

Red Clover as a Silage Crop

Management strategies to improve productivity and reduce costs have never been more important than now.

Recent research shows that the introduction of red clover as a silage crop offers significant advantages in terms of input reduction and increased nutritional values

There are several benefits attached to the practice of incorporating alternative forage crops as part of the “on-farm grown” forage options. These offer nutritional benefits over silage made from grass because they are high protein crops and thus reduce the requirement for expensive bought in protein supplements.

Baled legume silage is an alternative forage option that offers nutritional benefits, improved milk yields and, because legumes “fix” their own nitrogen, savings in fertiliser costs. Altogether, this offers a significant cost saving over grass based silage.

This is especially important in the livestock sector, where prices have been sluggish and the profitability for both dairy and beef enterprises has been under pressure.



Why Use Red Clover?

- High yielding silage crop (13t DM/ha/annum – equivalent to Italian/hybrid ryegrass with 250 units of nitrogen/acre).
- Less fibrous than grass & highly digestible.
- Twice as much protein as grass.
- Up to 20% higher intake.
- Requires little or no nitrogen fertiliser.
- Offers affordable home-grown protein (14 – 20% crude protein).
- Proven to increase animal performance – both milk and meat.
- Good for aerating soils and improving soil structure.
- Offers a wider harvesting window than grass.
- Significant cost savings over grass silage.



Establishment of Red Clover Crops

- Sow mid-July to end of August in a fine, firm, level seed bed.
- No nitrogen required and only moderate applications of phosphate and Potassium (K).
- Correct soil indexes = pH 6 Phosphorus (P) and K soil indices of 2.
- Can be direct drilled 1.5 cm deep or broadcast, over-sown into existing sward or under-sown in a cereal crop in the spring.

Optimise Productivity

- Fits into a rotation with a 5 – 8 year gap between croppings.
- A 3 year productive ley can be anticipated.
- Should be wilted rapidly to 25 – 30% DM.
- Excessive handling should be avoided as the leaf is prone to shatter.
- Silage inoculation is essential in order to avoid a poor fermentation.

Grazing

- Graze carefully to protect the growing crowns.
- Avoid poaching or hard sheep grazing.
- Minimize bloat by introducing to stock slowly and ensure they are fully fed when first entering the field.
- Avoid grazing breeding ewes 6 weeks pre- or post-tupping.

Also available in this series of fact sheets:

Ensiling Red Clover

Feeding Red Clover

Go to www.silageadvice.com to download these fact sheets and much more.

Legal Disclaimer

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Clover Vs Grass Cost Analysis

	COST/HA/ ANNUM
Less Nitrogen (300Kg N)	-348£
Extra Lime (1/2 tonne)	+13.50£
Extra Potassium (80kg K ₂ O)	+80£
Extra herbicide	+20£
Extra seed costs	+15£
Potential Savings ha/annum	219.50£

Source: IBERS



About the Silage Advisory Centre

The Silage Advisory Centre is an industry initiative aimed at promoting the benefits of baled silage as a modern grassland and forage management system and at providing forage conservation advice to farmers, contractors and other players with a direct involvement in baled silage production and grassland farming. For more information, please visit www.silageadvice.com