



AGRONOMY UPDATE

As the agronomic husbandry of crops finalises into the coming weeks, the next few weeks is a crucial time to walk the fields and assess any (potential) problems which may have manifested over the course of the growing season. Weeds such as blackgrass, brome grasses, canary and scutch grass should be noted. A plan of action can then be created - which fields to harvest first/last (preventing spread of weeds), or potentially discarding certain areas of fields. Management decisions can be easier post-harvest as you know the problem areas of your fields. Blackgrass is becoming an increasing concern in Ireland, and can become a serious problem if ignored. Each plant can produce up to 6,000 seeds/m². Tackling it now before it produces viable seed should be a priority. Hand roguing small areas will be beneficial, while burning off larger areas may be necessary. Consult your Drummonds Agronomist if you are unsure of identifying some grassweeds on your farm.

Blackgrass



Blackgrass found while crop walking.

Source: Teagasc

See below of a list of cultural methods to control weeds on your farm:

- Ploughing: to a depth of at least 6 inches to ensure inversion of the furrow, completely

burying the seed.

- Allow for a wider or narrower headland when ploughing as accumulations tend to thrive where the plough is lifted out at the headland. This is due to poor burial of the seeds in this particular area.
- Limit the spread of seeds by ensuring ALL machinery for example, harvesters, trailers, balers etc., are cleaned out properly before entering a new field. Blowing machinery down with an air compressor is one of the best ways to do this.
- Use certified seed: the Department of Agriculture and the Irish Seed Trade Association have adopted a zero – tolerance approach to invasive weed species. Certified seed is brome free.
- Rotation: a non-cereal break crop allows a wider range of herbicides to tackle the problem. A spring crop allows a stale seedbed over winter. Try to avoid continuous cereal crops. Also, as weed species germinate in different seasons, switching between spring and winter cropping can reduce the build-up of the weed seed bank.
- Shallow cultivate after harvest to encourage germination of seeds, once germinated spray with glyphosate; and then plough.
- Delaying drilling date.

We must do all we can to deal with weeds before searching for the solution from the can – this also preventing the build-up of herbicide resistance, and forms part of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy.

Winter Wheat

The mid – flowering stage is the ideal time for head sprays in winter wheat. Here, we top up disease control to the flag leaf and provide protection against ear diseases such as fusarium. Wet and warm weather during flowering increases the risk of disease development. Keep an eye out for yellow rust and other diseases which may have moved into the crop. Keep a close eye out for aphids, particularly those fields along the

coast and those surrounded by high hedges. An insecticide may be needed. Apply Drummonds Super K Plus at 3L/ha to allow crops to reach their maximum potential. Potassium is an essential nutrient for straw strength and improves grain quality by raising the kph.

Spring Barley

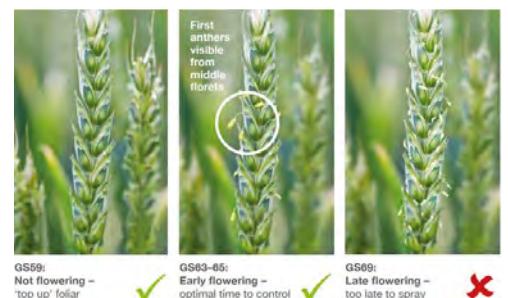
There is a lot of BYDV in crops around the North East, due to the mild winter allowing for the survival of large numbers of aphids. Apply the head spray to spring barley at awn emergence. This is called the paintbrush stage. Add Magnitech at 2.5L/ha for increased green leaf area duration and improved crop performance. It can improve yield and kph.

Beans

Applying fungicide before disease appears and develops in beans is crucially important. Prevention is better than a cure, and that is certainly the case for beans. Apply a fungicide at the start of flowering and 2-3 weeks after. Watch out for Downy Mildew as there is a lot of it around lately. Use Drummonds Superphite Pro at 2L/ha for additional control.

Spring Wheat & Oats

Mildew and rusts are the biggest threats to these crops at the moment. Use a broad spectrum fungicide such as Velogy or a Decoy + Comet mix to tackle these. Ensure PGR is applied to Oats at GS 32 and can be mixed with a suitable fungicide.



GS69: Not flowering – 'top up' foliar ✓

GS63-65: Early flowering – optimal time to control ✓

GS69: Late flowering – too late to spray ✗

Source: AHDB

ADDING WHITE CLOVER TO THE SWARD

Grass and clover in combination within a mixture produce scientifically proven yield benefits versus the same varieties sown individually. White Clover has been selected to withstand being grazed or cut, and accordingly the choice of companion grass depends on the primary use of the sward, ie grazing or cutting. The ideal grass is typically ryegrass, as it has good nitrogen use efficiency. This means it can successfully convert the nitrates produced by the clover into plant yield. Note: Research carried out by Teagasc has typically shown increased Dry Matter (DM) yields of 2 tonne/DM/ha (Dry matter/hectare) from White Clover and Perennial Ryegrass swards versus a pure Perennial Ryegrass sward.

What is in your sward?

Grasses such as Bent, Fescue, Meadow Grass and Yorkshire Fog have lower nitrogen use efficiency, and accordingly do not make good companion grasses where grass yield is the main objective. A full reseed is warranted where the sward is made up of less than 70% Perennial Ryegrass. Our Green Acres grass seed mixtures contain the leading perennial ryegrass and clover varieties. Clover can be successfully added to a sward where adequate levels of perennial ryegrass already exist (>70%); in such circumstances stitching in or 'overseeding' White Clover may be the preferred option.

How much clover should be in the sward?

The optimum amount of clover in a field across the full season is 30% of the dry matter of the total sward. At this level, clover can fix 150kg Nitrogen/ha per year and both animal and companion grass performance benefits. Note: Grazing trials at Teagasc Grange demonstrate that well managed grass/clover swards receiving only 50kg N/ha (40 units N/acre) in spring are capable of producing the same animal output as ryegrass swards getting 200 kg N/ha (160 units/acre).

Over-seeding clover into existing grassland

- Suitable on well-managed grassland – not suitable on old 'butty' swards of poor botanical composition.
- Minimise competition from existing plants before sowing by heavy grazing or harrowing to open up the sward.
- Ensure that field fertility is adequate – good lime, P & K levels.
- Ensure soil is sufficiently disturbed to allow seed-to-soil contact and coverage.
- Use a higher seed rate (5kg/ha or 2.0kg/acre) than conventional sowing to compensate for greater seedling loss.
- Apply no fertiliser N for the remainder of the year. The objective is to reduce grass competition and to promote clover growth.
- Mix seed and fertiliser in the field and spread twice; criss-cross the field.
- Apply slurry as required – ideally around 3000 gals/acre of watery slurry.
- After sowing, graze hard in short intensive 3 - 4 day periods every month until clover is well established; and to reduce competition from other plants.

GROWING BRASSICA CROPS FOR GRAZING

Brassica crops can provide nutritious, cost-effective feeds for cattle and sheep. From leafy kales and forage rapes through to root crops like stubble turnips and swedes, brassicas are a versatile feeding solution to fill summer grazing gaps and extend autumn grazing.

Forage Rape/Hybrid Rape

Forage rape is a fast growing, leafy crop that is high in protein. It's also a useful break crop for arable rotations and between grass reseedings to reduce pests and disease. There are various types of forage rape on the market - a standard forage rape or 'hybrid rape'.

Hybrids are a cross of two separate brassica parent plants, the kale plant and forage rape. The resulting hybrid has the quick speed of establishment of forage rape and the winter hardiness of kale. Secondary growth is a key characteristic of hybrid rape and these hybrids can potentially produce higher dry matter (DM) yield than straight forage rape.

Forage rape should be grown in a free draining, light loam with a pH of 6-6.5 if the crop is being grazed in the field or 'in situ'. Some forage rape is zero grazed – a suitable soil type will be just as important if this is the case. Forage rape makes an excellent break crop between grass leys as it breaks the life cycle of pests such as leatherjackets. Forage rape can also be grown as a 'catch crop' but it should not be used where oilseed rape is part of the rotation.

Fertiliser

Forage rape will benefit from applications of farmyard manure or slurry before sowing. If this is unavailable, then 60-90kg of nitrogen, 25kg P and 25kg K per hectare into the seedbed should be sufficient for the crop. Do not apply nitrogen fertiliser to a brassicas within 6 weeks of grazing as they can be prone to accumulating high levels of nitrate which may lead to nitrate poisoning.

Feeding

Forage rape crops can be ready to utilise between 12-14 weeks after sowing. They are ideally used for finishing lambs or youngstock. Feeding should be introduced gradually over a two-week period. Ideally there should be access to a fibre source such as silage or straw. Alternatively an area of grass may be left to allow stock to 'run back' onto. This is good practice as it allows the rumen to acclimatise before increasing dry matter intakes from the forage rape.

Kale

Kale is a cold tolerant, high yielding brassica crop. Kale is a protein rich crop that is normally fed 'in situ' so consideration needs to be given to land type. Kales hardiness makes it flexible in terms of when it is grazed. Crops can be sown between April to July and then grazed from August to March. There are different varieties of Kale on the market but it is best to use a high digestibility variety with good leaf to stem ratio as this will impact grazing intakes and crop utilisation.

Kale is capable of producing high yields with 8-10 tonne DM/ha normally being produced. Secondary regrowth is not seen in Kale so the aim is to optimise utilisation when being grazed.

Feeding

Traditionally, Kale is grazed in situ but it can be zero grazed. When grazing, the aim is to optimise intakes and reduce waste. Sufficient space for grazing animals is key to this so strip - grazing across the width of the field is preferable. As with all brassica crops mineral supplementation must be considered and a fibre source should be provided.

Weeds, Diseases & Pest Control

Pre emergence spraying is normally effective in kale. The crop canopy tends to shade out weeds once the crop is up and growing. Crops should be monitored regularly for slugs and flea beetle damage. Clubroot represents the main disease threat. It is a soil-borne disease, so avoid planting kale or indeed forage rape where there is a history of clubroot.

FORAGE RAPE/HYBRID RAPE - SOWING INFORMATION				
Sowing Time (month)	May - late August	Seeding Rate (per acre)	2-3 kg/acre (Direct drill)	5 kg/acre (Broadcasting)
Average DM yield (DM/ha)	Dry Matter %	Crude Protein %	Digestibility (D value)	Metabolisable Energy (MJ/kg DM)
3.5-5 tonne DM/ha	11-13%	19-20%	66-70%	9.5-11

KALE - SOWING INFORMATION				
Sowing Time (month)	April - July	Seeding Rate (per acre)	2-3 kg/acre (Direct drill)	4 kg/acre (Broadcasting)
Average DM yield (DM/ha)	Dry Matter %	Crude Protein %	Digestibility (D value)	Metabolisable Energy (MJ/kg DM)
8-10 tonne DM/ha	13-16%	16-18%	66-70%	9-10.5

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