



### **Getting the best out of the grazing season**

Given the high price of grain, fuel and forage it makes sense to get the best out of the organic grazing season. If you are farming on land with a good fertility that is not drought-prone or seasonally water-logged then a good general purpose herbal-ley mix might be a mixture of perennial ryegrass varieties suited to your soil type and situation such as a range of white clover types plus other legumes, like red clover, trefoil and perhaps chicory. Herbal-leys can be adapted for use on good quality beef land by using some of the smaller leaved white clover types, which are more persistent and tolerant of closer grazing. Lucerne is slightly higher yielding but is tricky to establish. It is expensive to grow and if trampled or poached by heavy machinery is killed off. Lucerne, like red clover has to be ploughed up every 4/5 years but the main problem restricting it's production are soil type, soil pH and the susceptibility to heavy and continuous grazing and loss of livestock production through bloat.

White clover spreads sideways, unlike red clover, which is a single plant and is therefore more resilient and hardy. White clover are persistent, widely adapted perennial nitrogen producers with tough stems and a dense shallow root mass that protects soil from erosion and suppresses weeds. Depending on type plants grow just 6/12 inches tall but thrive when mowed or grazed. Once established, they stand up well to heavy field traffic. In beef systems enhanced rates of live weight gain have been reported on grass/clover swards and silage. During the fattening phase cattle fed on silage made from grass/white clover swards can have a higher daily live weight gain than those fed on grass N silage.

Depending on weather conditions the grazing season is ideally February/March to November/December. Generally 3 weeks is allowed between grazing periods to allow the clover to do its job and produce nitrogen and to mature otherwise the value will decline. The grass should then be topped to get rid of the weeds.

Every grazing system is a compromise. The strengths and weaknesses of each forage species must be recognized to combine them, making a balanced productive pasture.

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