

Filling the forage gap

This summer's hot and dry weather means that filling the forage gap and looking at options for home-grown forage are becoming increasingly important.

Reseeding or overseeding are two options to replace or revitalise leys that have been badly damaged by drought conditions. Different species should be considered when reseeding. TOPGRASS mixtures containing festuloliums (Advanced grasses) have shown good drought and stress tolerance during the dry weather, with their deeper rooting structure and mass.

Productive swards

Renewing swards regularly is important to maximise productivity and maintain feed quality. As grass varieties are constantly improving, reseeding can potentially produce extra milk production that's worth more than £1,235 per hectare.

Using new and improved varieties can produce 33% more yield than a typical five-year ley and dry matter yield will be 10% higher. Westerwolds will provide a bulky crop and help mitigate winter feed shortages. It can be sown in August, September and into October.

The disadvantage of using this species is that it is not the most winter hardy grass, so it can struggle in a harsh winter, and it is only a one-year crop.

An alternative would be to sow an Italian ryegrass, which may not yield as much as Westerwolds this autumn but would produce more grass in the spring due to better overwintering capability. This will also be productive for up to two years.

Brassicas are a popular option for producers who are looking for crops to graze in autumn and winter. These include hybrid brassicas or root mixtures, with crops that are ready for grazing between 10 and 15 weeks after sowing.

TOPGRASS mixtures containing Advanced grasses (on left) tolerate drought conditions better than perennial ryegrass (on right)



Forage rye is also suitable for early turnout in 2019 and will help to reduce winter feed costs. It has a flexible sowing window, after cereals or maize, and can be zero grazed or big baled. It is also an ideal crop for mopping up residual nitrogen and preventing soil erosion.

Forage rye is primarily grown for its ability to deliver very early grazing in the spring, so it is essential to make sure that it is grown on suitable ground.

Although the crop will grow on a wide range of soil types, it is best to avoid exposed or poorly drained fields.

Drilling should be carried out from mid-August through to late September. Forage rye should not be allowed to enter the winter in a 'proud' state so, in a mild autumn, crops sown in good time should ideally be lightly grazed in late November or early December.

If grazing cows on forage rye, crop height needs to be between 30cm and 35cm. Strip grazing is essential to avoid waste.

After maize

If maize harvest is earlier this year, there will be a larger sowing window following the crop. Options could include a cereal crop, but for producers wanting to boost forage stocks then ideal choices include Italian ryegrass, Westerwolds, or forage rye.

Any crop grown after maize should be drilled or broadcast as soon as possible – and before the middle of October. For producers simply looking to grow a green manure crop, a rye and vetch mixture is a late season option that will provide excellent winter cover and improve soil nutrient and organic matter levels.

➔ To find out more, contact ForFarmers on 0845 070 6280, or email info.forage@forfarmers.eu

Preserving forage stocks



UK maize crops are under stress

Hot and dry weather conditions are proving to be a considerable challenge to forage crops this summer.

Maize crops are drought stressed and may be lower in yield. However, with a little rain in the next few weeks it should recover enough to have reasonable starch content.

Some growers may prefer to salvage what they currently have, if the crop is beyond recovery and they are short of forage.

If this is the plan then discuss the options with your local ForFarmers forage specialist, because a 'green' crop will ensile differently to a fully mature crop and will need to be treated accordingly.

Without the high starch content from well-filled cobs, the crop will ensile more like arable silage and the choice of additive will be important to preserve the maximum amount of nutrients.

The tendency for silage to heat up once the clamp is opened – aerobic spoilage – can be the main problem with mature maize silage. But an immature crop requires good fermentation control.

ForFarmers offers a range of different products to meet the challenge of all forages grown under different conditions.

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