

Winter visit with the Rutland Grazing Group

The Rutland Grazing Group ventured into Northamptonshire for their December meeting.

This grazing group meets three times a year and around 6,000 ewes are managed by the members.

The group met at Patrick Green's farm near Northampton to discuss the challenges he has farming on the urban fringe. Some of his rented land is being taken back as it is being developed for houses and industrial estates therefore he wants to make the land he owns work harder.



What the group discussed

During the farm walk, the group looked at a field that had been sward lifted to deal with a drainage problem. However the group thought that the contractor had been travelling too fast and there were areas where the sward has been damaged. Dandelions had been sprayed off in the field before the sward lifter, so the group felt that field could benefit from grass and clover being over-seeded in the spring to help fill the gaps. Patrick was only stocking the field lightly and hoping that the field settled over the winter.

The second field was chosen by Patrick because he'd noticed that yield was failing and it had a poor selection of grass species. A hole was dug and the field scored 2 on the [Healthy Grassland Soils scale](#), so soil structure didn't appear to be a limiting factor. Patrick was going to do a soil test as one hadn't been done for a few years. The group decided that he needed to act on those results before he decided whether to reseed.

The next fields looked at by the group were those that had been re-seeded near the yard. Patrick has struggled to get them establishing with one in 2013 taking two attempts and one needing some topping up in 2014. He struggles with dry conditions and also weed burdens on this part of the farm.



The group discussed options for improving swards without the conventional ploughing and re-seeding as the risks and expense of failures may be too great. Spraying off the sward and direct drilling or broadcasting on seed could be a possibility as it would help to maintain moisture in the ground.

The re-seeded fields from 2014 have a significant thistle problem and it was sprayed to control these, which meant that the white clover had gone. There were discussions about how to get white clover back into the sward and it was decided that some clover seed could be introduced in the early spring. This was dependant on moisture because the grass will be grazed well in the spring with ewes and lambs. This could give the clover a chance to get a hold before the dry weather comes. Alternatively, clover seed could be introduced in the autumn. One member of the group shared that they'd had some success

feeding clover seed in creep feed, but Patrick was planning that the new reseed could support good lamb growth rates without creep. He has seen that new re-seeds with no creep performs the same as permanent pasture and creep.

However he still has the benefit of accessing red clover grazing from a local dairy farmer and it does an extremely good job at finishing lambs and rates it better than stubble turnips. Patrick also has access to silage ground that is having two cuts of silage for a local anaerobic digestion plant. It is providing very useful clean grazing for lambs.

When is the next visit?

The next visit is in April, the group will look at spring grazing and stocking densities of new re-seeds at Vine Farm near Morcott, Rutland.

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