

MEDIA RELEASE

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Catch crops offer rescue plan for part-filled clamps

With the summer's inconsistent conditions adding to last winter's wet weather woes, livestock farmers could be facing the prospect of not having enough home-grown forage available this winter. Simon Montgomery of ProCam explains how an autumn sown catch crop could mitigate the shortfall and unlock additional revenue from the SFI scheme.

“After one of the wettest years in recent history, the summer hasn't given growers any respite, with unrelenting rain showers and below average sunshine preventing forage crops from growing as hoped,” Simon explains.

Lower than usual hours of sunshine and a corresponding lack of heat units has slowed grass growth, with a large proportion of dairy and beef producers expressing concern that second and subsequent cuts of silage grass simply haven't produced the biomass required to fill clamps. The sub-optimal weather has also impacted maize growth so far this year, with concern building that unless conditions improve and remain improved for the remainder of the growing season, the forage stock challenge could be compounded by low maize yields.

For producers with serious concerns about winter forage stocks, now is the time to start formulating a contingency plan Mr Montgomery advises. “One way of plugging the gap is to plant a catch crop as soon as the autumn's cereal and/or maize harvests have concluded,” he explains.

Growers have three main options, Simon continues: “They can either opt to drill a fast-growing single species ryegrass ley, choose a triticale based multi-species mixture which will have the added advantage of qualifying for an SFI (Sustainable Farming Incentive) payment under the scheme's SAM2 classification, or look at a forage and rye type mixture.”

For the former, Mr Montgomery recommends ProCam's 'Hurricane III' mixture from the company's Field Options range of forage seeds.

“Based on a new, high performance and exceptionally hardy diploid Westerwold ryegrass, Hurricane III is ideal in scenarios where grass is required in a hurry,” Simon explains. “Sown after maize, its combination of complementary varieties produces big cuts of silage early in the spring, with UK trials showing it can deliver as much as 8.1-9.1 tonnes of dry matter per hectare. It is also suitable for spring and autumn grazing when managed correctly and will easily persist for at least 12 months.”

For producers more interested in growing a multi-species catch crop – to produce biomass and to secure an SFI payment – ProCam’s ‘T101 N-Max’ seed mixture is more appropriate.

“N-Max is based on an 80:20 mixture of forage triticale and hairy winter vetch,” Simon continues. “The triticale element is more robust and faster establishing than forage rye which makes it ideal for the production of spring forage for early stock turnout and to reduce the reliance on bought-in feed when silage clamps run empty.

“N-Max also meets the SAM2 specification by providing over-winter ground cover which scavenges existing nutrients and prevents leaching losses and reduces soil erosion. It also excels at suppressing autumn weeds, and, thanks to its ability to withstand even the harshest of winters which enables it to keep growing through the winter, it has the best potential for producing spring biomass with a similar feed value to forage rye.”

As a third option, N-Rich – which comprises an 80:20 split of forage rye and hairy winter vetch varieties – is also suitable for drilling after maize.

“N-Rich occupies the middle ground for those who might not have the confidence to grow a triticale-based ley,” Simon explains. “It too continues to grow even in very hard winters and produces a good biomass for spring cutting or can be grazed from January onwards. And it is also SAM2 compliant which means producers electing for this option can also benefit from an SFI payment.”

More information

More information about the products mentioned can be found in the 2024 Grass, Clover and Forage Crop Guide which can be viewed and downloaded for free at www.field-options.co.uk More information and advice are also available by contacting ProCam’s Field Options team on 01544 262500 or via email at info@field-options.co.uk

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Despite being drilled in the first week of June, this crop of maize, like many others, is still not all above knee height. In contrast, it should be at least at head height and tasseling by this stage in the season.



Simon Montgomery explains that an autumn sown catch crop could help to alleviate worries regarding forage shortages this winter.

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