

Let them eat grass

Grass is one word but covers such a wide-ranging adaptable resource found at the top of a mountain to the seaside and everywhere in between. Knowing what grass is capable of is a far-reaching topic discussed the world over but often with common solutions in different countries.

Research and farmer demonstrations have shown that most farmers will not be making the best use of their cheapest feed – grass, and other forages such as legumes. Farmers in Australia, New Zealand, Namibia, China, Colombia, Ireland, Canada, and many other countries are all practising rotational grazing and finding that they can produce so much more beef, lamb and milk from the same area with a positive effect on their profitability and the environment.

Even in countries experiencing droughts, such as Namibia and Australia, rotational grazing has limited the rate of destocking and maximised output whilst helping to improve soils. Chinese farmers in Outer Mongolia have reduced stocking rates and reliance on purchased inputs, improved their environmental impact and, as a result, increased net income.

Colombia has increased production five-fold by introducing silvo-pastures (grasses with trees) and rotational grazing to improve soil structure and increase wildlife. Temperate countries such as Ireland, New Zealand and Canada have also found that the environment, soils and their profitability has improved by making the most of their cheapest resource.

Of course, additional skills and structure changes are sometimes required to introduce rotational grazing but these are often cheaper than buying in feed or fertiliser, or will help target what is needed and when. An early step has to be to soil test every field you graze to establish the pH and mineral levels. Without them being at optimum levels, grass and other crops cannot grow to their potential.

Why not listen to this webinar by a Northumberland farming family with beef, sheep, and other enterprises who found that making better use of their resources and some changes their solution for a more sustainable future. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsAm5JJ_xOo

Carol Davis, Farm Economics Lead Analyst (carol.davis@ahdb.org.uk)