

Gains from grass can put profit in your pocket

Reseeded pasture grew eight times the grass of old swards in Roscommon

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On many drystock farms, a shortage of grass is often a problem in spring and autumn, particularly where stocking rates are relatively high. On the other hand, drystock farmers frequently underestimate their farm's potential to grow grass, leading to lower stocking rates.

A viable option to increase the amount of grass grown on a farm is reseeding. Perennial ryegrass is a high-quality feed and offers major advantages:

- Extra grass production, particularly in the spring and autumn.
- Higher quality grass.
- Reduction in concentrate feed requirement.
- Improved response to fertiliser.
- Increased grass utilisation.
- Increased stocking rate capacity.

National data reports that just 2% of Ireland's land area is reseeded annually. Figure 1 (source: Teagasc) shows just how much more productive reseeded swards are.

The swards with 100% perennial ryegrass grew 2.7t DM/ha more than the 15% perennial ryegrass sward. Most of the difference in grass production between the two swards occurs in the spring period, up to mid-May. This is the key period of grass demand for sheep enterprises

and is the reason why all sheep farmers should consider reseeding. Put simply, it can reduce and concentrate costs.

BETTER sheep farmer John Curley reseeds regularly on his farm in Four Roads, Co Roscommon. Since joining the BETTER farm programme, John has significantly reduced his concentrate meal usage through increased grass growth and utilisation. Outlined below are the key steps John has taken in grassland management since joining the BETTER farm programme.

Soil fertility

Soil sampling is carried out on the farm every three to four years. Lime is spread according to paddock demand with a target pH of 6.2 to 6.5. A nutrient management plan is in place to maintain soil P and K levels at Index 3. These actions create the conditions for optimal grass growth.

Increased number of paddocks

The number of grazing divisions on the farm has been raised from eight to 21. This has allowed better utilisation of grass on farm and has increased the quality of the grass available. Additional paddocks have



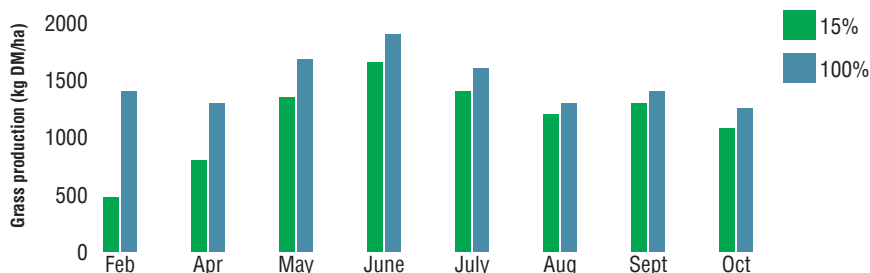
improved the quality of silage on the farm because covers, which are too strong for grazing, are harvested. Temporary fencing is used throughout the grazing season to further enhance utilisation/quality.

Grass measuring

John measures grass weekly and inputs his data on the PastureBase Ireland system. Weekly grass meas-

Figure 1

Grass production per month (February to October) in a sward containing 15% perennial ryegrass and 100% perennial ryegrass





A ryegrass dominant sward. On the last reseed (inset), John used a seed mixture of Abergain (4kg), Aberchoice (4kg), Drumbo (4kg) and 1.5kg of a clover variety called Iona.



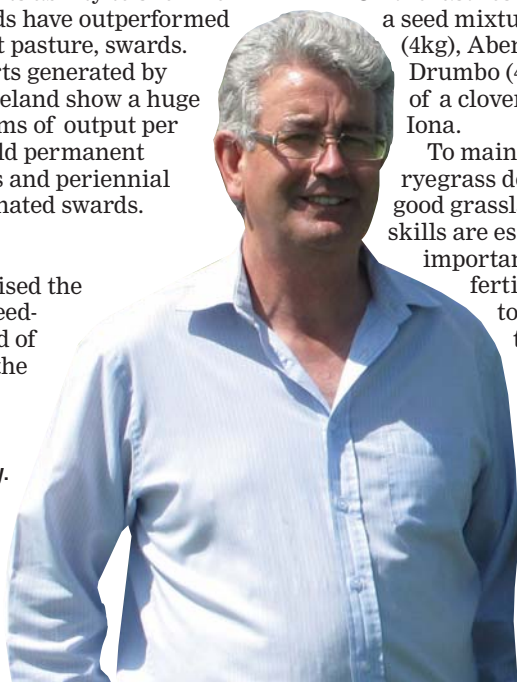
urement and budgeting is critical to management decisions. This will identify grass deficits or surpluses as well as identifying poorly performing paddocks; allowing them to be selected for reseeded. A highlight of the data collected on PastureBase for this farm has been its ability to show how reseeded swards have outperformed old, permanent pasture, swards.

Annual reports generated by PastureBase Ireland show a huge contrast in terms of output per hectare from old permanent pasture swards and perennial ryegrass dominated swards.

Reseeding

Having recognised the benefits of reseed-ing as a method of boosting both the

BETTER sheep farmer John Curley.



quantity and quality of grass grown, a reseeding plan is in place on this farm. "The reseeded swards are more responsive to fertiliser," says John. "They are really valuable in the spring when the flock's need for high-quality feed is at its highest."

On the last reseed, John used a seed mixture of Abergain (4kg), Aberchoice (4kg), Drumbo (4kg) and 1.5kg of a clover variety called Iona.

To maintain a perennial ryegrass dominant sward, good grassland management skills are essential. Also important is adequate fertiliser application to prevent weed takeover. John spreads 60 to 70 units N/ha on grazing ground and 90 units N/ha on silage ground.



Key messages

- Reseeded swards have the ability to improve the quantity and quality of grass growth on a farm especially in the spring and autumn.
- PastureBase Ireland allows paddocks to be identified for reseeded, show the improvements in grass growth, and help improve grass utilisation through more informed grassland management decision-making.
- A nutrient management plan is a must on all drystock farms to maintain optimal soil pH and soil P and K levels for grass growth.