

FARMING FIT FOR THE FUTURE

SEEDS FOR CHANGE

How a commercial silage crop can provide a diverse range of grassland flowers

CHANGING NATURE

A strong tradition of farming in Somerset has given rise over many years to a patchwork of iconic habitats, such as flower-rich meadows. Due to the economics of modern farming, and the need to feed a growing population, such habitats are now rare in areas such as the Mendip Hills. As stewards of Somerset's countryside, farmers have often had to choose between generating high yields to keep us fed, and making space for nature. But now there's an opportunity to have both.



KATE LAWRENCE



SOMERSET WILDLIFE TRUST

LEGUME-AND-HERB-RICH SWARDS

The production of legume-and-herb-rich swards was tested by Rothamstead Research and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and subsequently farm-trialled by Somerset Wildlife Trust and FWAG South West as part of the Seeds for Change project.

The approach focuses on getting a little more wildlife into a lot more of the landscape by using a grass and flower seed mix to deliver modest enhancements in flower abundance and diversity in grass ley systems, increasing pollen and nectar resources for insects. All this whilst maintaining the high levels of forage quality and productivity a farmer would expect from a rye grass crop.

"We had been resting the legume-and-herb ley as well as a field adjacent to it. When we turned the cattle back in to the two fields it became obvious which field they preferred to graze as they ran across the first field and didn't put their heads down to eat until they had reached the legume-and herb-rich ley!" - one of the farmers involved in the trial.

A GOOD CHOICE

Results from three years of farm trials have been impressive. Flower-rich leys sown in late summer perform as well as rye grass leys on a number of fronts, including digestibility, crude protein and metabolisable energy content. With such positive results for wildlife and farmers, the wider use of legume-and-herb-rich swards could contribute significantly to the creation of ecological networks, and the inclusion of legume-and-herb-rich swards as an option (GS4) in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme is a positive step in the right direction.



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