



BAR TECH

**September
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Aftermaize and Autumn Catch Crop Options

Grass can be a very useful crop to follow maize or cereals later in the year, providing soil stability and mopping up nutrients, as well as an overwintering feed source for any class of sheep or an early silage crop in the following spring.



As Maize harvest progresses in the UK, thoughts turn to post maize and post cereal field management. Maize harvests, particularly in the north or in times of very inclement weather, can be very late in the year leaving little opportunity to establish another crop.

As was widespread in 2019, a major problem with a late harvest seasons are that bare fields are at a much higher risk of soil erosion and nutrient leaching, with rainwater run-off taking topsoil and nutrients away with it which can often end up in drains and watercourses. As land managers, it is best practise to mitigate and reduce the risk of this wherever possible. It is our belief that the requirement within agriculture to reduce environmental pollution and soil degradation will only get more prevalent and carbon capture, or mitigating carbon losses, will also become a criterion.

Grass can be a very useful crop to follow maize or cereals later in the year because of its flexibility. Grass swards can simply provide a catch crop for soil stability and mopping up nutrients, an overwintering feed source for any class of sheep or an early silage crop in the following spring.

Dependant on the region of the UK, some environmental schemes exist where payments are available to growers establishing post maize or cereal crops and managing them as set out with the guidance on the individual scheme. Contact your local agricultural advisor for schemes relevant to your enterprise and location.



What could I establish?

Italian Ryegrasses are an excellent option for late sowing as they germinate down to 4°C soil temperature, lower than perennial grass species and legumes, meaning you have an increased chance of success of a good establishment later in the season. They will establish quickly under good soil and environmental conditions.

Short term grass is flexible enough to simply plough in after a few months, graze or cut for silage or zero grazing. Italian ryegrasses will give up to 20% more yield than perennial ryegrasses. After ploughing in, Italian ryegrass will steadily release the nitrates it has mopped up from the soil, back to the subsequent crop.

Barenbrug's **High D Italian** is a mixture of Italian rye grass diploid and tetraploid species, which includes the high ranking Barmultra II variety listed on the RGCL 2020/2021, so you can be assured of the reliability. Having a blend of diploids and tetraploids improves the ground cover and tillering capacity of the sward over a straight tetraploid, which improves its performance in all scenarios after a late sowing. High D Italian is supplied in 14kg packs and can produce 20% more grass than perennial ryegrass.

Aftermaize is an option for those looking for 1 – 2 years' worth of productivity. The mixture contains 50% Italian ryegrass as well as hybrid ryegrass and a small percentage of perennial ryegrass. Ideally, this mixture should be established before soils are below 7°C to allow best establishment of the perennial ryegrasses. Aftermaize will provide a short-term grass break crop of up to 2 years for silage production with the option to graze in the autumn and winter.

How much should I sow?

The intended use of the sward will influence the sowing rate of whatever grass option you choose. If going for a catch crop to hold soil and capture nutrients or even graze a limited amount of store lambs in autumn, then sowing around 10kg/acre (25kg/ha) would suffice. If there are a lot of sheep to feed throughout the whole winter, or the aim is to achieve an early silage cut in spring 2021, then sowing at 12.5kg/acre (32kg/ha) is advisable. In the instance of wishing to retain the crop for a full two seasons, the sowing rate could be increased again for optimal persistence.