

# Winter Management – Bale Grazing and Deferred Grass



November 2024



# Bale Grazing Field Lab

Funded by Innovative Farmers.

The first attempt at quantifying the soil health and pasture productivity implications of bale grazing in the UK and is bringing together seven farms across England and Scotland in a five-year project to measure a range of soil health indicators and pasture quality metrics.

AHDB have provided additional support to this project, funding a Cost Benefit Analysis of each farm, including their own Northumberland Monitor Farm, to help quantify the impacts of this outwintering approach.



# The Farms

Grampian Graziers – Aberdeenshire (60 cattle)

Whitriggs Farm - Scottish Borders (140 cattle, 330 deer)

Alnham Farm – Northumberland (230 cattle)

Gowbarrow Hall – Cumbria (65 cattle)

Treflach Farm – Shropshire (51 cattle)

Barton Hall – Worcestershire (33 cattle)

FAI Farms – Oxfordshire (300 cattle)



# Cost Benefit Analysis

## System Benefits

Good-quality hay plus deferred grass provides sufficient nutritional needs for a dry cow, so there are savings in making hay for cows rather than silage; even more so if buying in straw to balance a silage diet

With housing, straw is a major cost. At the time of writing (summer 2024), straw prices are predicted to rise, possibly by around 50%

Depending on the efficiency (layout, type) of the housing system, fuel and labour costs are at least half. Much of the fuel reduction cost comes from a shift from tractors to UTVs when on the bale grazing

Setting out bales as soon as they are made reduces handling and storage costs.

## Cost Considerations

The potential income forgone is important to factor in – for all the farms, pasture wasn't available for grazing once shut off in the summer.

The recovery period the following spring also meant machinery, but one farm only had a single graze of the bale-grazing field during the growing period, just ahead of shut-off

For farms that are reducing purchased straw, the change in nutrient (P & K) import value should be accounted for

Fixed costs in machinery and buildings are difficult to drop. Only one participant disposed of some machinery, and one had repurposed existing sheds for a diversified enterprise.

# Cost Benefit Analysis

All of the participants reported non-financial benefits, both wellbeing (work/life balance or enjoyment) or biodiversity improvements.

The cost-benefit analysis showed a net financial benefit to the farm when bale grazing of £1.58 per head per day – approximately half of the housing cost.

This financial benefit is helping to maintain the viability of the herd within the wider farm system.

# Our experience

Outwintering all cattle – mostly on **deferred grazing**.

Use bale grazing as a late winter buffer, a bad weather option, bracken management and for seed distribution.

**3 groups:** 20 head, 50 head, 3 bulls

Water is a key consideration – we use continuous flow troughs and have emergency 1000l troughs as a back up.

We mix rolling out and feeding on end – depending on what we want to achieve.



















