Cotswold Seeds Ltd
The Cotswold Business Village
Moreton in Marsh,
Gloucestershire GL56 0JQ

FIRST HAND: Pochon Dairy with Waldegrave Estates



Farm Type: Dairy & arable

Location: Wells, Somerset

Size: 800 Acres

Soil Type: Mainly shallow loam over limestone

Mixes Used: Pochon Dairy & Longer Term Red Clover Ley

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Waldegrave Farms, in the Mendip Hills, Somerset, is one of Cotswold Seeds' oldest customers, the mixtures mainly used for silage and grazing.

The 230 herd of dairy cows are paddock grazed and milked twice a day. 'We are very exposed on top of the Mendips with a cold east wind, so we get a lot of frost and the grass is always late,' says Farm Manager, Penny Wiseman. 'It's a short grazing season for us because of the late spring.'

The farm went organic in 2000, driven by Lady Waldegrave, the principal tenant, who was running a cookery school and was interested in healthy food and farming with nature.

'Ian Wilkinson recommended introducing plenty of red and white clover to help build fertility in the organic system,' explains Penny.'We've always alternated the Pochon Ley with

a 3 year Red Clover Ley. Red clover makes very good silage but there are diseases that affect red clover if you reseed with it without a break.'

The advice is to have a four to five year break between red clover leys. We have 10 fields that we reseed every 4 years and we've always alternated between red clover and white clover, which isn't prone to the same disease. We do that religiously. In the early days we had a much longer rotation, with wheat and triticale, then things like vetch and oats and peas and barley, so we could get a four year break and then go back to a red clover mix but nowadays we do a much shorter rotation of red then white clover and we've never had any problems. We particularly like the Milvus red clover because that will last four to five years. If the grass looks a bit sketchy we just overseed grass onto the red clover to keep it going another year. That's why we like Cotswold Seeds because the bespoke mixtures are so versatile. We can say we want that mixture without the clover just to overseed.'

After harvest, a crop of winter wheat is folllowed by a custom cover crop of mustard and rape over the winter. 'The mustard and rape takes up whatever nitrogen is in the ground and then in spring you plough it back in which releases nitrogen for a crop of spring barley undersown with a clover ley. Having that winter cover crop reduces the risk of soil erosion and also helps suppress weeds.'

The method of reseeding is to plough, power harrow and drill the spring barley and then immediately overseed with a grass seed mix pretty much on the surface. A Stocks Ag Turbojet Seeder mounted

on a Browns harrow works well ‘because it’s really easy to calibrate’. The grass seed is broadcast and then followed with a set of tines before rolling. ‘The seed comes out of tubes low to the ground which is perfect, because you can do it when it’s windy, which is pretty much all the time here! It’s also ideal for the small seeds like clovers because it ensures they are not sown too deep. If we are lucky during establishment, after the whole crop is harvested in June/July, we can then get a good cut.

‘One improvement we hope to make is that it can be difficult to get muck to some of the fields, but we are considering investing in our own muck spreader to give more flexibility with timing of spreading and to hopefully do more spreading in early spring, which would be beneficial to encourage earlier spring grass growth on these exposed hills.’

We have started exploring SFI options. We’re using SAM3 herbal leys and we’re also doing IPM2 wildflower grass margins and are looking to do some AHL2 winter bird food. Apart from ensuring we have a viable business, one of our other important aims is to try and farm with wildlife. We’ve got a lot of brown hares and skylarks on the farm.

‘I always use Cotswold Seeds because the mixtures are so versatile and the seeds are always reliable, good quality,’ says Penny. ‘They are always able to give me what I want. Deliveries are quick too.’

Pochon Dairy

Longer Term Red Clover Ley

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