



Case Study

August 2014



Learning from the challenges of this spring

Tim Teague, Shropshire

Tim Teague of Manor House Farm, near Craven Arms in Shropshire, finishes 250 Hereford steers a year. He rears these from calves, selling them at a 320kg carcass weight at 20 months of age.

A significant focus has been on improving growth rates on grass and rotational grazing was started last year. He is currently grazing 150 animals this way, with a further 184 in the shed and 88 just-weaned calves. His target is to achieve more gain at grass to reduce feed costs.

In recent years, he has made a significant commitment to improving permanent pasture by spraying with glyphosate, then waiting two days before mowing tight for silage. He then uses an arable direct drill to introduce perennial ryegrass and white clover into the sward.

He is adjusting soil indexes to ensure good performance, and has increased his nitrogen use. He believes that the improved areas are growing double the amount of grass of the old pasture. He has currently improved half of the 55ha (136 acres) he grazes, with the aim of it all being improved over the next two years.



Challenges this year

This spring was particularly challenging for Tim because he under-estimated the yield potential of the re-seeds, the grass grew much earlier and quicker than expected, and there were unforeseen delays in getting the cattle out.

This meant that pasture covers were way ahead of where they should have been at turnout. To try and redress this, all stock was turned out at once. However, the wet conditions in May led to utilisation problems.

In June, he decided the only way to regain control was to cut half of the grazing area for silage. However now with the dervish summer, pasture covers have fallen too low and he has had to house some animals to balance supply and demand.

Lessons from the perfect science of hindsight, means Tim will now investigate and adjust his turnout policy for future years.

He realises he could turn out animals earlier in most normal years, by not bringing in 400 pregnant ewes during the winter to tidy up the pastures. If sheep are not used, alternative strategies could include back fencing or pre-grazing mowing.

The target sward height for grazing cattle in the early spring is 5-6cm for set stocking, and 10-12cm for pre-grazing heights and 5-6cm for post-grazing heights for rotational grazing.

Grazing confidence

Tim is still trying to understand what his grass can achieve, especially when it has been improved. He is also learning how to deal with the transition period between TMR feeding in winter and grazing.

He is investing in infrastructure (fences and water tanks) so he can push utilisation and growth rates up further. He is planning to measure pasture covers monthly to see how they change during the season, which will help him make informed decisions about his grassland management.

Tim is a member of the newly-created Marches Grazing Group, which is facilitated by Charlie Morgan and supported by EBLEX, HCC and Field Options. If you want to know more, email poppy.frater@eblex.ahdb.org.uk or call Poppy on 0247 647 8891.