Oversowing Clover into Existing Grass Swards

- **Oversowing** is the technique of sowing clover and/or grass seeds into existing pasture without preparing a traditional, ploughed and cultivated seedbed.
- Sowing into a **ploughed and cultivated** seedbed will always give a quicker, better establishment of white clover, **BUT**
- **Oversowing could be useful** in situations where ploughing and seedbed preparation is not possible

**Secrets of success**

- Ensure adequate **soil fertility**: pH, lime, phosphorus and potassium
- Choose the **best white clover varieties** available
  - Use small-leaved varieties for long-term swards and continuous grazing
  - Use medium and large-leaved varieties for cutting
  - Your local SAC Adviser can advise you which are the best varieties
- Use a **seed rate of 5kg/ha clover**, either alone or with 5kg/ha perennial ryegrass
- The **machine** you use for sowing **makes little difference** to the success of the operation
  - Use whatever machinery is available on the farm - seed drill, grass seed broadcast, or fertiliser spreader.

**THERE ARE TWO FACTORS CRUCIAL TO OVERSOWING SUCCESS:**

1. **Availability of soil moisture for germinating seedlings**
2. **Control of competition from the existing sward**

See overleaf for the best ways of optimising these two factors
1. Ensuring adequate soil moisture:
   - **Sow in spring (late March/late April)**
     Plenty of moisture in the soil
     Long growing season for seedlings to get established before winter
     *(Sowing in mid-late summer will almost always give a poorer establishment - Less soil moisture available, shorter time for clover seedlings to get established)*

2. Controlling competition:
   - **Adequate sward preparation - depends on grasses present and sward density**
     a) Thin, open, predominantly perennial ryegrass - cut or graze very tightly before oversowing
        (expect high success rate with minimum preparation)
     b) Dense, predominantly ryegrass swards - cut or graze tightly, one or two passes with harrows
        (expect moderate success rate with some mechanical treatment)
     c) Dense, matted mixed grass swards - needs fixed tine harrow, power harrow or rotavator
        (expect low success rate - considerable pre-conditioning required)
   - **Graze tightly after sowing - do not set up sward for cutting for hay or silage**
     a) Initial post-sowing period - repeated intensive short periods of grazing
     b) Avoid continuous heavy grazing with sheep in the initial post-sowing period

SAC has been a partner in an EU-funded project to demonstrate the potential of oversowing white clover.

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