



In this issue, Neal looks at the benefits of flowering plants in your grassland fields, while Aoife focuses on the value of leaving a field margin when mowing for silage or hay.

The Benefits of Flowering Plants in your Fields

by Neal Jeuken

Positive indicator plants and some of the things they can tell us:

When your grassland fields are being scored in summer to assess their nature value, one of the main things your farm advisor is looking out for is the presence of 'positive' indicator plants. These are essentially a broad list of different native wildflowers, with some, such as Selfheal being more commonly present, while others, such as Orchids, being rarer.

The presence of these plants in the sward can help to identify those fields that received low levels of agricultural inputs, and as such, are fields that can hold a lot of value for biodiversity.

"If you have fields on your farm with many positive indicators, you are providing an increasingly rare habitat and refuge for nature."

Aside from this floral diversity, the different plants also provide vital pollen and nectar food sources for many native bees, butterflies,



SHRILL CARDER BEE ON KNAPWEED IN THE BURREN
Source: Sharon Parr

moths and other insects, and thus shows the biodiversity web your fields can help spin in the landscape.

"For example, the Burren region is a very important stronghold for the nationally endangered Shril Carder Bee."

This bee forages very keenly on positive indicator plants such as Knapweed, Devil's-Bit Scabious and Bird's-foot trefoil, so where farmers manage fields with such flowering plants, they're also helping to support the survival of one of our rarest Bumblebees.

Farmers deserve to be recognised and rewarded for the delivery of such environmental services, which the use of scorecards and the results-based approach aims to do.



MARSH FRITILLARY
Source: Cormac Kelly

Why leave a field margin when mowing for silage or hay?

by Aoife Forde

Leaving a field margin, or headland, around the edge of the field that is being mown for hay or silage will increase your field score.

“Whether your field is being scored as an ACRES Co-operation field, or ACRES General LIG field, a field margin of greater than 1 metre will bring the score up and increase your overall results-based payment.”

How can I increase my field score on silage fields?

Question 4B on the grassland scorecard looks at structure after a field has been recently mown.

A4(b) What is the vegetation structure in grasslands which are CUT FOR HAY or SILAGE?

Poor structure: No field margins present. Field topped right up to the field boundary line. No grazing of after-grass. Little or no variation in sward height.	-10
Moderate structure: Narrow field margins present (~1m). Low number of flowering plants and vegetation structure within the field margin poor to moderate. Some grazing of after-grass providing some structural variation.	15
Good structure: Wide field margins present (2m+) and/or good headlands. Grazing of after-grass takes place providing variations in height of sward; sward does not look uniform in appearance.	25

QUESTION A4(b) ON GRASSLAND SCORECARD

Source: Acres Scorecard

From the scorecard you can see that if there is no field margin left, and the field is mown right up to the boundary, you receive minus 10 marks because there are no indicator species or flowering grasses present.

If a very narrow field margin of up to 1m is left, you can receive 15 marks which again has a positive impact on payment.

“However, if you want to achieve top marks leave a field margin or headland of 2m (7ft) around a field.”

This will get you 25 marks and will increase your score by 3, and therefore, will have a positive impact on your ACRES payment.



FIELD MARGIN

Source: Donal Hogan

What are the benefits of field margins?

A field margin gives flowers and grasses space to flower and set seed, which positively impacts biodiversity. Therefore, it's important not to graze the field margin with stock after cutting. Leave the margin undisturbed and then cut it, or graze it, on the next rotation. By their nature, silage fields are often quite species-poor and may score low, as the priority of the field is for production.

“Margins can be very important refuges for plants and pollinators. If possible avoid fertilising these field margins.”

It is important to point out that ACRES is a results-based scheme and therefore there is no obligation, or requirement, to leave a field margin. Results based schemes give farmers the flexibility to farm how they want to. The payment rate you receive is based on how you choose to manage your fields.

However, if you do want to increase a field score, and put more money in your pocket, leaving a field margin of either 1m, or greater than 2m, when mowing for silage, or hay, can really make all the difference both to your payment and the environment.

News: It's been a busy few months for the CP team. We carried out Advisor Scorecard Training in the lovely Tubber Hall, where 44 Advisors attended Refresher Training. A further 5 new Advisors, attended our New Advisor Training. Our Farmer Clinics in Gort Mart continue to be attended by local farmers eager to find out more about ACRES. The team will be taking a break, in July, from the Farmer Clinic, but look forward to getting back to Gort Mart on the last Thursday in August. Information Evenings for T2 farmers were held on the three Aran Islands, in the first week of July. And in between all the above events, our team are out and about, monitoring fields, across the whole Burren Aran CP area.

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