

Grassland Weed Control

The difficult weather conditions this spring reduced the opportunity to spray grassland for weeds. There were limited opportunities to spray silage ground so it will be important to take the opportunity to address grassland weeds after the first cut silage has been harvested. Depending on growing conditions, an ideal time to apply a suitable herbicide is approximately 2-3 weeks after silage has been cut.

Apart from being unsightly grassland weeds can have a serious impact on grass performance in terms of yield and quality. The most common weeds are Docks, Thistles, Nettles and Dandelions. It is vital that grassland farmers focus on getting the most out of every hectare of land. In

some cases, reseeding may be the only option if the percentage of productive grass in the sward is very low. One of the main causes of weeds is open swards, especially in 2-3 cut silage ground or grazing ground which has been poached.

IMPACT OF GRASSLAND WEEDS

- Reduced grass yield and forage quality
 - 10% weed infestation reduces grass yield by 10%
- Increased waste in silage pit and reduced DMD in silage
- Reduced stocking rates
- Noxious weeds are dangerous to livestock E.g. Ragwort

DEALING WITH DOCKS

Docks are the main weed problem in grass. They are a perennial plant which can produce 40 – 80 thousand seeds per year and these seeds can last in the soil for up to 80 years. They are small, hardy and only need a small amount of light to germinate. This means they are very persistent in the soil. Research has shown that dock seeds are not viable when preserved in silage (due to low pH). However they do have a high requirement for Potassium, this is why they appear to be more prominent in fields which receive a lot of slurry. Docks are best controlled when actively growing at the rosette stage (the size of a dinner plate - See Figure 1). Docks have a large root so they need to be treated with a herbicide which is highly systemic to achieve long term control. After spraying a dense grass sward most dock regrowth is from old roots that were not fully killed. Forefront T offers the best long term broad spectrum weed control in grazing ground, as it has the best translocation down into the roots. Clover safe products are less effective for long term dock control. In reseeded, the best long term control is achieved by spraying when Docks are at the seedling stage, 6 weeks after sowing.

There are different spray programmes available depending on your grassland issue or weed



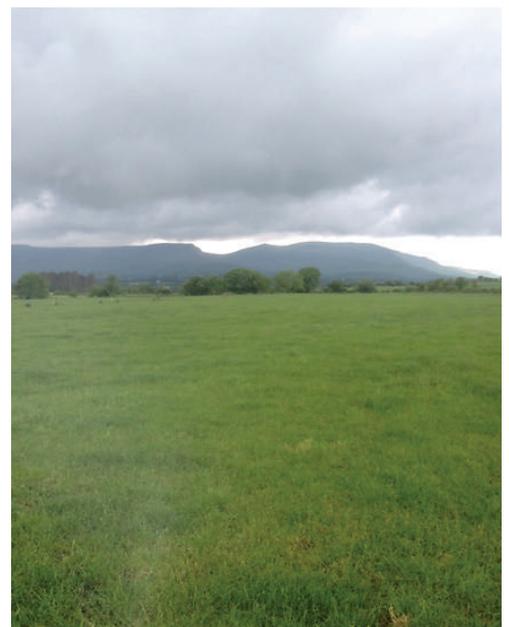
Figure 1: The ideal stage for spraying

problem so please consult your Bretts Ruminant Support Specialist, Michael Foley or David Lawrence, for further advice.

QUICK REMINDER – Grassland farmers are responsible for recording any agrochemicals used on the farm, even if a contractor applies them. A simple record of date, name of product used, PCS number, area treated, how much was used, volume of water used and the reason for using it should be noted. A sample can be downloaded from the Department of Agriculture website.



Before Treatment



After treatment of Forefront T six weeks later

Beef Grass Finisher Cubes now available

For beef cattle at grass our Beef Grass Finisher cubes are now available. These energy dense cubes are high in cereals combined with soya hulls. With protein at 12% this is the ideal feed for heifers or bullocks that will be finished off grass this summer. Ask your Bretts Sales Representative for further information.

Calves and Weanlings

The welcome improvement in the weather and grass growth has boosted the performance of calves. Youngstock are often left in heavy grass covers for too long and this does impinge on growth. Aim to give fresh breaks of grass at least twice per week. Late born calves recently weaned will benefit from being grazed in a separate group and fed additional Ultra Calf Cubes or Heifer Rearer Cubes. With good grassland management and attention to detail it is possible to get these calves to target weights and achieve calving at 22-24 months of age.

DAIRY

Customers top queries:

How much milk will grass support?

The heading date of most grasses in swards is late May and early June. After this date the energy levels in the grass start to decline. The Ruminant Support Specialists in Bretts have been sampling grass throughout the season and average grass results for late May indicate that 16 kgs Dry Matter of grass will support 23 litres but this can vary depending on weather, sward height and quality of grass. For cows with milking ability greater than this they may eat more grass and support more milk.

Does it pay to feed cows when milk price is poor?

The answer is dependent on cow type and grass supply so we will take an example. We know 16 kgs Dry Matter of grass supports 23 litres. We also know that clients feeding 3 kgs are holding an average milk yield of 29 litres. The 3 kgs of feed costs 76cents and the additional 6 litres from feed at 27 cents/litre generates €1.62 in milk sales. The answer is; it pays to feed cows that have the genetic potential to respond to concentrate feeding with good grassland management. Apart from the return on milk yield there is also a benefit to milk protein and body condition score during the breeding season.

Cows eating stones and plastic!

In May there was an increased incidence of cows eating all sorts of things such as stones, plastic and soil. One client said a cow took his wavin pipe out of the parlour! This can be indicative of acidosis or phosphorus deficiency. One solution to alleviate the problem is to offer additional phosphorus. All stock has a basic requirement for



phosphorus but milking cows have an additional requirement of 2 grams for every litre produced. In peak milk production some grass swards, especially those with a low P index, may lead to phosphorus deficiency. Feeding one consignment of Bretts **Hi-Phos Graze Max** has helped solve the problem for most clients. Alternatives are to offer phosphorus in the water or in mineral blocks.

A solution to low butterfats

From previous years we know that during the second grazing rotation milk butterfats are prone to dropping. The reasons for this are complex and include a lack of structural fibre in grass, which may cause acidosis, and high levels of fats (oils) in grass. Reduced butterfats reduce milk price and this hits the milk cheque. Our grass monitoring demonstrated changes in oil levels with its peak in early May. High levels of oil contribute to

energy levels but unfortunately these oils work negatively against butterfat production. To deal with this the Ruminant Support Team developed the **Supreme Breeder Nut + Actisaf** and reports from farmers has been positive. The combined effect of Acid Buf in the Breeder Nut and the Actisaf yeast stabilises rumen pH, leading to improved rumen function and a reduced risk of falling butterfats. Anecdotal evidence from over 40 farms that have fed this product is that cow dung visibly improves within a matter of days and that butterfats 'stopped sliding', stabilised and started to rise. In severe cases of butterfats at < 3.7 % clients also offered straw to cows.

Please contact your Bretts Sales Representative if you have specific issues that you would like to address.

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