

“Why should I think about slot seeding or oversowing?”

A number of reasons really- you should be thinking about it as an option where you have a need to keep grass in production; open swards - to prevent weed ingress and increase tiller density; sward damage – e.g. on poached swards, land conditions that prevent ploughing or other cultivation; where you want to introduce clover or increase clover content; or introduce new varieties to gain benefits of extra yield or early season growth.

What benefits are there from injecting slurry as opposed to spreading with a splash plate?

Slurry contains lots of nitrogen (N) up to 3kg/m³ – half of this is available immediately for uptake by grass. In summer up to 90% of this available N is lost to the atmosphere as ammonia if it is surface spread. Injecting slurry into the soil ensures that the nitrogen is used by grass and not wasted. In addition to this there are benefits in terms of less risk of contaminating grass – a quicker return to grazing paddocks and less concerns about poor silage. Also, injector systems put the slurry out with an even spread with no risk of contaminating field margins and with little slurry on the surface there is minimal risk of surface run-off. Using an injector can help in breaking up soil compaction caused by heavy machinery traffic and poaching. Injection also eliminates the damage to soils and worm populations that can be caused by slurry puddling at the soil surface.

What are the main effects of thistle infestation?

There are two or three main types you see on farm such as spear thistle or creeping thistle as we have here at Blaenglowon, the main effect is loss of grazing, we know that sward height is affected up to 30cm away from the thistle thus preventing grazing; a 5% infestation equates to about 0.5t /ha DM loss per year. More thistles therefore means less available grass. Other problems are forage rejection in hay for example; livestock health, eg in sheep, orf infection and spread, less stocking flexibility and ultimately, the viability of a livestock enterprise.

What's the best way to control thistles?

Effective control can be achieved over two seasons through weed control using a weedwiper and grazing management using lenient cattle grazing (8-10cm) + Sheep grazing (6-8cm) to maintain a competitive sward in the spring and the autumn.

Try to: avoid the creation of large patches of bare ground which may trigger the initial colonisation by wind dispersed thistle seedlings -livestock poaching, disturbance around water troughs, winter feeding and re-seeding; Increase fertiliser input in the spring which increases the ability of grass to compete with the thistle; don't leave grass swards open and uncompetitive at the time of thistle emergence.

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