

# Beating the competition to kick-start yields

Rejuvenating tired, low-performing pastures by topping them up with fresh, productive grass species is a key way to boost yields, but you have to do it right. **Andy Collings** investigates

**G** rassland rejuvenation sounds easy. Instead of having to spend time and money ploughing up old pastures to reseed them, new grass seed is sown into the existing sward and the job is done – just stand back and wait for the increased production to arrive.

No surprise perhaps, to learn there is more to grass rejuvenation than this. In fact, to ensure any degree of success there is quite a bit of preparation involved – along with some luck with the weather.

The first point to appreciate is that existing, well-established grass, while not perhaps being the most productive in terms of growth, can still dominate the proceedings. It can be a big ask for a small grass or clover seed to germinate and grow

## PASTURE REJUVENATION

### Advantages:

- \* Minimum down time of pasture
- \* Cheaper than total re-seed
- \* Can be used where cultivation is not possible

### Disadvantages:

- \* Results can be variable and at best, a top up of new varieties
- \* Does not remove weed grasses

away in such competitive conditions.

So reducing the competition to a minimum is a priority and this can be achieved either by tight grazing or by taking a hay or silage cut. Just topping grass is a definite no-no – the resulting residue will tend to stifle the germinating grass seed.



Above: Opico grass overseeder in action. Note how hard the grass has been grazed to create an open, less competitive sward for the new seed to germinate in.



Mike Simpson's Dalbo roller complete with grassland overseeder unit. The tines can be seen raking out matted grass.





Raking out the dead grass with the tines on the Dalbo seeder.

In terms of timing, the optimum is probably July/August when the initial vigour of existing grasses has waned, although, with proper management, it is possible to seed pastures both earlier and later than this.

It makes sense during the planning stage to ensure soil pH indices are adequate along with phosphate and potash levels. An application of herbicide to reduce the broad-



Above: Angled disc on the Moore Unidrill opens a slot for the seed to be dropped into.

leaved weed population could also be considered.

And for those who have not yet worked out that this is a competition between small seed and established grass, applying a dose of nitrogen is not going to be a good idea at this time.

It may be possible to deal with compaction problems if the right kit is available – such as the Opico

Sward Lifter or Ritchie's Actisol Grassland subsoiler, for example.

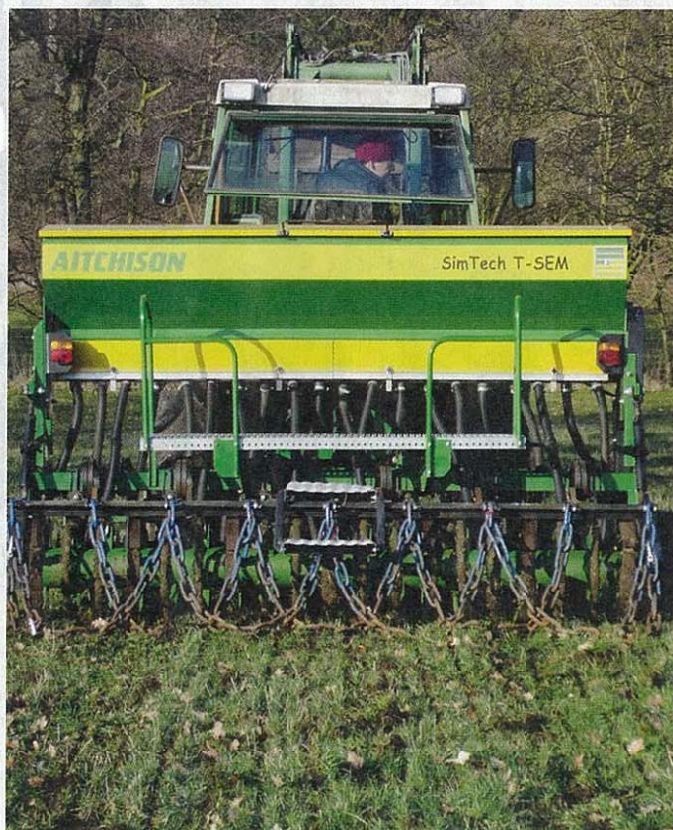
So, with the existing grass down at ground level and soil status and

structure all OK, it's time to get some grass seed sown.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of planting grass seed into an

#### THE CASE FOR RE-SEEDING

- \* About six million hectares of grassland in the UK has been down for more than five years and there is about 1.2m ha of shorter-term grassland
- \* 15% of weed grasses are established at the same time as a new sward is sown. After five years these unproductive grasses – Yorkshire fog, creeping bent and annual meadowgrass, for example – dominate the sward and output is significantly reduced



Left: No denying a touch of optimism for success in these conditions. Reco's Sulky Easydrill exerts up to 250kg on each disc coulters.

Above: Aitchison's SimTech T-Sem at work. An inverted 'T' shaped coulters creates a seeding slot which is wider at the bottom than on the surface. The heavy chains provide an element of slot coverage.