Don't Let Docks Curb Sward Productivity

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Docks are a major, deep rooted, persistent weed problem on many farms. Docks will seriously limit grassland output and productivity unless controlled. No can be a really good time of year to control docks.

Cultural Control:
The best control of all for docks is good grassland management. Maintaining a dense, leafy grass sward will smother out emerging docks. In this regard, having a fertile soil with adequate levels of Nitrogen, Phosphorous and Potassium along with a suitable pH for grass growth is hugely important as the grass will be more competitive. Avoiding poaching and overgrazing will limit the space for docks to emerge. Tight grazing and heavy regular silage cuts leave open swards. Open swards promote docks. The dock seed needs light, air and plenty of nutrients to establish. A harvested silage field is a good environment for the dock. Docks are associated with slurry. Teagasc research has shown that docks germinate and thrive better where there are high potassium (K) levels. Regular slurry applications build up or provide K for dock establishment.

Chemical Control:
Where heavy infestations of docks occur, use of chemical herbicides may be needed.

General Dock Control:

- Apply the herbicide onto actively growing weeds and nutrients which are actively being transported to new foliage and roots.
- If seed stalks are seen on the plant or if the dock has diseased leaves or is under pest attack it is better to cut/top or graze and allow re-growth of the docks before applying chemical.
- Allow adequate time between spraying and cutting silage for the herbicide to work, especially where weeds have a developed taproot.
- Avoid spraying in very dry or cold conditions.
- Remember to keep the prescribed cross-compliance records and follow the product label

Best time to spray is before stem formation. In late July, this is when the dock plant has plenty of leaves to absorb chemicals in herbicide being used.

Season Long Dock Control:

1. Use of herbicides based on Aminopyralid, Dicamba, Triclopyr, Fluroxypyr, etc., will give season long control plus a wide range of common grassland weeds. The price range is from €25-74/ha (€10-€30/acre) depending on the product selected and rate applied. These products will eliminate clover.
2. Treat when the docks are actively growing, in the rosette stage up to 25cm high or wide.

Chemical Control in Non-Clover Grassland:
Where clover is of no consequence, use products such as Bandock, Forefront, Dockstar Pro, Pastor, Starane2, Foundation, High Load, Mircam Super, Lupo, Thrust, Kildock, CroplinkD50 will kill established docks, but they will also kill/damage clover plants. Forefront cannot be used on fields before silage harvesting. Docks should be sprayed before they start to limit sward

productivity. Any spraying should be carried out at least fourteen days in advance of any cutting, thus allowing the sprayed docks to wither and sward close in. Follow manufacturer's instructions carefully when using these herbicides. Cost of chemical varies from €25-€100/Ha depending on the product used.

Chemical Control in Clover rich Swards:
Where Clover is of consequence, the following herbicides, Eagle or Prospect may be applied. These products do not harm clover but Prospect may have some effect on the constituent grasses of swards. These products are best applied in good growth conditions and will give season long control of docks. Eagle has label clearance for dock control on grassland, at the 40-60g/ha rate, 60g/ha being the full recommended rate for docks and should not be used in dry weather. The higher rate should be used where the infestation is high or the docks have a well-established tap root. Most broad leaved docks will be at the correct stage for weed control in the next few weeks. For both sprays, allow seven days after spraying before cutting or grazing. Cost of chemical varies from €28 - €50/Ha.

Other Considerations:

- Dock seeds don't survive in pit silage, but do survive in round bales and in hay.
- Always spray seedling docks at 4-6 weeks after reseeding.