



Happy as a pig in... grass

Farm facts

Location: Norfolk – sandy land

Farm size: 5,500 outdoor sows, with 2,000 sows and gilts on the new grass variety

Background

An outdoor pig producer in Norfolk has been successfully using a new variety of grass, Rhizomatous Tall Fescue (RTF), which is a unique Tall Fescue that produces rhizomes, renowned for its resistance to heat, drought and wear but not widely grown in the UK. This unique characteristic among Tall Fescue enables RTF to offer superior traction strength, stability and recovery in comparison with other Tall Fescues available. This variety has been used in dry sow and farrowing paddocks in preference to the usual perennial ryegrass mix, where seed cost is comparable. Excellent results in terms of durability and consistent grass coverage have been observed.

The system

- The grass seed was sown in December 2010 and the pigs were moved into the paddocks in May 2011
- Despite 12 months of wear and tear, drought conditions and a harsh winter, the grass is still in excellent condition
- The only area of significant wear in the paddock is at the edge where the pigs are fed. It is considered that trough feeding would reduce this localised wear.

Benefits

The Tall Fescue variety of grass is:

- A hard wearing amenity variety usually used on football pitches in countries with a hot and dry climate
- Resistant to drought and waterlogging
- Unpalatable to pigs
- Deep-rooted, making it harder to root up by pigs but also improves soil organic matter and nitrogen fixing
- Reduces the impact of nutrient run-off and soil erosion
- Improves visual impact of the farm to the public.

Further reading

For more information on soil management for outdoor pig producers see the BPEX Soil Management Plan which can be downloaded from:

<http://www.bpex.org/environment-hub/soil-water/SoilManagementPlan.aspx>

For more information on soil management visit www.bpexenv.org.uk and click Soil and Water.

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I have been very impressed with the maintained grass cover compared to conventional grass cover over the last 12 months and I am keen to convert my whole outdoor pig area to Tall Fescue grasses.

Farmer

Key to success

- Ideally, this variety should be undersown eight months before the pigs go onto the land to allow the grass to establish
- The grass seed can be undersown with winter wheat, standard wheat and spring barley
- Well-established grass also reduces the risk of nutrient run-off and soil erosion.



Farrowing paddocks sown with Tall Fescue grass 12 months previously