

Diary for September

HENSLEY FARM DIARY FOR SEPTEMBER - MAINTAINING HIGH QUALITY GRASS

The cheapest way for us to produce milk is to feed our cows on high quality grass. To maintain good grass swards the fields have to be cut, topped or in some cases re-seeded.

Re-seeding

This year we have re-seeded two fields on the farm where the pastures had got very old. Before ploughing, the fields are spread with dung that can then be immediately ploughed under to provide nutrients to help the new grass to grow. This year the number of seagulls following the plough was an amazing sight, there must have been in excess of 200 gulls! If the pH of the soil is below 6.5 then lime is applied after ploughing, but in the case of these two fields this was not needed. Once the ploughing is finished the field is rolled with a Cambridge roller to push the furrows down and then dragged in opposite directions to make the field level and the soil fine. In ideal conditions the field would be worked down during dry weather and left to get some rain to tighten the seedbed and then dragged again. Once this has been achieved the field can then be tilled.

We have used an organic white clover and perennial ryegrass mixture as this will produce good grazing grass for the dairy cows for approximately ten years.

We have a contractor come in to sow the grass seeds for us using a tine weeder with a air seeder, because this machine can be calibrated to ensure the seeds are sown accurately and evenly.

To complete the process the field is finally rolled using a flat roller to leave the seedbed tight to hold the moisture for the grass seeds to germinate.



Shows the dung being spread before ploughing



The field being ploughed



The amazing flock of seagulls



Seagulls looking for worms



Cambridge Rollers



Dragging the field



Tilling the grass seed



Flat roller



Rolling the field after tilling



Mowing the surplus grass to make big bales

Cutting

At this time of year we do not usually have surplus grass but due to the dry early summer followed by the recent rain, grass has grown a lot faster than usual for August. In order not to let the grazing get too far ahead of the cows and therefore not eat it at the correct stage (see para on topping), we decided to make some big bale silage.

The fields were cut with a spreader mower, left for 24 hours for the grass to wilt (dry a bit), then raked into rows before being baled and wrapped. This year our contractor used a new machine that does the job of baling and wrapping in one operation. This is a very clever machine that saves a lot of time and work. We then pick the bales up using a squeezer (so as not to damage the plastic wrapping), load them onto bale trailers and bring them back to the yard where they are unloaded and stacked three high ready for feeding the cows in the winter. If any holes are accidentally made in the plastic when

Topping

A topper is used to top off the weeds and uneaten grass to promote new growth and keep the fields looking tidy. A piece of technical info for you now! When each stem of grass has grown three blades (or leaves) it has reached the perfect stage for grazing. As the fourth blade appears the first blade dies off making the grass less palatable for the cows and lower quality as 25% of the grass is dead. When it has only grown one or two blades there is obviously not the quantity for the cows to eat so you are not using the grass at its maximum potential.



Raking the grass into rows



Baling the silage



Wrapping the bales

moving them, patches are stuck over them to keep the air out so the silage doesn't go mouldy.

We are now getting ready for our busy calving season – read all about it in our October diary!



Loading the bales on to a trailer using a "squeezer"



Unloading the bales back in the farmyard



Stacking the bales to store for winter