



Reducing Poaching Around Livestock Feeding Points

Alwinton, Coquet Valley, Northumberland

Cheviot Futures is trialling an innovative solution to the age-old problem of ground poaching by livestock around ring feeders.

Wetter winters are likely to mean that poaching becomes more of an issue, along with the potential for more cattle to be wintered outdoors to save on management costs.

We are trialling the use of 'GrassProtecta' - a plastic matting product, incorporating an element of recycled plastics, as an option to reduce the effect of poaching around feeding sites.

Working in partnership with local farmers and Catchment Sensitive Farming, we hope to prove that such materials work, along with a consideration of sustainable feeding practices. Guidance notes will be developed in due course to guide land managers as to the least environmentally damaging sites to feed, and how to manage feeding areas to reduce the diffuse pollution risk to watercourses etc.

The trial will compare the use of the product in a number of

scenarios, across three farm holdings:

- haughland site, used by continental cattle
- haughland site used by sheep
- hill site used by traditional-type cattle
- mobile trial (material moved alongside a feeder in line with cross compliance requirements)
- in bye site, used by continental bulls

Most of the trial plots have now been put in place, with vegetation being allowed to establish ahead of the first feeding season in winter 2011-12.

We will be closely monitoring the trial, and will share the results in the coming months.

Case Study

Livestock farming is a very significant sector within agriculture in the Cheviot Futures project area. Soil poaching, the damage caused to grass sward by the feet of livestock, can be an issue when cattle and/or sheep are wintered on grasslands, which can lead to risks of soil erosion and loss, as well as soil compaction, all of which will lower soil productivity and can cause some welfare issues as well as runoff and pollution problems. Heavier clay soils are more prone to poaching.

Good farming practices, such as appropriate stocking levels in winter and location of supplementary feeding sites, will minimise poaching and compaction. Cheviot Futures actively promote this, however, it is recognised that there are some situations where management techniques do not always reduce poaching as much as possible and in such instances this trial may be of interest.

A single poaching incident can reduce pasture growth over the next few months by 20 to 40%, which will impact upon productivity, for

instance silage/hay production, which could increase the need for supplementary feeding. It will also make this area of the farm more susceptible to future poaching, which will often be much worse. Making effort to minimise poaching as much as possible on farm will have a dramatic impact upon cost savings and productivity.



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In the future wetter winters are likely to mean that poaching becomes more of an issue, coupled with the potential increase in outwintered stock in order to save on increasing management costs, could mean that poaching becomes more of an issue in coming years.

The Trial. Cheviot Futures are working in conjunction with local farmers and Catchment Sensitive Farming, to reduce the effects of poaching around livestock feeders during winter. It is hoped that this trial will provide proof of concept to encourage wider use of such materials in this manner. Other similar products are available and Cheviot Futures does not endorse the suitability of one particular product over others – this trial is intended to test the suitability of the concept, rather than one product specifically.

Guidance notes will also be developed alongside this trial to guide land managers as to the least environmentally damaging sites to feed and how to manage feeding areas to reduce the diffuse pollution risk to watercourses etc. This is an important element of the project, which will ensure that the partner organisations offer a full package of advice to interested parties.

The GrassProtecta product is a slip resistant grass reinforcement heavy duty mesh. It has been developed with an oscillated mesh structure which is designed to increase traction and improve slip resistance by up to 97% compared to standard straight oriented meshes. It allows the grass sward to intertwine with the plastic mesh filaments creating a strong, discreetly reinforced grass surface. This slip resistance information was a key element in the choice of this particular product as a basis for this trial.

The trial will look at the effects of the product on semi-permanent and mobile sites and the impact on livestock poaching and compaction, whilst also making a comparison between haughland and hill ground and the differences between cattle and sheep poaching.

The trial plots have now been put in place, with vegetation being allowed to establish ahead of the first feeding season in winter 2011/12.

Costs of GrassProtecta. The product being used in the trial is heavy grade GrassProtecta product, supplied in 2x20m rolls (40 m²). The retail cost of this product is £353.25 per roll, however,

purchasing 10 rolls would attract a 12% discount – therefore comparative cost would be £3,108.60.

Indicative cost per m² - Full retail price = £8.83 per m²

Discounted retail price for 10 rolls = £7.77 per m²

Other similar products are available, and prices may vary between product brands and suppliers. As noted, the intention of this work is to provide proof of concept relating to the suitability of ground reinforcement solutions in a supplementary feeding situation.

What next? The sites will be monitored regularly over the winter/feeding months with a portfolio of photographic and other evidence being collected. The results will be collated and distributed in the coming months, please keep checking the Cheviot Futures website for further details on this trial.

Type	Location	Size	Detail
Semi-permanent trial plots.	Dunns Green Alwinton Farm NT9235, 0620	6x6m (36m ²)	To trial effectiveness of product with sheep on haughland
	Trial Field Alwinton Farm NT9144, 0630 NT9142, 0635	2 plots 6x6m (36m ²)	To trial effectiveness of product with sheep on haughland
	Low Alwinton Park House Farm NT 9242, 0565	10x8m (80m ²)	To trial effectiveness of product with cattle (continental types) on haughland
	Biddlestone NT 9607, 0837	10x8m (80m ²)	To trial effectiveness of product with cattle (continental bulls) on in-bye ground managed for hay/silage
Mobile trial plot	Low Alwinton Park House Farm NT 9242, 0565	As required	To trial effectiveness of product in a short-term temporary situation, where the material is put down with the feeder & moved as required, without encouraging vegetation growth