

AHDB grass research day

AHDB and NIAB-TAG recently hosted a grass research open day at Headley Hall, in Yorkshire. The event focused on soil, grass and nutrient management projects that AHDB have been involved in over the last few years. Attendees were told about the ongoing research that is being carried out by various institutions in both the UK and Ireland.



The projects

Liz Genever from AHDB Beef & Lamb and Peter Burgis from NIAB-TAG talked about the work behind the Recommended Grass and Clover Lists (RGCL) and how information for grass and clover varieties are collated. They also discussed how to use the list when selecting the right type of varieties for reseeds.

RGCL enables the selection of grass and clover varieties that are genetically superior. A weakness in this evaluation system is that the grasses are tested under high-nitrogen (N) levels (around 400kg N per year). A recent study, funded by AHDB and carried out by NIAB-TAG, considered the effect of low-input nitrogen application levels on perennial ryegrass. Jo Matthews of NIAB-TAG presented at the day that the grasses selected under high levels of nitrogen perform similarly at different nitrogen levels (100kg N and 200kg N), so the RGCL is relevant to all systems when selecting varieties for reseeds.

John Williams from ADAS gave the audience an update on the revised RB209 Fertiliser Manual which is due to be released in May 2017. A simplified structure and recommendations for grassland pastures now mean that the future, renamed, RB209 Crop Nutrient Management Manual will be more user friendly.

The use of mixed species swards has come under the spotlight in recent times. Volatile N prices and awareness of the negative effect of excessive nitrate levels in watercourses now means that producers are introducing mixed species swards to the grazing platform. Dr Bridget Lynch spoke about work being carried out by University College Dublin which is investigating the benefits of mixed species swards.

Following on from this, the audience heard about the SURERROOT project which aims to develop highly productive and climate-smart, deep-rooting grass and clover varieties that can improve soil hydrology significantly. Heather McCalman from IBERS spoke about the development of these and also demonstrated the Festulolium hybrid grasses in the trial plots. These recently developed hybrid grasses are the product of crossing fescues with ryegrass cultivars. They have many beneficial attributes, including improved nutrient utilisation and increased water uptake capabilities. Festulolium could potentially have a significant role to play in grassland production systems in the future.

The final demonstration from Paul Hargreaves of SRUC spoke about an AHDB Dairy project that assessed the impact of compaction on grass yields and the value of remediate action. Attendants were reminded of the consequences of excessive trafficking either by machinery or livestock. The research showed an 11% and 14% reduction in dry matter yields per ha where ground has been compacted by machinery and livestock respectively.

Summary

Despite the very wet conditions on the day, the grass research event was well attended and hailed a huge success.

A summary of the grass research day can be found on the [Beef & Lamb website](http://beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk)