

HOME-GROWN FEEDS

SFP LIKELY TO MEAN MORE USE OF CLOVER IN SWARD

THE SINGLE farm payment will almost certainly lead to the use of more clover, predicts Ian Wilkinson of Cotswold Seeds. Clover potential has been restricted by the intensive nature of the CAP, with producers opting to use high input/high output leys, he says. But with payments being decoupled from production, producers can make savings by switching to low-input clover leys. "Red clover for silage and white clover for grazing suits the current financial climate perfectly, particularly as nitrogen fertiliser at £150/t now represents about one-third of silage costs," he says.



Clover's potential has been restricted by the CAP, says Cotswold Seeds. But decoupling may change that.

"We know clover-based production systems have always been an option, with about 20% of UK farms already growing these leys. But the full potential is yet to be realised." In addition, Mr Wilkinson says leys of 30% clover will contain 2-3% more crude protein and animals grazing clover produce higher liveweight gains than grass-only leys. "It's cheap to produce, animals like eating it and they produce more milk or meat as a result."



Cost out the efficiency of home-grown feeds carefully. It may be more economic to buy in supplements.

Cost production with care to find best crop

With changes to subsidy payments, the economics of many home-grown feeds, particularly concentrates, has altered. But there is still a place for them as this special, edited by Shirley Macmillan, reveals

WHILE IT'S tempting to grow concentrate replacers in a bid to cut costs and become more self-sufficient, it may be more economic to focus on producing high quality forages.

Protein is the dearest ingredient, so it seems a good option for reducing bought-in soya. "The problem is getting the management of crops, such as lupins and beans, right," says Dumfries-based independent consultant Davidson Thorburn.

And despite the attraction of a protein supplement of £37/ha (£15/acre), peas and beans also lose out on the cost per unit of protein, points out nutritionist Chris Savery of The Milk Group.

"Rape and soya have a lower cost per unit and because they are heat treated their protein is of higher quality. If lupins could be grown more consistently, however, they would be a potential rival as a protein source."

Producers should be weighing up the cost of home-grown supplements against competitively priced products, such as citrus pulp and brewers' grains, in areas where such feeds are readily available.

Cereals also continue to be attrac-

tive as a concentrate, but look hard at buying other crops compared with renting extra ground to grow your own, warns consultant William Waterfield, of The Farm Consultancy Group, Hants.

Without subsidies most good growers can't produce cereals at world market prices, so he thinks it unlikely livestock producers will be able to grow cereals cheaper than they can buy them.

"Growers need to be genuine with

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- Protein crops unreliable
- Consider cereal economics
- Focus on forage quality

their production costs – particularly power, machinery and labour – and yields."

Mr Thorburn also questions whether livestock units in south-west Scotland and northern England will continue growing cereals with low market prices. These crops are often grown as part of a grass reseed policy, with producers seeing grass reseed as a cost.

"Feeding home-grown cereals cheapens the ration and earns more turned into beef or milk, so they drill grass after harvest or undersow cereals with a ley.

"Crazy straw prices in this area of up to £90/t are also encouraging producers to grow cereals for the straw value." But in a good summer there is plenty of quality cheap straw available, he adds.

Mr Savery suggests focusing on producing high quality forages instead of other feed crops. Good forage is still the cheapest feed and most stock need it to form the greater part of their diet, as it helps rumen function.

He believes producers should grow their own forages and buy the remaining ration ingredients to ensure cost-effective diets. "We feed more silage these days – no one runs out in winter – and buffer feed in summer, so most units have big problems in making enough good quality grass silage."

Maize or whole-crop cereals can help make up any shortfall, as they also provide consistent yield and quality forage, adds Mr Savery.

● shirley.macmillan@rbi.co.uk