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"How do I recognise soil compaction?"

First of all take a look at the surface- how is the grass performing? Is there surface waterlogging? Are there scorch patches from cattle urine?

Then take a look below the surface- use a spade. Is it difficult to push a spade in? Dig a cube of soil out and find out if the soil breaks up easily. Compaction is indicated by soil which doesn't crack easily, a lack of horizontal cracks, poor rooting depth, lack of worm activity, brown ferrous deposits, grey soils and a sour smell.

It can arise as a result of over trafficking with machinery, poaching or untimely cultivation and overworked soils.

"Why should I test the soil?"

Testing the soil helps you make accurate informed decisions that enable you to correct soil deficiencies and apply the right amount of nutrients to the right crop at the right time. This means that growth conditions for the crop can be improved eg liming to target pH which optimises nutrient availability, and other nutrient inputs such as the Nitrogen available from clover or the phosphate and potash from muck or slurry for example can be accounted for when assessing crop needs.

As a result of achieving the right soil conditions for crop growth you should be able to grow more grass for example over a longer growing season, achieve improved health status of stock, waste less nutrients and avoid environmental pollution and increase the efficiency of production.

"I'm not sure what the best time of year to apply lime is?"

You can apply lime any time of the year but its probably more sensible to put it on in the Autumn. This will give it time to work its way down through the soil and change the pH so that the grass can make more efficient use of nutrients in the spring. You don't have to wait until you cultivate for a new reseed or sowing to apply lime although it makes sense to correct pH ahead of a new re-seed.