

DON'T RISK A SHORTAGE OF FEED, CONTROL THE AMOUNT OF SEED THAT IS SOWN

Ask any grain farmer what happens when he sows too little or too much seed, sowing pasture is no different. Sow too little and yields drop, sow too much and yields also drop.

Allowing your Italian ryegrass paddocks to naturally regenerate does not control the amount of seed that is dispersed for later germination. There is considerable conjecture between the perceived benefit of shutting up soft seeded annual ryegrasses for re-seeding, and the sowing of seed the following year.

Research has shown that seeding rates above 250kg/ha of self sown seed will have a significant detrimental effect on the total dry matter production over that growing season, and in the process of natural regeneration the amount of seed dispersed is largely uncontrollable.

There are some key issues that need to be taken into consideration when evaluating the options surrounding this discussion.

Where a paddock is shut up for reseeding, the following points need to be taken into consideration:

- The cost of dry matter lost to produce a seed crop equals lost income
- Potential loss of seed because of false break
- Higher risk of fungal and insect damage due to additional litter carried over
- Potential for increased weed infestation
- Loss of production in the following year from immature and cross pollinated seed. This could be significant.

Versus, the paddock being grazed after taking for silage:

- Income generated from dry matter produced after silage/hay
- A cleaner paddock for the sowing of seed
- The cost of seed for sowing the following autumn
- The cost of sowing (partly offset by topdressing)

To look at each of these scenarios, we have detailed below some costings.

Self sown paddock:

Say there is 3,000kgs/DM/ha sacrificed by closing up a paddock for seed. The cost of replacing this in today's market could be from \$100 to \$180 per tonne, so this equates to \$300 to \$540 per hectare.

Seeded paddock:

The cost of seed to sow the equivalent area in Annual ryegrass at 25 kgs/ha would be approximately \$120 plus sowing costs of \$25 per hectare, making a total cost of \$145 per hectare.

Conclusion:

These figures show that it is half the cost to re sow a paddock in new seed compared to saving it for seed.

Importantly not only is there a potential saving in adopting the seeded paddock option, but the risk factors associated with the self sown option, i.e., closing the paddock for seed, are considerable and may include:

- Potential loss of seed due to a false break
- Increased risk of plant loss due to fungal and insects
- Lower production from cross pollinated seed

Fertiliser requirements are considered to be the same for both areas.

Seed is an investment in the future profitability of a farming operation and whilst it may be considered to be expensive, there is considerable evidence to show that taking shortcuts has a negative contribution to the bottom line.