

# Grass & UK Farming

Growing grass is a great way to boost soil organic matter and improve soil health. This is described in our [one page briefing](#) on the subject, which also sets out our concerns about proposals which will limit the use of grass as a feedstock for producing biogas.

## **Growing grass also has a number of wider benefits for UK farmers:**

**Flexibility** - grass can be used both as animal feed and as an Anaerobic Digestion (biogas) feedstock. The high-yielding first cuts are often used for AD, and later cuts for silage for animal feed. The crop can also be grazed in the autumn, which helps to improve the quality, giving higher yields of grass the following spring.

**Improving soil structure** - grass is mown and harvested in the dryer months (May to September) as opposed to say maize (October onwards). This minimises damage to the soil structure and reduces soil erosion and run off of nutrients during the winter months.

**A low input, closed-loop system** – digestate (the residue from the AD process) is a soil conditioner. It can be spread back to land after the grass is harvested, reducing almost entirely the need for additional fertiliser. Applied “little and often” digestate acts as a soil conditioner and minimises nutrient leaching.

**Blackgrass control** – blackgrass this is becoming a serious problem for cereal and oilseed production in the UK. A bad blackgrass infestation can reduce wheat yields by up to 60%. To stop the spread of blackgrass seed, over 9,000 hectares of wheat was destroyed during 2015 and was never harvested. Blackgrass is now found in over 58% of the wheat producing area of the UK, with herbicide-resistant blackgrass being found in 34 counties in England. Silage grass out-competes blackgrass, and as it is harvested 2-4 times per year, the blackgrass does not get the opportunity to set seed.

**The ability to do direct drilling** - new seed can be drilled directly into grass leys, avoiding the need to plough. This reduces carbon emissions, as well as being better for soil structure.

**Nitrogen-boosting** - grass helps to mineralise nitrogen from the soil for take-up by the following crops. Crops following grass may only require a 30 – 50% of amount of fertilizer compared to crops following a different crop.

