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Defining Pastures

Permanent Pasture

A significant proportion of UK grassland is permanent pasture. This is defined as an area that's laid down to grass for a period of more than five years and has not been ploughed for other crops during that time. It's typically used for grazing or occasional cutting. Generally, the quality of grazing on permanent pasture is significantly lower than that of shorter term leys because the grass is old. On average, permanent pasture will consist of no more than 50% of originally sown species, the remaining percentage being made up of weed species such as annual meadow grass.

Leys

A ley is an area of land put down to grass, clover, herbs etc for a single season or limited number of years. It's typically used for forage and replaced on a regular basis. As a general rule, shorter term are higher yielding while longer term leys compromise on yield but gain on lifespan.

Short Term Ley

The typical lifespan of a short term ley is 1-2 years. Short term leys are generally high yielding and used for conserved forage such as silage or haylage.

Medium Term Ley

A medium term ley lasts 3-4 years. It's chosen for cutting only, or for dual purpose cutting and/or grazing, where the compromise of a higher yield is required, together with a longer lasting ley..

Long Term Ley

Long term leys, lasting 4-5 years plus, are chosen if the ley is to be used for grazing only, but where a better quality than permanent pasture is required.

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