



SILAGE DECISIONS FACTSHEET



DOCK CONTROL

Controlling docks should not be viewed as a cosmetic gesture. They have a significant impact on grass yields, will often not be eaten by stock and reduce the quality of the silage.

Why are docks such a problem?

- They can germinate through the year
- Germinate from both seed and roots
- Each plant can produce 60,000 seeds a year
- Seeds can be viable for 80 years
- Docks produce seed even after cutting

Spraying is likely to be economic when docks cover at least 10% of the field area. To calculate the dock cover, count the number of docks in an area stretching 2.5m either side of you and 7m in front of you (35m²), as the number of docks in this area is equal to the percentage cover of docks.

A spray programme over three years is often the best way to get them under control in the long term. When control and subsequent grassland management is good, the benefits of this spray programme could be expected to go beyond a total of four years.

For best results, docks should be treated at the rosette stage when the dock measures 150-200mm in diameter. Advice from a BASIS qualified adviser must be sought before spraying grass with herbicide.

A four year study at IGER North Wyke found that where docks covered 20% docks of the field area, a control programme saw the treated plots yield 3.4t/ha more/year on average. The research sponsored by Dow AgroSciences involved spraying the crop three times with Pastor herbicide.

Further trials by Northern Farm Services for Dow AgroSciences showed that silage quality was also improved when docks were controlled, with metabolisable energy 3% higher in the treated plots. The higher dry matter and sugar content of grass after controlling docks is also likely to improve silage fermentation and reduce the chances of making poor silage.

Further information and chemicals for controlling docks are included in The UK Pesticide Guide 2007, published by CABI Publishing. See www.ruralni.gov.uk for contractors costs.

Factsheet produced by Jessica Buss, with the assistance of Alan Hopkins, GES Consulting and Vaughn Stansfield, Dow AgroSciences.

Please note: BGS and EBLEX cannot guarantee these results will be achieved on every farm. We advise any changes to management are researched thoroughly and tried cautiously, such as on a small area, bearing in mind any restrictions in force, such as Nitrate Vulnerable Zone regulations or environmental stewardship scheme rules. BGS and EBLEX cannot be held liable for any losses.