

### “What’s the best time of year to control thistles?”

The most effective means of controlling creeping thistle was a combination of lenient autumn grazing to maintain a relatively competitive sward with weed wiping for two consecutive growing seasons. Lenient autumn grazing in combination with topping also gave an acceptable level of control. In contrast, tight autumn and over winter grazing by sheep significantly increase the number of creeping thistle shoots emerging in the following spring compared with lenient autumn grazing. Cattle grazing reduces thistle numbers more than sheep grazing. Tight grazing in the spring is desirable in achieving a large differential between elongating thistle stems and surrounding grass prior to weedwiping. The best combination of machinery control is topping in June and weedwiping in September when translocation of herbicide to roots is greater.

### “How much of a problem are thistles in the UK?”

There’s 5.5 million ha of productive grassland in the UK. 40 %of this is affected by more than 1 thistle per m<sup>2</sup> resulting in a loss of 1 million tonnes of DM/year. 60% of the area is affected by moderate infestation resulting in a loss of 732,000 tonnes of DM /year. That’s 1.7 M t of DM that the livestock industry can ill afford to lose. Thistle roots can spread up to 5 metres in the first year.

### “What does a thistle infestation affect?”

Thistles directly affect: grass yield through competition; grass area available for grazing- there’s a no graze zone around each thistle of about 20-30cm; forage rejection –content in hay; livestock health- orf infection and spread; stocking flexibility; and ultimately the viability of a livestock enterprise. 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. Increasing fertiliser input in the spring increases the ability of the grass to compete with the thistle. Don’t leave grass open and un-competitive at the time of thistle emergence.

**Sefydliad Gwyddorau Biolegol, Amgylcheddol a Gwledig  
Institute of Biological, Environmental & Rural Sciences**

Canolfan Datblygu Tir Glas, Prifysgol Aberystwyth  
Grassland Development Centre, Aberystwyth University,  
Gogerddan, Ceredigion, SY23 3EB

Ffôn / Tel: (01970) 823026 / 823028  
Ffacs: (01970) 828357