

Reseeding

Increasing grassland productivity has never been more important. In order to maximise animal performance from pasture we must first ensure we are optimising the production of grass at farm level. The average level of grass produced nationally is 9.1 t DM/ha, with the top farms producing over 15 t DM/ha. There is huge scope to increase the total grass grown and hence increase grass in the diet, while reducing feed costs in livestock production systems.

Soil fertility is critical to maximising the performance and longevity of swards at farm level. With Teagasc recently highlighting that 90% of all soils are sub-optimal in terms of pH, phosphorus (P) or potassium (K). Without doubt, this is costing farms throughout the country significantly in terms of under-performing grass swards and the necessity to bring in more expensive supplements to overcome grass deficits in the system. Completing regular soil fertility tests on your farm (every 3 to 5 years) and using the results to develop a fertiliser program is critical to ensure you can get the most from your swards.

Reseeding is important as a mechanism to increase the perennial ryegrass content in swards. There are several benefits to reseeding and maintain perennial ryegrass dominant pastures:

- Provide more grass at the shoulders of the season (early spring and late autumn)
- 25% more responsive to fertiliser N compared to old permanent pasture
- Increased feeding quality
- Faster re-growth
- Greater total production and so can increase the carrying capacity of the farm

Timing of reseeding

Reseeding is generally conducted in the autumn as it suits from a feed budget perspective. Ideally, the seed should be in the ground by the end of August, as delaying beyond this date can result in deteriorating weather causing poor establishment of the new grass.

There are a number of reasons why we should give more consideration to a spring reseed. In spring, days are getting longer and temperatures are improving – both will help give the new reseed the best start. The improving weather conditions also mean the reseed can be completed with a quicker turnaround time from spaying the old sward to grazing the new sward. It also provides a greater window of opportunity to complete a post-emergence spray and allow for several grazings of the new reseed before autumn closing, which will help ensure a weed-free, well tillered sward, ready for grazing the following spring.

Deciding on what fields to reseed

The general recommendation is to reseed 10 to 15% of the farm per year to maximise the quality and performance of your swards. The best way to identify the poorer performing

paddocks on your farm is to complete a weekly farm walk and assess the total production of individual paddocks at the end of each year. Those paddocks producing less grass should be targeted for reseeding. Other ways to identify what paddocks need reseeding are to consider the following:

- Is there a high presence of weeds such as docks, thistles etc
- Has there being severe poaching of a field?
- Is there a high content of unproductive grasses such as meadow grass, bent grasses etc
- Is there less silage being harvested from the field compared to previous years?
- Are regrowths slow after cutting or grazing?
- Is there a poor response to nitrogen?

Variety Choice

Selecting the right varieties for your particular requirements is critical to ensure you maximise the performance and value of your new reseed. Varieties will perform differently depending on the management (e.g. grazing or silage). Using the DAFM Grass Recommended List and the Teagasc Pasture Profit Index will help ensure you choose the best varieties for your needs. The main traits to focus on are

- Seasonal DM yield (spring and autumn)
- Quality
- Total DM yield
- Ground score or persistency

The Top 5 varieties in the new 2015 Pasture Profit Index are AberGain, Dunluce, AberChoice, AberMagic and Kintyre. Using the sub-indices within the PPI will highlight where these varieties are excelling. Digestibility and seasonal growth are 2 key traits, with the top varieties having good figures for both. Ensuring your mixtures contain at least some of these varieties will help ensure a greater return on your reseeding investment.

Method of reseeding

Once you identify the fields that require reseeding the next thing to consider is spraying and the method of reseeding. By spraying off the old sward with a glyphosate spray all weeds such as docks, thistles etc and weed grasses will be killed. This is important to give the new seed the best possible opportunity to establish without competition from the existing species.

The method of reseeding will likely be dictated by soil type, amount of underlying stone and machine/contractor availability. Ploughing is the most common method of reseeding, however this may not be possible on stoney ground. Minimal cultivation techniques are also widely used.

Regardless of the method of reseeding it is crucial to ensure that the seed bed is fine and firm. A fine firm seed bed will help conserve moisture in the soil – which is important for germination. A loose seed bed will dry out much quicker and this may result in poor germination or weak establishment. An old rule of thumb is that you should be able to cycle a bike across the seed-bed!

After sowing, rolling is absolutely crucial to ensure good soil-to-seed contact. A loose seed bed will have a lower germination rate. One of the most common reasons for the failure of a new reseed is often related to not rolling after sowing.

Post-sowing management

1. Post emergence spray

The best time to control docks and other weeds is after reseeding. Using a post emergence spray will kill seedling weeds before they can properly develop their roots. The product you use will depend on if clover is present and also on the main weeds present in the new sward. It is worth discussing your options with your local advisor or rep to ensure you are using the appropriate product for your requirements.

2. Pests

New reseeds should be monitored regularly for pests such as slugs, frit fly, leather jackets and rabbits. If you suspect you have a problem then speak to your local rep to identify the best method of control.

- Slugs are most often associated with direct drilling but can be a problem regardless of the method used. They are more active in wet weather and generally are not a problem on firm seed beds. If you suspect you have a slug problem, place a plastic fertiliser bag in the field, weigh down the four corners and leave overnight. The following morning check to see if there are any slugs underneath the bag.
- Leather jackets, can create problems in wetter areas.
- Frit fly can cause serious damage to autumn sown swards and are generally more problematic in dry weather. They eat the centre leaf of the new seedling and the affected plants turn yellow and die. To examine swards for frit fly – check the crop regularly from the 1-2 leaf stage by gently pulling the centre shoot of a number of plants. Infected shoots are still green, but will pull away easily, and you will notice a brownish feeding area. If you dissect the stem you may find the frit fly maggot.

Grazing the new reseed

The new reseed should be grazed as soon as the plants can withstand the pull test (using your fingers check to see if the roots stay anchored in the ground when you pull the grass plants as an animal would when grazing). Early grazing is crucial to allow light into the sward and also encourage tillering of the plant. It is recommended that the first grazing is completed at pre grazing yields of 600 – 1000 kg DM/ha. During the first year a new reseed will grow rapidly and frequent grazings at light covers will help ensure you have a densely tillered sward. The 2nd and subsequent grazings on a reseed should occur at 1200 – 1400 kg DM/ha