

Weeds in newly sown grassland

We are now in the middle of the season for reseeding old and unproductive swards. A common misconception is that weeds are controlled from the initial burn off from glyphosate. Whilst it is true that the root structures of many important perennial weeds have been weakened - they are sure to make a recovery in the not too distant future. Recent trial work carried out by Teagasc has highlighted the critical importance of a post emergence herbicide, ideally six to eight weeks after reseeding. This application will nullify the remaining weeds, and ensure your new grass has the opportunity to colonise any bare patches that remain. Trial work has shown that weeds rarely manage to establish themselves once a post emergence spray has been applied to a healthy new ley. Indeed, this is the most important spray your new reseed will receive in it's life.

One major consideration is the inclusion of clover in your grass seed mix. If clover is included, a clover friendly herbicide is the obvious choice. However, most clover friendly herbicides do not control one very threatening weed - chickweed. This annual weed has the ability to mat along the surface, choking the life out of new sown grasses. In order to control young chickweed, it is vital that TRIAD is added to the clover friendly herbicide.

When spraying your new sown ley (ideally once the sward has three leaves), ensure you use the higher end of recommended water rates on the label for best results. Avoid spraying in cold or drought conditions. Only spray if there is active plant growth.

Although perennial weeds such as Docks, creeping buttercup and creeping thistle are big offenders due to substantial root structures, they have a critical weakness - All are very slow to establish from seed. This is why your post emergence spray will help ensure a weed free pasture for a number of years. Thus maximising the productivity of your valuable investment.

Once you have a dense sward established docks will be unable to germinate and compete, as they require light to reach the soil surface in order to establish themselves.

As the majority of reseeding is carried out in the autumn, there is a risk of cold or wet weather setting in within the coming months. Should this be the case, you may miss the opportunity to spray weeds at the eight week stage (when they are most vulnerable) - in this case it is vital that a robust spray programme is applied the following spring, this will ensure that any root systems do not get an opportunity to establish and compete with the sward.

As many of the new grass seed varieties have the ability to substantially increase you dry matter yields, it is vital that you protect this investment from any yield robbing threats. This includes weeds & pests - namely Frit Fly, Leatherjackets and slugs. If you spot bare patches,

it is possible you have a pest issue. In such cases, an early application of Dursban will help to vastly reduce Frit Fly & Leatherjacket populations. If you have slugs, you should see their 'trails', in such cases an application of slug pellets will be necessary.

Economics of Weed Control

High levels of weeds will reduce not only the nutritional value of your sward, but will restrict grazing areas & valuable grass growth also. Not to mention the effects that docks and thistles have on silage production.

To establish your level of weed infestation in mature grassland - Measure out a rectangular area of 7m * 5m. Count the number of docks / thistles in this rectangle. The number of weeds present will represent your percentage infestation.

If less than 5%, spot spraying with Grazon pro is the most economic option. If more than 5% a broad acre product is more cost effective.

For every 1% docks or thistle infestation, this represents a 1% drop in sward yield.

Approx economic cost of weeds:

- Based on 10 T DM / Ha
- 10% weeds represent a loss of one tonne of DM, or approx €160 per Ha.
- 20% weed infestations are commonplace. Such losses have a considerable impact on farm profitability.

When treating your sward for weeds, ensure you use a new generation systemic herbicide - products such as Doxstar Pro, Pastor Pro, Forefront T and Thistlex. These new generation herbicides are Grass friendly and equally important - they kill out the roots of the problem weed.

Timing - ensure weeds have not 'gone to seed'. If weeds have reached this stage, the best option is to top the weeds, and spray in the coming weeks once the weeds have recovered to the correct stage for spraying.

Docks should be 6-10" high or across (the size of a dinner plate)

Thistles should be 6-8" high or across.

If ragwort is present, treat with appropriate herbicide, and ensure all livestock are excluded until this poisonous plant is completely perished or removed from the grazing area.

Always use the higher end of recommended water rates, especially in dense and lush swards.

As the average dock plant can produce up to 60,000 viable seeds, a programmed approach to dock control is vital. Ensure to use a quality herbicide that effectively deals with high infestation levels, without inhibiting the growth of your valuable sward.