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The “three” crop rule and cereal herbicides

CAP reform and greening is forcing changes to rotation and future cropping. Beans and peas are attracting particular interest. Integrating what may be sudden changes of rotation with past herbicide use in preceding crops will be vital. Minimising future headaches now, will be a positive move.

For Broadway® Star® treated winter wheat:

In autumn 2015, cereals, oilseed rape, field beans, brassica plants as transplants or grass may be sown to succeed a cereal crop treated with Broadway Star. Next spring 2016, there are no restrictions at all on crops.

So winter or spring field beans or peas are a following crop option with Broadway Star. Also remember there are no additional cultivation requirements for drilling crops like oilseed rape where direct drilling is desired.
Groundsel

This weed, particularly the common form, *Senecio vulgaris*, is cropping up more and more in arable rotations across Ireland.

Seeds germinate throughout the year and seed shed can mean more than one generation a year even though it is an annual. It can flower within about 6 weeks of emergence and its speedy growth habit can catch many out. Seeds are dispersed by wind. It prefers loamy soils or sandy soils with a pH above 6.0.

Although not on label, Galera® and Dow® Shield® 100 control groundsel in oilseed rape. Again not on label but Broadway Star controls it up to flowering. Spitfire® does it to 50 mm again off label at 1.0 L/ha, but you will get better control if you tank mix with with a dicamba+ mecoprop mix. Watch that speedy growth habit!

Check oilseed rape now for weeds

Cleavers are the most aggressive broad-leaved weed competitors impacting yield and as such, significantly decrease final percentage oil content. As yield robbers, mayweeds, groundsel and thistles, follow closely behind.

With such populations of broad-leaved weeds present in oilseed rape crops, the temptation is get out early and treat with Galera, but caution is required. To optimise performance, stable air temperatures are required of at least 6°C and rising, but preferably 8°C or higher. The warmer and more stable the conditions, the better the results are likely to be. Warm days and cold nights (high diurnal variation) are likely to give poor results, particularly against cleavers.

Another issue at this time of year can be wet leaves. Galera needs 6 hours drying time, after application to a dry leaf, for best results. A breeze to dry the plants off in the morning and a planned application during the warmest part of the day is the approach most likely to give good results. That is why having the appropriate fields identified and the required amount of Galera on farm and ready to apply is so important. With the cut off of flower buds visible above the crop canopy, the opportunities to spray can be limited.
When do broad-leaved weeds start to grow in grass fields?

Like grass, weed growth in spring is governed by soil temperature. Most plants get going when soils reach 5-8°C, although speed of growth is also related to day length.

This is the order that broad-leaved weeds start growing in the spring:

- Buttercup
- Dandelion
- Ragwort
- Dock
- Creeping thistle
- Spear thistle

**Buttercups** like having their feet in damp soil and creeping buttercup spreads rapidly along the ground by rooting runners, quickly suppressing grass growth around it. Both species are starting to grow now.

**Dandelions** will also be preparing for growth after the mild winter and kind spring.

Both these weeds must be treated BEFORE FLOWERING. Waiting until there is a carpet of yellow across the field is too late.

Broad-spectrum herbicides such as Pastor® Pro (on silage ground) and Forefront® T (on grazing land only) are good options for controlling both these weeds.

But they must be applied BEFORE sprays targeted at docks and thistles.

Buttercups and dandelions ideally should be treated within the next two to three weeks. Keep a close eye on their development and spray when there is a rosette of actively growing, fresh green leaves.
**Ragwort** is usually biennial – forming a rosette in its first year and sending up tall, branchless stems in its second. It can also act like a perennial if its crown has been damaged by cutting, poaching or incomplete hand pulling.

It is toxic to animals – particularly horses and cattle, which become more attracted to it when it has been cut and is wilting.

*Forefront T* is the most effective herbicide available for controlling ragwort, but can only be used on fields that are grazed and not those cut for hay or silage.

**Docks** are just starting to grow – with fresh leaves springing out of the centre of old established plants and seedlings pushing through the young grass.

It is likely to be another 3-4 weeks before docks are ready for spraying with herbicide – they should still be at the rosette stage and at least 25cm across or high.

Treating before first cut with *Doxstar Pro* is the best way to boost silage yields, as the grass then has a chance to fill in the gaps left by the dead weeds before harvest. The silage will also be more nutritious, as docks have only 60% of the feed value of grass.

**Thistles** are the last to start growing in spring but do not ignore them.

The most common species in Ireland are Spear and Creeping thistle and both start growing at about the same time.

The combination of clopyralid and triclopyr in *Thistlex maximises* the activity on thistles, giving up to 85% control 12 months after application.

Apply between 1 March and 31 October and use once per year at a rate of 1l/ha in a water volume of 200 l/ha. Use higher water volumes up to 400 l/ha, where thistle numbers are high or the grass sward is dense.

Spray when the thistles are at the rosette stage and up to 20cm across or high. If they are larger than this, it is better to top them and spray the active regrowth two to three weeks later.
What should farmers be doing now about weeds in grazing areas and silage crops?

1. Reflect back to last year – which fields/areas were the worst affected? Which will benefit most from treatment this year?
2. Walk the fields now and map where seedling docks and thistles have overwintered.
3. Decide whether these areas warrant spraying. Remember where weeds grow grass cannot grow. A 10% infestation of docks or thistles means 10% less grass.
4. Select the most appropriate products. Translocated sprays travel within the stem, leaves and roots of the target weed, giving long-lasting control. Choose a herbicide that has been specifically formulated for the target weed, e.g. DoxstarPro for docks or Thistlex for thistles.
5. Book the contractor – demand for grassland spraying is increasing due to changes in the application regulations, so booking early is essential so the job can be done at the right time. This is when the weeds are actively growing and 20cm high or across (docks) or 25cm high or across (thistles).
6. In silage crops, spraying should take place three to four weeks before harvest – work back on a calendar to find the ideal date.

Fast Facts - Docks

- Grow in soils rich in nitrogen and phosphates
- Colonise trampled/poached ground
- Left untreated infestations increase in size
- Tap roots can reach depths of 1.5m where they access moisture and nutrients
- Flower from June onwards
- Can produce 60,000 ripe seeds/year
- Seeds spread on animals or in manure
- 60% the feed value of grass
- Tough stalks can puncture silage wrap on round bales leading to spoilage

This edition’s FAQ:

What can I add to Alister for cleavers in winter wheat?

Adding in 0.5l/ha Spitfire will control cleavers. This delivers:

- Complete control of cleavers
- Wider broad-leaved weed spectrum (vs. amidosulfuron)
- Superior control (activity in cold)
What is the best way to control dandelions?

Dandelions are susceptible to fluroxypyr in DoxstarPro and PastorPro. On silage ground: if docks and dandelions are the main problems use DoxstarPro; if there is a wider spectrum of weeds in the sward use PastorPro. In grazing situations use Forefront T, which is highly effective against dandelions.

What is the best product for getting rid of chickweed in gappy leys?

DoxstarPro and Forefront T are very good at getting rid of chickweed in established silage and grazing leys respectively – but they must be at least one year old.

There are no Dow AgroSciences grassland herbicides approved for use on new-sown leys at the moment – but there is one coming soon!

Currently in the approval process with PRCD the new product should be available for farmers to use in spring 2016.

More information can be found at www.dowagro.com/ie/