



Event Report

May 2014



EBLEX South West Grazing Group

Soil Temperatures

To start we discussed the results from one of the member's soil temperature readings, as he has probes buried in some of his fields. They recorded temperatures between 8.5°C on 20 April at 244m (800 ft) to 11°C on 26 April at 183m (600ft). The group discussed the factors influencing soil temperature such as bulk density, moisture content and soil type.

Grass growth

Grass cover measurements for the group were good, as most of the group had progressed beyond 'Magic Day', where grass production on the grazing platform exceeds the grazing demand by the stock. Our sheep farmers were recording average farm covers of 1600kg DM/ha on permanent grassland and up to 2100kg DM/ha on reseeded. Our beef farmers had average covers ranging from 2426kg DM/ha to 2700kg DM/ha.

Average covers of between 1800kg/ha for sheep farmers and 2100kg/ha for beef farmers were deemed to be adequate. Fields where growth was greater than this were to be removed from the grazing platform and designated for silage. Grass growth varied between 50-80kg DM/ha per day, very much mirroring the adage that over 5°C, every 1°C increase in soil temperature produces 15kg DM/ha of growth.

Good lamb growth

Due to good grass growth, not many ewes since lambing had been given additional feed, and all supplementation had occurred before lambing. Sheep at grass had plenty of milk, with some lamb growth recorded up to 500g/head/day on grass alone.

Lambing on most farms had occurred within a five-week period. On several of the sheep farms, grazing residuals had increased from 1400 to 1500kg DM/ha, allowing quicker regrowth of grass into the next rotation, rather than grazing it out to the usual 1200kg DM/ha. As the saying goes – you need grass to grow grass!

We discussed the option for beef farmers to pre-mow during a dry day, at the next or subsequent grazing to 'tidy up', rather than topping, as this can cause damage and the cuttings can shade out the new grass tillers come through.

Farm walk focus

The main issue to deal with on the host farm is that its mostly moorland with 25-38cm (10-15") of peaty soil over granite.

We dug some holes and saw plenty of rooting depth. There was up to 5cm (2") of grass cover made up mainly of creeping bent. Where ploughing and reseeding had occurred eight years before, most of the reseeded grasses had disappeared and been taken over by plantain, dandelions and bents. The stock carrying capacity of the field had decreased.

The discussion centred around complete reseeding or partly reseeding, as it may be important to maintain the top layer of tough rooting material. The group thought that a partial reseed with a slot seeder, or shallow subsoiler with seed shanks dropping seeds into the created tilth, would be best.

Investment

It was deemed to be more important to invest in fertiliser and lime than to buy a tonne of feed blocks or concentrate, as 1kg of Nitrogen (N) can give grass response rates of up to 25kg DM/kg N applied, with N being 80p/kg (Ammonium Nitrate). The cost of that extra kg of DM production is 3p/kg DM or £30/t DM compared with concentrates and feed blocks at over £250/t DM.



The group's next meeting is in June. For more information contact Luppod: luppod@gmail.com