Soils, Nutrients and Fertiliser Factsheet

White Clover

Priorities

- The optimum amount of white clover in a field across the season is 20-25% of total herbage mass

Opportunities to save money

- At this level, white clover can fix up to 150 kg N/ha per year improving both animal and sward production, as well as allowing a reduction in chemical N fertiliser use
- Adjust fertiliser application rate in summer – where sward white clover content is increasing (>20%), reduce chemical N fertiliser application rates to approx. 9 kg N/ha per rotation

Key steps

- In spring, good grazing management is crucial to promote white clover production and persistence
- In spring, avoid poaching using on/off grazing
- Good soil fertility promotes sward white clover content – white clover requires a minimum soil Index 3 for P (5.1 – 8 mg/l) and K (101 – 150 mg/l) and a minimum soil pH of 6.5-7.0
- Reseed and oversow areas of the farm with low or no white clover in April and May

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Building white clover content in grazing swards

Establishing white clover on farm will take a number of years using a combination of reseeding and over-sowing. Use Irish Recommended List grass and white clover varieties

Incorporating white clover in a full reseed is the most reliable method of establishing white clover and provides the best opportunity for weed control, whereas over-sowing is a simple and low cost method of introducing white clover into existing swards

- Aim to complete a full reseed of 10-15% of the grazing area as early in the year as possible (April, May)

Prepare a fine, firm seedbed

Seed mix should include 3.5 to 5.0 kg/ha medium leaf size clover for cattle swards and 5.0 to 6.0 kg/ha small leaf size clover for sheep swards

Roll well to ensure good seed and soil contact

- Over-sow 10% of the available area in April or May immediately after grazing (≤ 4 cm post-grazing sward height) or after cutting the paddock for surplus bales

Sowing rate should be 4.0 to 6.0 kg/ha of white clover seed

- Post-sowing management – full reseed or over-sowing

Target a pre-grazing yield of 600 to 1000 kg DM/ha and a post grazing height sward of ≤4 cm for at least the first three grazings post-sowing

Graze later in the autumn to avoid carrying heavy covers over the first winter period

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