

British Grassland Society

Grass farming for the future competition 2013

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EXTRACT ONLY

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Introduction

Home farm in Herefordshire, owned by Mr Jones, is currently making a loss of £84000 per annum before SFP. In 2020 SFP will be discontinued and therefore the farm needs to adapt to become more profitable.

Analysis of the existing accounts show that the biggest expense is within variable costs – feed. Variable costs should equal 30-35% of total output in this instance it is 60%, 54% of this is feed.

It is therefore essential to reduce feed costs. A grazing based system will significantly lower costs as a cow grazing reduces the transport and harvest of forage and also housing costs.

To move to a grazing based system there are some significant changes to be made including grassland management, breed of cattle, calving system and the machinery and buildings required to support these changes.

Grazing infrastructure

Allowing cows out on fields for a large part of the year can cause damage such as poaching and erosion if not correctly managed.

It will be necessary to add tracks across some fields this will reduce erosion from continuous walking and increase land trafficability. It has been suggested to add 1575m of cattle tracks. 1050m as concrete sleepers and 525m as gravel tracks. There is a larger proportion of concrete sleeper use as these are for major access to several fields or paddocks. This will allow wider grazing platform in poor weather as gravel tracks can poach and cause problems such as slow movement between fields and also health issues such as foul.

Some fields should be fenced to create paddocks this will increase ease of grazing. A total of 6025m will be required all of which will be Hi-tensile netting 2 plain 1 barb with 3m between stobs. The majority of this will be alongside tracks but some is used to divide fields into paddocks. Fields that are divided into paddocks are easier to manage as they require less temporary fences and back fences.

It will be noted that the furthest fields are not divided, as these have greatest travelling distance they will be grazed less often and therefore are more likely to be cut for silage.

There will also need to be some additional water troughs fitted, these are sited on figure 4 there are 10 in total and the movement of 1 existing trough. Where there is a trough in an adjoining paddock the use of removable tapes will allow access from across a track or fence. Each cow requires 60l a day minimum and ideally should not have to walk greater than 250m to reach water hence some fields have more than one trough, it is also recommended that a trough should have 70cm per cow to drink this ensures that 10% of the herd can drink at any one time

Farm Layout



Figure 1 Proposed field plan

Figure 4 shows the layout of existing fields with the addition of tracks, fences and water points. It also includes a suggested reseed plan for the first 3 years.

Final Recommendations

In summary the farm can be made significantly more profitable by moving to a spring calving grass based system. New Zealand Friesians will graze the PRG and clover leys with the aid of infrastructure such as tracks, fences and water points. Machinery investment will reduce dependence on contractors and new buildings will support a larger herd.