

Influencing positive change through collaboration

Keri Davies is an organic beef and sheep farmer from the Crai Valley and is on a mission to support and improve local water and nutrient management through better farming.

The farm sits over 1,000m above sea level at the highest point in Crai, south Wales, and fields lead to both the River Usk and the River Crai. By working with local authorities, farming institutions and advisors, Keri has shared knowledge and best practice, while undertaking on-farm research to influence decision-making from his 300-acre sheep and beef farm.

With the help of Farming Connect, Keri has met similar forward-thinking farmers and benefitted from improved knowledge exchange and adopting best practice, where possible. Alongside his son Ruben, they keep green covers on all fields to help capture water throughout the year, use weather stations to influence field applications, and this year Keri has applied organic fertiliser to his crops for the first time, something he didn't think was possible.

Local fertiliser knowledge

As an organic farm, Keri hasn't used fertiliser for over 15 years, with nutrition derived from organic sources, and lime to improve soil pH. However, following a conversation with Juliet Anderson at Farming Connect, Keri contacted merchant Hay & Brecon regarding an organic fertiliser that could improve crop establishment and performance.

"I didn't think that I could use fertiliser in an organic system, but following conversations with Hay & Brecon, I met Guillaume Franklin at Origin Fertilisers. Guillaume and I spoke at length about my system and what I was trying to achieve. He knew the area and was able to match nutrition to my system."

Guillaume advised Keri that Origin's Gafsa Biophos and Polysulphate products are both suitable for use in organic systems and could significantly boost yields in his multispecies grassland and barley undersown with pea crops. After a detailed soil analysis, Guillaume created a prescription fertiliser plan that would address some of the deficiencies, help Keri produce more grass, and maintain winter cover.

Guillaume explains how Gafsa helped: "Gafsa is a soft rock phosphate that is naturally mined and contains additional nutrients, including calcium and sulphur, so it isn't just supplying the crop with a phosphate source. Unlike other phosphates it also offers immediate and sustained release and reduces the likelihood of lock up."

Results

Keri took Guillaume's advice and applied Gafsa along with Polysulphate to his crops this spring. He explains the results. "We carried out some grassland reseeding this spring and have seen much bigger grazing areas, with clover as tall as I've ever seen it on the farm since we applied Gafsa. The sheep and cattle love it, and our silage stocks are now at a level where we can increase our stocking numbers. The advantage of Gafsa was clear early on. We were at three leaf stage in 21 days, and as this above ground growth is mirrored by the roots, we were growing strong crops that were able to withstand grazing and weather."

A further benefit was the addition of Polysulphate, which offers an immediate and sustained source of sulphur for up to 55 days. This increased the nitrogen use efficiency of the barley and pea crops, as Keri explains: "We grow barley for crimping and the peas act as an organic nitrogen source for the barley to use immediately. The addition of the sulphur

Wales Farmer – local support

improved the nitrogen use efficiency and meant the barley could convert the nitrogen and use it efficiently.”

Keri’s ambition to keep more phosphates in the soil and prevent leaching is being helped by growing denser swards that don’t leave the soil exposed. The local support and knowledge gained from working with Guillaume, who understands what the farm is trying to achieve, means further trials are planned next season.