

## Spring 2014 - New Seed Guide

After the demanding season of 2012, UK farming deserved an easier year. We were hit with a terrible spring in 2013 and for some, an unforgiving dry summer spell. On average forage yields and quality have been very good – A reminder of what animal performance can be achieved with top quality forages. In general forage stocks are yet to recover from the lows of 2012.

Autumn 2013 brought one of the best seasons for grass growth, and where soil conditions allowed, stock were able to be out for a long autumn grazing season. The winter has been less fair, especially for many low lying areas of Southern and Western Britain, so there is still a need to optimise production of quality forage. Hopefully we can help you achieve this objective.

## Updated Grass Mixtures

Each Field Options Grass Mixture is a specification for achieving particular objectives. For example, **Spitfire** is a two year intensive cutting mixture which is designed to last three years if required, and is dense and palatable enough to provide grazing at each end of the season. If we change a mixture significantly, we rename it to correspond with the new specification. For 2014, we will significantly update three mixtures. They become **Hurricane III**, **Ultra-Bite MP** and **Endurance II**. The following paragraphs summarise the developments.

### Hurricane III - Spring Sown and High Yield?

Hurricane II is about to get better. This eighteen month mixture was originally designed around a surprisingly persistent Westerwold Ryegrass. In NIAB trials it out-yielded the control Italian Ryegrass by +6 T silage/acre. **Hurricane III** will be based on a new Belgian Westerwold which has higher yield, more persistence and is ready for cutting one week earlier - from a spring sowing. The seed does not arrive from New Zealand until April, so it will not be available for early sowings.



### Endurance LT II - High Performance on Light Land

Analysis of older pastures of **Endurance LT** suggested that the Meadow Fescue was not persisting in the mix on light land, so this has been removed and the levels of the other grass species, has increased. Some farmers had included Yellow Trefoil, in this and other dry situations. This grazing legume appears to have thrived, so it is now included in the standard mix.



## The Ultimate Cow Grazing?

Grass testing systems rarely emulate the system for which they are used, but over the last four years TEAGASC at Moorepark, County Cork have created a system for testing grasses which closely mimics the requirements of extended grazing systems. The objective is to identify grasses which meet the growth patterns demanded by paddock grazing. They have also created an 'Economic Index', giving higher value to grasses that produce better yield in the key spring and autumn periods.

Grass testing is a long term business, especially as these systems demand that paddocks must last for 8-10 years. Each year a list of varieties has leaked out of Moorepark, highlighting the top performers. In the first year, we were a bit shocked as many of the best performers were not sufficiently persistent. After four years, the list now contains an increasing number of the varieties which we already use, plus a few that we are happy to add to our portfolio.

Selecting only persistent varieties which are top performing in both the Moorepark Economic Index and in the UK's SAC & BSPB recommended lists, we have reformulated our Ultra-Bite mixture to produce what may be the perfect mixture: **Ultra-Bite MP** (Crop Guide p 7)

## Grass Prices Easing

It is good to have some extra good news - At last there is a better balance between supply and demand, with some exceptions, spring 2014 sees an easing of grass seed prices. Both conventional and organic grass seed prices have dropped by £3-5.00/acre pack. The exceptions are some minor species, like Meadow Fescue which is in very short supply. The main problem for the UK is Red Clover supply, just at a time when the species is becoming more popular. This is due to very variable crops across northern Europe in 2013.

## Maize – You Can Get Best Quality and Best Yield

When you select maize varieties, there is a misconception that you cannot select for yield, quality and reliability. Across the globe the best breeders have concentrated on improving the feed quality of maize whether it be starch type and yield or fibre digestibility, they also appear to maintain improvements in yield. This is also true of marginal areas such as the UK.

What has stood out in the trials? Firstly the consistent yield and quality of **Lapriora** and **Adept**. Lapriora has again excelled as an early grain maize. Of the new varieties, ultra early **Sergio** has vigour, yield and exceptional quality: very good starch, but new for KWS, excellent fibre digestibility. It is standing out in trials from Northern Ireland to Denmark. A week to ten days later, with similar earliness to Adept, **Rodriguez** also adds another tonne of silage an acre and performs like Lapriora in grain trials. A few days later again, but still a week earlier than NK Bull, **Asgaard**, which is semi compact in type, has massive cobs, producing exceptional feed quality. (Crop Guide p.7)



## New Grass Varieties

Grass variety development is a steady and incremental process. Yield or digestibility increases of 1%/year are normal. Every so often a new variety comes along which makes a leap forward. IBERS at Aberystwyth have managed to produce two in short succession, **AberGreen** and now, **AberWolf**. Both combine improved yield with an ability to hold onto 'D' value and produce a very dense sward. Disease resistance is also enhanced. Availability of AberGreen is good for 2014 and AberWolf will be introduced into some key Field Options mixtures.

The 2-3 year ley market is dominated by Hybrid Ryegrasses. The best of these combine the yield of Italian Ryegrasses with the persistence and quality of Perennial Ryegrasses. IBERS and DLF have dominated this sector, but French Breeder RAGT is breeding some interesting new material. **Enduro**, new for 2014, combines persistence with high yield, leafy summer growth and good disease resistance.



## Summer Fodder Crops - Spoiled for Choice (Crop Guide p 15-16)

As the rain pours down and I know that pumps are gushing water out of our new house, I hesitate to write this, but, each year we sell more brassicas for summer grazing through dry spells. Last year we had a cold wet spring, but many farmers were grateful of fields of **Redstart** Hybrid Brassica or 'Clampsaver' – our Brassica x Ryegrass mixture. On my last trip to New Zealand, I visited some summer Brassica trials. Sadly it was not our new varieties that stood out, but one of the controls: **SF Greenland**. Its vigour in a dry time impressed us. It is high yielding, and has good disease, pest and bolting resistance. Like Winfred and Redstart, it also has excellent regrowth potential. Sow from early April. Start grazing 10 weeks from emergence.



## Boost to Lucerne Establishment

(Crop Guide p 15-16)

Lucerne is not for everyone, but it does have the ability to produce very high yields of 20% protein fibrous forage with low rainfall and no nitrogen fertilizer. Many ruminant nutritionists would consider it the perfect balance of maize silage. New Zealand farmers are even using it as the basis for paddock grazing systems on dry land sheep farms.

One of the frustrations of Lucerne has always been its relatively slow establishment. French seed company Jouffray-Drillaud have developed a new seed coating which combines both the Rhizobium bacteria necessary for optimum nitrogen fixing with a growth stimulant to boost establishment vigour. SAS seed treatment will be available from Field Options this spring on the new top performing variety **Galaxie** and on a blend of Galaxie and the proven, high protein variety **Timbale**.



## More Energy Than Any Other Crop!

(Crop Guide p 13)

Fodder Beet is undergoing a revival in parts of the UK. It has more yield potential than any other crop and it is more adaptable than most people realise. It is a tradable, transportable 12 ME fodder. The one thing it needs is arable skills, some specialist equipment to establish and manage it and preferably, light soils.

An increasing area of Fodder Beet is now grazed in situ. Winter 2013-14 highlighted the value of growing it with headlands of catch crop ryegrass to allow a more balanced diet and a lying area for stock. For Growers Guidelines and Beet grazing information contact Field Options.

