

# Seasonal priorities

## Managing pasture in wet conditions

Grow & Utilise

Pugging and treading damage can reduce pasture yield by ≥ 35%. Severe pugging by cattle can kill pastures (see photo below). Where pastures are badly damaged, repairing them is a race against time. New seed needs to be sown before weeds take over.



*Severe pugging can kill a pasture. Here damage was caused by dairy cows behind a break fence (left) during heavy overnight rainfall. (Photo taken 4 months later.)*

## How to minimise pugging damage

Several strategies are available:

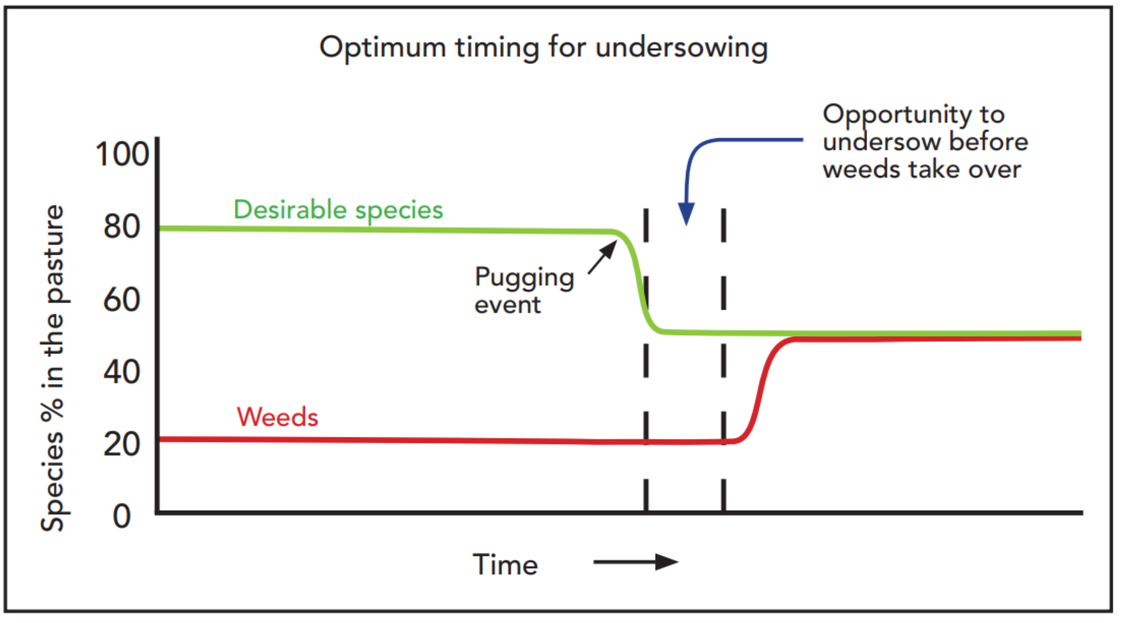
- Draw up a wet weather management plan and make sure everyone shifting animals on your farm understands the plan.
- Graze paddocks vulnerable to wet conditions (including new grass) early, i.e. autumn, in case the weather turns wet later on.
- On:off graze - remove stock from pasture after 2-4 hours grazing onto a stand off pad or sacrifice paddock (e.g. one going into crop). Sacrificing one paddock is better than damaging many.

- Spread stock out at low stocking rates.
- Don't worry about post-grazing residuals when it's wet. Concentrate on protecting your soils. Focus back on residuals when conditions are dry again.
- Create laneways within paddocks which are being break-fed, to limit treading damage to smaller areas.
- Avoid grazing tetraploid pastures during heavy rain. Diploid pastures are denser and more likely to persist through a pugging event.
- Keep machinery off wet paddocks - feed out a couple of days in advance.

## Restoring pugged pastures

Even with a good plan, the need to feed animals in wet weather means pasture can be damaged.

- Restoring pastures after bad pugging damage is a race against time. If you don't get productive species back into the bare ground, fast growing weeds will quickly fill the gaps.
- If used at the right time (see graph below), undersowing is a useful tool for repairing damage.




- In early spring, sow as soon as soil temperatures are above 6°C for annual or Italian ryegrass, or 8°C for perennial ryegrass. Sow seed at 10–15 kg/ha for thin pasture and 15-20 kg/ha for severe damage.
- For larger areas, mark damaged area(s) on a farm map, and give the map to the contractor to undersow (provided damaged areas are level enough, otherwise surface cultivate first)

- Consider undersowing with *Tabu+* Italian ryegrass. This will give quick growth and is ideal where the plan is to fully renovate the paddock within the next 6-12 months. *Shogun NEA12* hybrid ryegrass will provide 2-3 years' production; *Forge NEA* will give 3-5 years. Where there are no plans to renew the pasture, undersow with perennial ryegrass.
- Where pugging is severe, consider full renovation, either through a summer crop or in irrigated areas via grass to grass in spring.
- For smaller bare gaps, e.g. gateways, grass seed can be oversown or broadcast. A higher sowing rate will be required, e.g. 30 kg/ha, because establishment is poorer than drilling.