

## Using sheep to combat black-grass

**John Pawsey, Shimpling Park Farm, Suffolk**

In March the [Soil Association](#) organised a 'Cultural methods to control black-grass' event as part of the Duchy Future Farming Programme.

Farmers were invited to one of their field labs on John Pawsey's organic farm in Suffolk.

Dr Stephen Moss from [Rothamsted Research](#) discussed the potential of non-chemical control of black-grass. What became apparent is that there is a problem for a reason – unfortunately the solutions are just not that simple.

Black-grass has always been an issue on John's farm, and when he converted to organic and focussed solely on the market, the problem worsened.

### Grass leys

To reduce the problem John decided to introduce a two year ley into his rotation. To make it pay graziers were brought in to utilise the grass, but he underestimated the red clover and realised he needed longer leys.



Plus using graziers never worked particularly well and as such John decided to do some research and bring in his own flock.

In 2014, after looking at an array of breeds, he bought 250 New Zealand Romney ewe lambs to graze the 120 hectares of grass. Having never kept livestock before John wanted a ewe that would lamb itself, graze extensively with good feet and have a low worm burden. He met with sheep farmers and did plenty of research before settling on this breed.

John has been experimenting with the mixture in his leys, the recently sown grassland has ribgrass and chicory within the mix.

The current flock will be put to the ram in November 2015 and the first lambs will be born on the farm in 2016. The plan is to buy another 250 this September and build the flock up to 1000 breeding ewes.

### Research

John has also engaged in some research with the [Organic Research Centre](#) this year. The project aims to assess whether traditional methods of grazing winter cereals with sheep before and/or after the winter months in combination with an early sown crop can have a beneficial impact on crop weed competition without grain yield loss as a result of grazing.

Funded by the [Duchy Originals Future Farming Programme](#), the two-year trial will look at early and normal sowing timings and either grazed or un-grazed treatments in a winter wheat field with significant black-grass infestations.



For more information read the BRP manual  
[Planning grazing strategies for Better Returns](#)