



DairyCo

BATH & WEST
GRASSLAND UK

GRASSLAND UK 2009 FACTSHEET

Beating fertiliser price rises

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When less fertiliser is used without addressing efficiency measures to improve nutrient use, then it can often simply result in growing less grass.

Cutting down on nutrients may not be a bad idea, but just spreading a little less everywhere is not the best option. Saving considerable amounts of money on fertiliser, without reducing grass output will require some basic strategies. The challenge is to improve nutrient efficiency and utilise effectively the forage produced.

To achieve this:

- Take basic soil samples and keep a record of the soil nutrient status (pH, P, K, Mg) of individual fields. Maintaining P and K indices within the correct banding is essential for maximising N uptake and crop yield. Too much of these nutrients can be as much of a problem as too little.
- Liming is often overlooked and a study carried out by IBERS Grassland Development Centre showed 70% of soil samples collected from dairy farms were below the target of pH 6. Efficient nutrient uptake is dependant on soil pH being at 6-6.5.
- Poor soil structure or compaction can reduce crop yield. It will reduce nutrient availability, by preventing root development and, therefore, prevent nutrient mobility, reducing fauna activity and hampering drainage.
- Calibrate fertiliser spreaders and consider application timing to avoid waste and leaching losses.
- Sulphur is in decline, due the reduced emissions from heavy industry, so much of the UK is now in need of sulphur applications. Without adequate sulphur, uptake of nitrogen is inefficient and losses of nitrogen by leaching can increase.
- A high quality ryegrass/clover sward is needed. Money spent on high quality reseeds using NIAB Recommended List varieties will optimise the farm's potential and efficiently convert nutrients into feed. A new, high quality, well managed sward can produce more than 10t of DM/ha each season.
- An old pasture is possibly one place to cut back on nitrogen.
- Clovers have the ability to fix nitrogen, increase protein levels and improve dry matter intake. A sward containing 30% DM clover is capable of fixing up to 150kg N/ha, but the clover must be in good health with active nodules on the roots.
- Account accurately for the nutrient value of manures. Developments in new machinery such as injection systems also mean improved nitrogen capture, allowing for reduced costs and a cleaner environment.
- Grazing is the cheapest feed, but a three cut grass silage system is uneconomic in many circumstances, so consider alternatives e.g. maize, whole-crop and crops for out-wintering stock.

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