
Case Study: Herbal Leys with Alex Joynson



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Mr Joynson took over Hyam Farm in Malmesbury back in 1987. He only started using Cotswold Seeds Herbal Leys four years ago but has been delighted with the results.

The farm, 445 acres together with another 100 which Mr Joynson rents, is mixed in every way. Mr Joynson runs a sheep flock, a beef herd and grows cereals in rotation. There is also a wide variety of soils across the farm, ranging from Cotswold brash to heavy clay and light dry, gravels over clay. This in turn means that there is a need for a variety of species which are best suited to grow on the different soils.

Over the years Mr Joynson has experimented with a range of white clover mixes and red clover mixes, with varying results.

Four years ago he decided to properly trial different leys to see how they performed. He planted strips over two different fields, one clay and one gravel, across a total of about seven acres. A white clover mix was grown on each side of the fields with a dry ground herbal ley rich in red clover, in the middle.

‘The red clover dominant herbal leys easily out produced all the other leys,’ he says. ‘The sheep seemed to prefer it and grazed it very tight. It is still highly visible after all this time, with the sheep still grazing it harder than the rest.’ It also performed well for finishing both lambs and cattle.

Red clover has a reputation for causing problems for tupping ewes but Mr Joynson tupped his ewe lambs on the herbal mix and got 180% tupping, a good result, with several triplets and a multitude of twins.

Crops generally do well enough on the clays but Mr Joynson has always struggled to keep the summer growth on thinner very dry brash soils. He is hoping the deep-rooting chicory and red clovers in the herbal leys will improve the soil structure and boost growth. This year he also sowed some gravel land with a herbal ley mixture.

He operates a rotation of wheat, oats and barley undersown with the grass mix which he plans to leave down for three years before reverting back to the wheat.

‘It may seem relatively costly,’ Mr Joynson says. ‘But it’s actually good value, if you consider that the extra expense of the first year is spread over four years. There is also the fact that the herbal ley is the best yielding on the farm, which is why we have kept increasing the amount we grow.’

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