

# Spreading forage-harvested grass from a hay meadow

This technique can be used where species-rich hay meadows (“seed donor sites”) are only a short distance away (<2 miles) from the site that is to be restored (the “receptor site”).

The receptor site must be suitably prepared. All the operations described below will usually be carried out the same day. The mown grass can be left for one day to wilt *in situ* if the weather is dry and if it suits the contractor.

Mow the hay in mid-July (southern-central England) or late July-early August (upland Britain), when the main grasses, such as Crested Dog’s-tail and Meadow Foxtail hold ripe seed, and the Hay Rattle seed is still on the plants.

- Use a mower without a conditioner to mow the grass
- Line the mown grass into swathes
- Collect the grass using a double-chop forage harvester
- Blow the forage into silage trailers and cart it to the receptor site
- Empty the forage into a heap, and load it into a rear-discharge muck-spreader with vertical beaters



- Do not leave the forage in heaps for more than one hour without turning as it will start to heat up and the seed will deteriorate
- Using the muck-spreader, with an experienced operator, spread the forage across the receptor site, covering 2-3 hectares with the material collected from 1 hectare.
- Late-flowering species will need to be collected by hand and sown separately at a later date.

## Machinery & labour

The operation uses a foraging team, e.g.:

**Mowing:** Tractor with cutters

**Raking:** Tractor with liner

**Forage harvesting:** forage harvester

**Carting:** Tractor and silage trailer x 3

**Loading:** Loader

**Spreading:** Tractor and 1 or 2 muckspreaders.

**Work rate:** Over three days, using a 6-man team, forage from 35ha was spread on 70ha at Chimney Meadows in 2004.



Photo: Alistair Helliwell, Defra

The operation can be scaled down for small sites. For example, there are amenity versions of muck spreaders available that can be used with a compact tractor or quad.

This note was produced by Sue Everett, as a contribution to the *Flora locale* Local Seeds for Local Needs Initiative and the Thames Valley Meadows Action Plan Project. October 2004. Based on two projects undertaken in Oxfordshire in 2003 & 2004, carried out by Ron Varney (agricultural contractor) and sponsored by Defra and the local wildlife trust (Chimney Meadows, 2004).