

MACHINERY

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Aiming to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of his grassland rejuvenation and overseeding service, contractor Ian Kirkby opted for the latest tool from He-Va. *Farmers Guardian* finds out more.

Saving time and money with one-pass overseeding

Grassland reseeding and rejuvenation are key areas of work for dairy farmer and agricultural contractor Ian Kirkby.

Often under time pressure and always looking to minimise costs, his latest system enables him to reseed or overseed in fewer passes, and sometimes in just one.

At Park House Farm, Tatham, Lancaster, Mr Kirkby farms in partnership with his wife Jenny and parents Brian and Linda.

They run a 100-cow dairy herd on their tenanted 40-hectare farm. For many years, they have also run an agricultural contracting business alongside the dairy unit.

Mr Kirkby says: "My father had always done some contracting and when I left school and joined him on-farm, we pushed on with this side of the business. It helps spread the costs of our own farm machinery.

"These days there are three of us: me, my father and a stockman/tractor driver. At peak times, we can pull in additional self-employed tractor drivers."

Rejuvenation

A key service offered by the contracting side of the business is grassland rejuvenation.

Mr Kirkby says: "When we started out with the agricultural contracting, we would use an Opico six-metre Grassmaster harrow and Air 8

seeder. When we got busier, we replaced this with another Grassmaster, but with an Air 16 seeder.

"Four years ago, when we saw there was scope to further expand the reseeding side of the business, we decided it was time to upgrade our kit again.

"We looked on the internet and found a video of the He-Va Grass Rejuvenator on YouTube. It is a machine which was originally designed for overseeding, but it can also be used for seeding onto cultivated ground. The big attraction for us was that fewer passes would be needed.

"We had a demo model from our local dealer Rickerby and eventually bought a trailed 6.3m model.

"With the harrow and seeder set up, we could use a 100hp tractor, but with the heavier Rejuvenator, we are using a 180hp tractor.

"The paddles at the front are quite aggressive, as they are designed to scuff up the surface and create a tilth for seeding.

"We have also found they can be used to lightly grade the soil."

When reseeding, Mr Kirkby will make three to four passes with the Rejuvenator to level and comb the soil, he says.

"Then we put the seed in just using the tooth roller, having lifted the other sections up. We have had some really good results doing it this way.

"The roller is key; it presses the

USER STORY MACHINERY



Originally designed for overseeding, the Grass Rejuvenator also enables seeding into cultivated ground in one pass.

seed into the soil. You can see where you have been and the ground does not need to be rolled again. Establishment is very good and germination is even.

"However, there are still some situations when we need to power harrow first before going in with the Rejuvenator."

Even though overseeding enables land to be kept in production, it only accounts for about 20 per cent of Mr Kirkby's grassland work.

He says: "Overseeding is a great way to freshen up a ley without the cost of ploughing. And when seeding into an established sward, there is not the risk of any seed washing out if there is a downpour.

"But it is really important to only do this when ground conditions are right. Leys to be overseeded need to be grazed down tight with sheep.

"Alternatively, we can go in straight after a cut of silage, so long as there is moisture in the ground. This is what we are doing on our own farm.

"We tend to overseed either in early spring or much later in the

season after second or third cut. But it all depends on ground conditions. We never cut corners on seed rate, it is not worth it at the end of the day. So if the recommended rate is 14kg/acre for a full reseed, we will use 10kg/acre for overseeding.

"We also always use a seed mixture which contains specific grass varieties and is designed for use in this situation where new plants are going to have to compete with the existing sward.

"When overseeding with the tine harrow and seeder combo, we used to make three or four passes to get a tilth before switching on the seeder. But with the more aggressive Rejuvenator, we can go straight in and seed in just one pass.

"The Rejuvenator has also proven especially useful in putting life back into fields where soils

are shallow or the ground is rocky and ploughing for reseeds cannot be done."

Over the past 20 years, in addition to seeding farmland, Mr Kirkby has taken on contracts to reinstate grassland for utilities companies.

Tip-off

He says: "In 2000, one of the utility companies was laying a large water pipe which had to come through our farm. Thanks to a tip-off from a friend, we got the contract to reinstate the grassland after the pipe was laid.

"The work involves putting all the soil back level then reseeding. Back at the start, we used to plough and power harrow before reseeding it with our harrow and seeder, and then flat-roll the ground.

"Nowadays, we need only take

the Rejuvenator. However, if the soil needs levelling or breaking down, we will power harrow first. But overall, it is more economical than always having to take the plough. It all saves cost and time.

"In 2018, we reseeded more than 1,000 acres, all with the Rejuvenator. But in 2019, the weather conditions meant we only managed about 700 acres.

"This year, we had a very dry April and could not do any of the seeding we would normally have done. So we will have to see how much we can get to do later."

Overall, it is the flexibility of the new system which impresses Mr Kirkby.

"While the Rejuvenator is a more expensive machine than a harrow and seeder, it does have the ability to cope with a variety of situations. It looks robust enough to handle lots of acres too."



Contractor Ian Kirkby.

About the Rejuvenator

THE He-Va Grass Rejuvenator consists of an aggressive shatter board with slicing plates, followed by two rows of heavy-duty harrow tines, and a heavy 600mm-diameter toothed roller.

The slicing plates and harrow tines break up and level the soil surface in front of the grass seed outlets, and the soil is then firmed behind by the roller.



Use of a 'toothed' Prisma roller means the ground does not need rolling again after seeding.

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