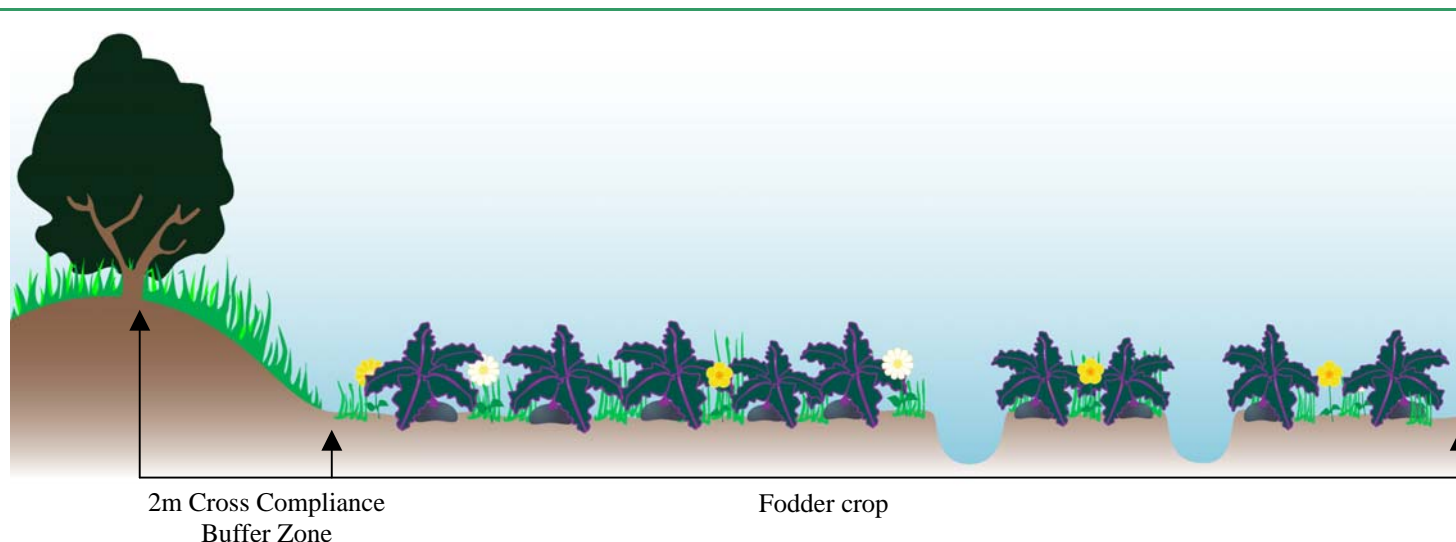




HG06 Fodder crop management to retain or re-create an arable mosaic (£150/ha)



Value to plants & other wildlife

- Fodder crops (brassica or root) grazed in situ can provide valuable cultivated conditions with restricted herbicide application in which arable plants can germinate, set seed and flourish.
- The crop is established in late spring/early summer and then grazed over the autumn and winter, maintaining stubble until the following spring. Arable plants should not be at risk from grazing animals as they will have already set seed before grazing starts and stock will have been taken off the ground in time for spring germination.
- The application of this option is to help retain the mixed cropping patterns and mosaics of arable and grassland landscapes. These conditions provide an important habitat for seed eating birds (e.g. Tree Sparrows and Yellowhammers).
- Its application is particularly important in areas that were traditionally mixed farming and arable cultivation is reduced.

Details of ELS/HLS options (as stated in RDS handbooks)

- Establish a whole field of fodder brassica / fodder root crop before 1 July
- Do not apply any insecticides other than as a seed treatment
- An agreed pesticide programme should be followed under guidance provided by your RDS advisor
- Autumn and winter grazing can commence after 15 October and a stubble should be retained until 15 February

Location of option on the farm

- If rare arable plants have already been identified on the farm then the fodder crop should be located accordingly. Providing the most benefit to the species identified as often as possible in the rotation.
- If rare arable plants have not been identified but a good variation of broadleaved plants occurs this is a good indication rarer species could appear if given the right conditions, and the crop should be located in these areas.
- Characteristic indicator species of a potentially rich arable flora: on sandy soils - Thyme-leaved Sandwort, Corn Spurrey, Purple Viper's-bugloss, Common Stork's-bill and Loose Silky-bent; on chalky soils - Venus's-looking-glass, Small Toadflax, Fluellen's and Dwarf Spurge.
- Locations with scarce species present, such as Prickly Poppy, Dense Silky-bent, Pheasant's-eye or Shepherd's Needle will be especially suitable for fodder crop management.
- Other considerations (where there isn't already identified arable flora):
 - Sunny south facing aspect
 - Light, well drained, low fertility sandy or chalky soil
 - No significant weed burden (particularly problem species that are pernicious and difficult to control without herbicides e.g. Cleavers, Creeping thistles, Black-grass and Barren brome) or herbicide resistance problems.
 - Sites that have had a long history of cultivation (over 100 years) will be more likely to have the rarer arable species still residing in the seed bank.
 - Try not to locate options on: land that has received overly heavy applications of herbicides or fertilisers (including manure); fields that have been heavily cropped with legumes or sugar beet; or directly after a break crop, as soil fertility will be higher.
 - Fodder crops should ideally be sited adjacent to desirable habitats, including scrub, woodland, intensive and extensive grassland, hedge boundaries and ditch banks. These will be valuable habitats for insects, birds and mammals that can benefit from the weedy fodder crop as a food source.
 - Choose sites with minimum soil erosion risk. Therefore not on steep slopes or in fields immediately adjacent to watercourses. This option may be rotated around the farm to maintain good crop husbandry and avoid soil related problems.

Working with farming systems

- This option is suitable for use in landscapes mainly dominated by grassland that once had a greater area of cultivated land.
- Fodder crops should only be considered where it is relatively easy to incorporate the management requirement of the option into the farming system. This includes the need for arable cultivation machinery, temporary fencing and a good knowledge of crop production.
- Stock will need to be available to graze the fodder crop, and therefore stocking rates and grazing periods will need to be controlled to avoid severe poaching, minimising erosion risk.

Possible problems and how to resolve them

- There are few perceived problems with the management of this option. A severe grass or perennial weed burden can be controlled with a restricted herbicide programme.

Value of arable plants to the farmer,
and what to do with them

- A species rich arable flora needs to be welcomed in a sustainable farming system, it provides the foundations of a bio-diverse farming environment rich in plants, insects, birds and mammals.
- The identification of UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species will help you get into Higher Level Stewardship as this satisfies a primary target on most [JCA Target Statements](#).
- Arable plants provide a food source for insects, birds and mammals, they also have strong historic and cultural importance, with species like Cornflower and Corn Marigold being perennial favourites.
- Plantlife are keen to record all sites where rare species of arable plants are identified. There is a real need for good baseline information on the distribution and occurrence of less common species coupled with monitoring to determine the effectiveness of all attempts to conserve them.
- Plantlife are running an arable plants survey to identify important sites with either single very rare species or good assemblages of more common plants. If you think you have rare arable flora on you farm do contact us as we should be able to arrange a survey: kate.still@plantlife.org.uk Tel: 01722 342741

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