

Chicory proves ideal for finishing organic lambs quickly and profitably



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HERBS are often favoured by organic farmers for their mineral content, animal health benefits and for their effect on improving soil structure through their rooting structure.

Chicory is a leafy high yielding crop producing highly nutritious forage. The levels of protein, digestibility and mineral content (Zinc, Potassium and Copper in particular) make it a valuable forage crop to include in the feeding regime.

In research carried out at Ty Gwyn – the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research organic dairy unit – chicory was regularly included in the seeds mixtures of white clover leys, and plot trials monitored its quality during the season. Results showed that the calcium and magnesium content of white clover, ribgrass, and chicory were higher than perennial rye grass, and that sodium was highest in chicory.

Further research at University of Wales investigated the role of chicory in internal abysmal parasite control. Lamb growth rates were higher and faecal egg counts lower on chicory than on ryegrass swards. This was attributed to the nutritional quality (especially protein), high water soluble carbohydrate content, and a 'defence' against internal worms. This is of particular interest to organic farmers who need to plan livestock grazing to avoid anthelmintic use.

Chicory 'herb' strips are used strategically by some organic farmers to treat lambs or sheep likely to be vulnerable to worm burdens. Growing in a strip also reduces competition from the rest of the sward and enables the chicory to establish well.

In a survey of Welsh organic farmers, chicory was the third most used species, within ley mixes after Cocksfoot and Timothy. The level of nutrition it offers enables farmers to finish lambs quickly and profitably in a way that is very difficult to achieve using grass alone especially at the end of the season during the autumn.

Forage analysis results for Chicory

DM %	Tot CP%	D value	Oil (Acid Hydrolysed)	Tot Ash	ME
7.8	25.4	66.1	4.6	15.2	10.4

Organic sheep farmer Dafydd Jones, from Machynlleth, as part of a Farming Connect discussion group, sowed chicory in June to see if it will work as an alternative to rape on his farm for finishing lambs.

Analyses so far have shown that ME is 10.3 to 10.6 and crude proteins 24 -26 g/Kg.



Some sowing facts to consider

IF considering chicory

- Use a recognised variety of chicory bred for use as a forage crop, eg Puna II (British Seed Houses)
- Spring sowing is recommended e.g. between the beginning of May and the end of June
- Early Autumn sowing is possible as long as the chicory is established before going dormant in Winter
- Sow into a firm seedbed to a depth of 10mm as the seed is very small. Seed can be drilled, broadcast or direct drilled
- Sowing rates vary; If sown as a mixture in a new ley the rate should be 200 – 800 g/acre; If sown as a pure stand the rate should be 1.6 – 2.4 kg /acre

For a factsheet on chicory please contact one of the IGER GDC extension team on 01970 823000.