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Seed Supply & Demand



You've probably noticed how seed availability can fluctuate from year to year. The vast majority of the time this is caused by changes in the weather. Whilst a good season leaves farms all across Europe with sheds full of seed, a challenging growing season can mean crop failures which puts pressure on supply of seed. A tough winter, and therefore an increased need to improve pastures in the spring, can increase demand further. Last year we saw a very rare set of circumstances.

Winter 2017 was unusually long and harsh and caused damage to many pastures. Spring planting in 2018 was then delayed due to a cold start to the season, and therefore many farmers were lacking grass growth for grazing, and short in conserved forage due to high usage over winter. This meant that when grass started growing, it was either grazed by hungry animals, or cut for silage. Once the limited amount of grazing grass had been exhausted and the weather became untypically hot & dry (limiting regrowth), farmers had to start feeding-out 'first cut' conserved forage which should have been destined for feeding during the following winter (2018).

The freak combination of these two weather events meant a very high demand for short term 'rescue' crops late spring, such as Italian ryegrass, to try and replace the forage stores as quickly as possible. It didn't stop there though! The hot & dry summer also caused many of the spring sown 'rescue' crops to fail, which had to be re-planted again in the autumn, effectively doubling the normal usage for some species.

The end result of this sequence of events was a severe lack of supply, coupled with a big increase in demand. It usually takes a year or two for the trade stocks to recover from these events, dependent of course on favourable weather, until demand gradually drops and supply can catch up. The good news is that 2019 got off to a great start, which looks set to continue.

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