

Mowers and Soay sheep

Extracts from Nibblers online discussion group

Hi,

I am currently trying to assess our maritime grassland management and was hoping people could give me some advice on a couple of areas:

1. We presently mow an area and then graze it with sheep and we are trying to find a new mower that is suitable to tow behind a tractor, which is capable of going over the many rabbit made holes. If anyone has any suggestions, I would be very grateful!

2. We currently have a group of soay sheep that are dying out and we are hoping to replenish stocks as I feel their benefits will be a lot more noticeable when they have gone! Does anyone have any experience of using soays? One of our major difficulties is of maintaining a stable number as being on an island, it is not easy to move stock around!

Thanks

Julie Furber

Julie,

There is a huge range of mowers available for any size of tractor. May be worth having mower to go on 3 point linkage so height of mower can be altered from tractor seat so that mower 'floats' over ground rather than being dragged over. Flail type mowers can deal with bramble woody vegetation as well as grass.

Also try to get demo's of various machines before deciding. Most company's are willing to demo especially if you have money available.

Hope that helps. Possible makes include Kubota, reco,votex.

Tim Green
Countryside Ranger
Herefordshire Council

If you get a topper mounted on a tractor that has skids and not wheels that should cope with rabbit holes.

We used a soay ram on ewe lambs. Good meat but small joints. If you did not catch the lambs within ten minutes of their arrival you could not catch them at all .

Feeding copper to sheep is or was illegal as they were meant to be susceptible to copper poisoning but we were told soays are very copper tolerant due to living on a diet of seaweed.

RM

A grazier here had a flail type with a horizontal shaft and that seemed to be a pain. the ones with a vertical shaft and large horizontal rotating flails seem better. I guess you need a "topper" not a mower.

I think you need skids not wheels as the tractor may still disappear into holes dropping the flail onto the ground, but they all need plenty of power it seems.

If they will not ship one out to you, use here for a demo of the types you like.

Richard Micklethwait

Author wrote:

- > May be worth having mower to go on 3 point linkage so height of mower
- > can be altered from tractor seat so that mower 'floats'
- > over ground rather than being dragged over.

Hi -

In my experience, a linkage-mounted mower follows the tractor, so it tends to lift high off the ground when the front wheels drop into a hole, then it hits when the rear wheels get there. You get a tuft of tall vegetation just before every dip, immediately followed by bare ground.

I've used a good trailed topper which has four wheels at the corners, and tows from a hitch rather than mounting on the linkage. It runs up and down each bump or hollow independently from the tractor, and although it still hits sometimes I've found it much more even. Can't tell you what kind it is, as the maker's name has long since disappeared...

That one is powered from the tractor's PTO, but I believe similar ones carry an independent engine so they can be towed behind an ATV or even a horse.

For small, soft or awkward areas we use a big two-wheeled pedestrian-controlled mower, similar to a big rotovator. Only a 3' cut, but four gears (plus reverse!) and fat tyres so it'll do very soggy ground indeed. The cutter skids along and follows the ground very well, and you can lift it up for big bumps or obstructions. You can get similar things with various types of cutter -- ours has a vertical-axis rotary blade, but you can have a finger-bar mower or presumably a horizontal-axis flail.

We also have a very ancient Allen scythe -- a pedestrian finger-bar mower. It would give a health and safety officer a heart attack just to look at it -- no dead-man's handle, and the clutch stays in if you let go and locks solid if you hit anything. If you trip it drives itself in a circle and gets you from behind...

Richard C

Set the 3pt-I to 'float' and so long as the implement has some weight it should follow the ground and not the tractor. Old fergies from the 1950s did this really well largely because the seal in the hydraulic return was knackered and didn't stop the implement dropping! We had a Ransom swipe which had really broad runners (ca 4" from memory) so ran over the ground rather than dig in when it came to small scale undulations, including holes, and because its blades were hinged had no difficulty with bunny spoil. The knives can be removed relatively easily to sharpen on a grinder.

Size and type will be a function of tractor power, scale (how tight a gap you need to get into - note that you can manoeuvre a 3 pt-I implement wherever your driving skills will let you), terrain, sward finish - swipes are do not create bowling greens!) and of course budget!

Nigel Symes

Richard Small has asked me to post this response on the sheep and copper question

I believe there may be some confusion in the last contribution. Although Soay (and other breeds of sheep) may eat seaweed when available it is the North Ronaldsay that has adapted to a diet composed largely of seaweed on their native island. Seaweeds tend to have low copper content so N. Ronaldsays have developed the ability to absorb copper very

efficiently - so much so that island bred Ronnies on 'normal' grasslands may extract too much copper and can die from copper poisoning. Soays are likely to have greater copper tolerance than N. Ronaldsays, but not necessarily more than other breeds, and certainly not as a result of a seaweed diet.

Bill
