

# GRASSLAND ESTABLISHMENT

Most milk producers relish the prospects of new reseeds and the extra production they can offer but nevertheless have concerns over the cost and downtime of replacing an old ley. Here, we look at how we can minimise both downtime and costs.

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Getting the most from rotational grazing platforms

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Farmers missing out on proven improvement

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Species-rich strips providing a boost

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## Saving time and money with one-pass reseeding

Grassland reseeding and rejuvenation are key areas of work for dairy farmer and agricultural contractor Ian Kirkby. Often under time pressure and always looking to minimise costs, his latest system enables him to reseed in fewer passes, and sometimes in just one.

**A**t Park House Farm, in Tatham, near Lancaster, Ian Kirkby farms in partnership with his wife Jenny and parents Brian and Linda.

They run a 100-cow dairy herd on their tenanted 200-acre farm and, for many years, have run an agricultural contracting business alongside the dairy unit.

Ian says: "My father had always done some contracting and, when I left school and joined him on-farm, we pushed on with this side of the business. It helps spread the costs of our own farm machinery.

"These days, there are three of us – me, my father and a stockman/tractor driver. At peak times, we can pull in additional self-employed tractor drivers."

A key service offered by the contracting side of the business is grassland rejuvenation.

Ian says: "When we started out with agricultural contracting, we would use an Opico six-metre Grassmaster harrow and Air 8 seeder. When we got busier, we

replaced this with another Grassmaster, but with an Air 16 seeder.

"Four years ago, when we saw there was scope to further expand the reseeding side of the business, we decided it was time to upgrade our kit again.

"We looked on the internet and found a video of the He-Va Grass Rejuvenator on YouTube. It is a machine originally designed for overseeding, but it can also be used for seeding onto cultivated ground. The big attraction for us was that fewer passes would be needed.

### Demo model

"We had a demo model from our local dealer Rickerby and eventually bought a trailed 6.3m model.

"With the harrow and seeder set up we could use a 100hp tractor, but with the heavier Rejuvenator we are using a 180hp tractor.

"The paddles at the front are quite aggressive, as they are designed to scuff up the surface and create a tilth for seeding. We have also found they can be used to lightly grade the soil."

When reseeding, Ian will make



Ian Kirkby and his trailed He-Va Grass Rejuvenator.

three to four passes with the Rejuvenator to level and comb the soil, he says.

"Then we put the seed in just using the tooth roller, having lifted the other sections up. We have had some really good results doing it this way.

"The roller is key as it presses seed into the soil. You can see where you have been and the ground does not need to be rolled again.

"Establishment is very good and germination is even.

"However, there are still some situations when we need to power

harrow first before going in with the Rejuvenator."

Even though overseeding enables land to be kept in production, it only accounts for about 20% of Ian's grassland work.

He says: "Overseeding is a great way to freshen up a ley without the cost of ploughing. When seeding into an established sward, there is not the risk of any seed washing out if there is a downpour.

"But it is really important to only do this when ground conditions are right. Leys to be overseeded need to be grazed down



Ian Kirkby says the 'toothed' roller is key.

tight with sheep. Alternatively, we can go in straight after a cut of silage, so long as there is moisture in the ground. This is what we are doing on our own farm.

"We tend to overseed either in early spring or much later in the season after second or third cut. But it all depends on the ground conditions.

"We never cut corners on seed rate, as it is not worth it at the end of the day. So if the recommended rate is 14kg/acre for a full reseed, we will use 10kg/acre for overseeding.

"We also always use a seed mixture which contains specific grass varieties and is designed for use in this situation where new plants are going to have to compete with the existing sward.

"When overseeding with the tine harrow and seeder combo, we used to make three or four passes to get a tilth before switching on the seeder. But with the more aggressive Rejuvenator, we can go straight in and seed in just one pass.

"The Rejuvenator has proven especially useful in putting life back into fields where soils are shallow or the ground is rocky and ploughing for reseeds cannot be done."

Over the past 20 years, Ian has also taken on contracts to re-instate grassland for utilities companies.

"The work involves putting all the soil back level then reseeding. Back at the start, we used to plough and power harrow before reseeding it with our harrow and seeder, then flat-roll the ground.

### Economical

"Nowadays, we need only take the Rejuvenator. However, if the soil needs levelling or breaking down, we will power harrow first. But overall, it is more economical than always having to take the plough. It all saves cost and time."

In 2018, Ian reseeded more than 1,000 acres with the Rejuvenator, but this year things have been a little slower owing to the very dry April.

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### About the Rejuvenator

» The He-Va Grass Rejuvenator consists of an aggressive shatter board with slicing plates, followed by two rows of heavy duty harrow tines, and a heavy 600mm-diameter toothed roller. The slicing plates and harrow tines break up and level the soil surface in front of the grass seed outlets, and the soil is then firmed behind by the roller.