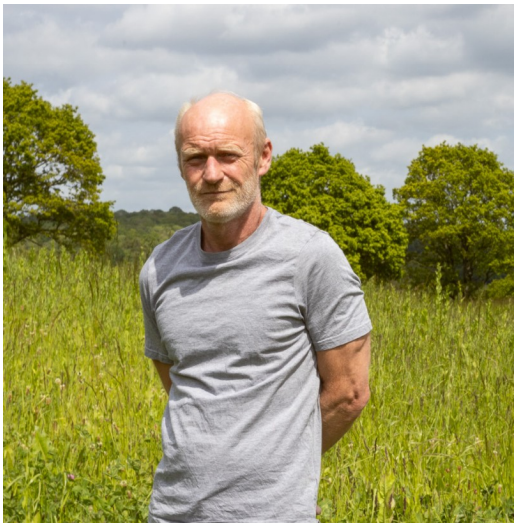
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FIRST HAND CASE STUDY: Bespoke chicory mix with Jeremy Davis



Farm Type: Mixed Smallholding

Location: East Sussex

Size: 40 acres

Soil Type: Sandy Loam

Mixes Used: Bespoke Chicory Mix

After taking over Lynne's Organic Farm, a forty acre smallholding in East Sussex, Jeremy Davis was looking for a bespoke green manure that would be of nutritional benefit to his pigs and laying chickens as well as adding nutrition for horticulture and he worked with Cotswold Seeds to develop a special chicory mix which has consistently produced fantastic results.

{video1}

Historically the farm was part of the Abergavenny Estate and had been tenanted as pasture for grazing sheep and cattle. Jeremy purchased the farm about 20 years ago and put the whole farm down to green manures for organic conversion.

'In the early days I was seeking advice about what we should plant and I got to know Ian at Cotswold Seeds quite well,' says Jeremy.

After introducing Saddleback pigs and chickens ten years ago he began working with Sam at Cotswold Seeds to refine a mix to give nutritional benefits to the pigs but also the chickens. The special chicory mixture is made up predominantly of chicory with some red clover and cocksfoot and plantain. The results have been very impressive.

'Breeding sows show massively increased fertility when they have been in the green manure prior to going to the boar,' says Jeremy. 'The litter size is substantially bigger. We have had breeding stock on this ley for ten years so that's pretty conclusive. The ley also helps with boar fertility. Since our breeding stock have been moved elsewhere and are not grazing on this ley, their fertility has certainly decreased. We don't get any trouble with worms or other sickness when they are on the ley either.'

So how is the ley established and managed?

'We have always done traditional drilling after working down the seed bed and rolling before sowing,' says Jeremy. 'Because we are organic we have quite a lot of weed. We tend to flail mow a couple of times as it gets established, to knock out any annual weeds like Fat Hen and encourage the plants to tiller out and the sward to thicken up and then we just let it grow. Depending on how long we are going to keep the ley, we will probably mow once or twice a season, depending on the weather. We prefer bulk but don't really want it going to seed.'

The ley is treated differently depending on whether veg crops are grown after it, or the area is used for hens and pigs. ‘In the veg field we are turning over and terminating the ley quite frequently. Generally we will try and leave they ley in for at least two years in the veg plot, but longer in the other plots. With the pigs and chickens we try to keep the ley in for three or four years before we terminate and resow. Laying chickens don’t destroy the root structure so we will leave the mix to come back and regrow. The chicory will come through first, because the tap roots are so much stronger. We will wait for it to grow a foot and then top it. And then you start to get the rest of the mix coming through. We let it grow to another foot, top it again, then you’ll likely get the same mix as you had originally. We will incorporate it eventually, but we don’t resow immediately. With pigs we have to cultivate once they have been through the green manure and then resow or plant veg depending on what’s happening in that rotation.

Jeremy has been a customer of Cotswold Seeds for twenty years, ever since he needed advice about growing green manures on the farm. ‘I like dealing with them because they are so knowledgeable. They are prompt and delivery is great. Never had a problem.’

Date Posted: 5th August 2024