

Red Meat Development Programme

Cutting fertiliser use



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The Red Meat Development Programme is managed by Hybu Cig Cymru on behalf of Farming Connect.

Current fertiliser prices are forcing sheep and beef farmers to re-think their policy on inputs and improving nutrient use on their farms. There may be scope to cut phosphate and potash but for many cutting back may simply result in growing less grass. It is therefore important to make sure that best use is made of muck, slurry, legume nitrogen and the P and K that is already available in the soil.

The key factors to consider are:

Soil management

Soil compaction; this restricts rooting, makes soils slower to warm up in spring and more prone to drought and waterlogging.

Correct soil pH; target pH 6-6.5 to maximise availability of nutrients.

Phosphate and potash levels; target index 2 and 2- respectively. Test soils regularly so that nutrient inputs can be targeted in order to correct soil indices and supply crop demand more accurately

Test herbage to identify whether you need to apply sulphur (say for 2nd/3rd cut silage); many areas are now deficient and would benefit from applications. Sulphur plays an important role in nitrogen use and protein formation, increasing yields; especially on lighter soils.

Ley quality

Include more clover over the farm to improve sward quality, soil structure and fix nitrogen. Ryegrass dominant leys will be most responsive to nutrient inputs, so prioritise inputs here. If early turnout is possible a suitable seed mixture which

includes intermediate heading varieties with early growth characteristics along with a few kilograms of hybrids will boost early season growth. For later turnout and more intensive grazing, late heading varieties should form the foundation.

Only select varieties from the NIAB recommended list. Some will produce 6 or 7% DM more than others; this could provide around an extra 60 cow grazing days/ha.

Improving application

Match the fertiliser you buy to the crop's needs and to soil nutrient indices. Choose a good uniform product, calibrate your fertiliser spreader so that it spreads accurately and avoid hedges and watercourses.

For muck and slurry - consider getting it analysed and account for its nutrient content when applying fertiliser. 13,500 ltr/ac of average 6%DM slurry will supply 16 units of P and 80 units of K.

Injectors and trailing shoe applicators for slurry make more of the nitrogen available enabling the grass to make more efficient use of inputs.

If spreading by splash plate, nitrogen losses will be less in early spring spreading than using these methods in the summer. Consider composting FYM to reduce the volume spread improve friability and reduce weed seed content

For more information on improving nutrient use on your farm, please contact HCC on 01970 625 050 or visit our web site www.hccmpw.org.uk.

