

Zero grazing in the West Midlands

Parry Walters

Zero grazing is not often associated with beef farming systems in the UK, but investing in a zero-grazing machine has paid dividends for Parry Walters of Manor Farm, near Rugby. Mr. Walters focuses on making the most of quality home-grown forage, with swards being comprised of late heading Tetraploid ryegrass varieties and white clover. The aim is to keep the quality in the sward and this has led to daily liveweight gains (DLWG) of 1.7kg per day in zero-grazed Limousin cross heifers.

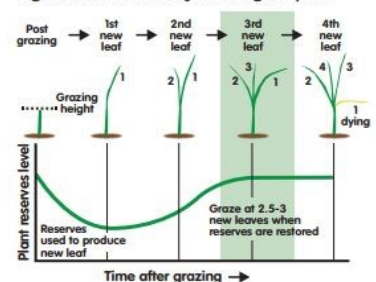


The cattle finishing enterprise forms the basis of the business at Manor Farm, although a small suckler herd is kept as well as a 450-head flock of Welsh Mules. Texel and Beltex rams are used for breeding and all ewes are lambed outdoors, this means there is more shed space for the store heifers, which are all sold through Rugby Farmers Market at 570kg to 600kg. Zero grazing enables Mr. Walters to make the most of the whole farm, with 172 livestock units being supported by the 30-acre cutting platform.

Mr Walters purchased his zero grazer wagon from France having toyed with the idea of a total mixed ration (TMR) system for some time. After visiting a number of farms throughout the UK using a zero grazer, he opted for a heavier built French machine. The machine itself weighs six tonnes unladen and has a holding capacity of 36 cubic metres of grass. Some modifications were made to suit the feeding system at the farm, the most notable of which is a rear discharge conveyor belt, which fills feed mangers in the shed. These mangers reduce spoilage and waste at feed out. Similar to a grazing scenario, the aim is to maximise the utilisation of the grass that is allocated to the herd. Mr Walters is also adamant that keeping the mangers full of fresh grass is key to optimising liveweight gain.

Good grassland management is a fundamental part of this beef enterprise. Mr Walters aims to harvest grass at the three-leaf stage and minimise the stem content at any point during the cutting period. Grass yields at Manor Farm are also impressive with over 17.5 tonnes DM/ha being measured across the cutting platform last year, twice that of the UK average. Furthermore, Mr Walters regularly has a fresh grass sample analysed where he hopes to achieve a metabolisable energy content of at least 11 megajoules. By cutting at the three live leaf stage and leaving sufficient residuals (4cm – 5cm), ME content and subsequent animal performance remains at a good level later into the season. Reseeds are carried out every five years after a crop of fodder beet, which is fed in-situ to the pregnant ewes over winter.

Figure 1: The leaf life cycle of a grass plant



Zero grazing allows producers to make the most of a segmented grazing platform. Mr Walters has seen interest in this system from producers where the grazing platform is not in one block he maintains that producers must apply basic grazing principles whilst 'zero-grazing'. The machine should replicate a grazing animal, but it is up to the operator to ensure this is done correctly. Only then is optimal sward performance and liveweight gain achievable.

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