Sward mixtures

When buying seed mixtures bear in mind that dust and dead seed can account for up to 20% of the contents of poor quality products.

Better quality seeds also optimise establishment, offering greater freedom from weeds and better performance.

**Seed mixtures should comprise:**

- Named varieties to a specific formulation
- High-yielding, high digestibility grasses from the NIAB or SAC recommended lists. Recommended not just tested – recommended guarantees tested quality
- Grasses with a good disease resistance
- Grasses with good intake characteristics and varieties shown to be preferentially grazed by cows
- Grasses that are compatible with white clover
- Grasses and clovers suited to local conditions – especially where these are drier or wetter than average.

The specific balance of grass and clover varieties in the mixture should reflect its primary purpose (Figure 1).

Specific types of perennial, Italian, tetraploid and hybrid ryegrasses, together with cocksfoot and timothy are appropriate for specific needs and growing conditions (Section 12).

Medium to late-heading perennial ryegrass is essential to maintain quality grazing throughout the season.

Specialist seed and mixtures are available for organic producers.

Better quality leys with good intake characteristics and persistent varieties can increase milk yield at pasture by 1-2 litres/cow/day.
**Recommended Grass and Clover Lists**

Knowing the performance characteristics of grass and clover is immensely useful for grassland farmers. It allows appropriate selection of varieties that will perform well for a particular system and end use.

The England and Wales Recommended Grass and Clover Lists (RGCL) are drawn up after rigorous testing for attributes such as yield, persistency, quality and disease resistance. The trials are carried out by the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) and evaluated by a panel of experts. An annual list is produced which can be found on the DairyCo website.

The testing is funded by levy paid by merchants and retailers participating in the Grass Levy Scheme, on retail sales of herbage seed mixtures. Seeds and mixes taken from the RGCL can be identified by the merchant/retailer displaying the RGCL logo.

Similar systems are in place for Scotland and Northern Ireland and again producers should look to use recommended varieties from these lists.