

Treatment of Young Pastures

THE season has been excellent for the early sowing of new pasture, and provided a good strike of grass and clover has been obtained, success in establishment will now depend mainly on good grazing management. Great care must be taken with the newly-sown permanent pastures, and they must not be made to act as supplementary feed at the expense of successful establishment of any of the pasture constituents.

Ryegrass Establishes Readily

The ryegrasses are rapid in establishment under a wide range of conditions. Other grasses such as cocksfoot and dogstail are less adaptable, and late sowings containing these grasses and red clover are frequently failures. Under average conditions ryegrass will be through the ground in a week, and cocksfoot and dogstail in about a fortnight. Under adverse conditions ryegrass has the best chance of establishment, although a check during early development will reduce vigour. Early-sown pasture will be making good growth during the early winter, but late-sown pastures will be slower establishing, require more careful handling, and yield less winter feed. Clovers may not establish well when sowing is delayed and there is a greater risk of poaching the ground with stock.

Stocking the New Pastures

Light stock such as sheep are preferable for the first grazing of the new pasture. High per-acre stocking over shorter grazing periods should be adopted. This will bring about evenness of grazing without selective effect and a good, even hoof consolidation. Firmness of the ground is essential to pasture vigour and the carrying of heavier stock. The stock nitrogen will then act as a useful and even top-dressing when the pastures are grazed in this way. An application of superphosphate in the early spring will further assist young plants, particularly clovers.

Overgrazing and Undergrazing

Young pastures should not be grazed too closely in winter, as recovery is unduly delayed and the action of frost and rain is detrimental on ground

with a depleted grass and clover cover. Any persistent close grazing will reduce root development and plant vigour. On the other hand, undergrazing of young pasture is a common fault and equally undesirable. It is most harmful when Italian ryegrass has been included in the seed mixture due to the strong shading of the slower and more permanent species of a mixed pasture sowing. Rank growth between grazings, while not usual under sheep grazing, is more likely to occur on the dairy farm. Under most conditions a March sowing should provide at least three grazings before September. Every endeavour should be made by careful grazing control to promote a dense and vigorous sward, able to withstand winter conditions. Such a pasture will yield well and maintain the balance between grass and clover.

Weeds give least trouble in autumn-sown pastures. Most pasture sowings contain a good proportion of ryegrass which will smother most annual and perennial weeds that are attempting to establish at the same time as the ryegrass. Most aggressive perennial weeds are more or less dormant in the late autumn-winter period. In control of perennial weeds, such as fern, blackberry, and ragwort, the aim is to establish a good cover over the winter and have sufficient growth to maintain heavy stocking when the weeds are most vulnerable. The young fronds of fern and young tender shoots of blackberry require this treatment as they appear in spring. Young ragwort is eaten by sheep but not by cattle.

Summer annuals are of little moment in the new autumn-sown pastures, but may establish in the spring if the ground has been badly poached during the winter by grazing when the ground was wet and soft.

Weeds such as docks and ox-eye daisy, which are slow to establish from seed, have a better chance of establishing in the autumn-sown pastures. Competition at this time is less keen than it would be with a spring sowing.

Harrowing is of greatest value from the start of autumn growth right through to the spring. Early harrowing is especially valuable, as it enables the pastures to make full use of the natural fertiliser before winter slows up growth. In many cases harrowing is urgently needed now. A herd of 20 cows each year drop fertilising material approximately equivalent to 6 tons of sulphate of ammonia, 1½ tons of superphosphate, and 3 tons of sulphate of potash. If undisturbed, the summer accumulation of dung destroys the grass beneath, while rank growth neglected by stock encircles the droppings. Yorkshire fog, which is a winter-growing grass, frequently develops in this way, while weeds rapidly occupy bare ground as the droppings decay.

Unevenness in the pasture will be accentuated in the spring, while the rough unpalatable grasses will prove difficult to control by grazing alone and are liable to harbour pests.

Harrowing is most effective following any concentration of stock on the pastures, as is the case with high per-acre stocking or with winter supplementary feeding. Distribution by harrowing becomes a definite and a cheap topdressing.

Harrows used should be of a type that will disintegrate the droppings. Tripod harrows follow unevenness in the ground. Light tine and chain



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Harrowing of Pastures

THE regular harrowing of pastures to spread stock droppings is one of the principal operations at this season on a dairy farm. The up-to-date dairy farmer rightly classes this work as essential from the point of view of fertility, productiveness of pastures, and health of both plants and animals.

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