

Seed merchant calls for lime application subsidy

FARMING

BY EWAN PATE

+ Scots seed merchant Johnny Watson has called for the support of a subsidy for lime application.

Speaking as host of a Watson Seeds conference in New Lanark, Mr Watson suggested a grant for the purpose should be made available through the Scot-

tish Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

"Farming is needing a real boost to get out of the present set of circumstances and this would give real support to improving Scotland's land. Finding money to buy 600 tonnes of lime is difficult," he said.

There was certainly a need for lime applications on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Mary McEvoy, technical development manager with seed company Germinal, told the conference of official Irish figures which showed 90% of fields in the country were below target for lime, phosphate and potash.

Mr Watson, who is based near Dunbar and operates throughout Scotland, said he had carried out free pH tests on 120 farms and

found 55% of fields with pH below 5.8 and 14% below 5.4.

"In fields as low as that the two tonnes an acre is not enough to lift levels to the pH 6 needed for clover to thrive," he said.

There was a huge incentive to re-seed permanent pastures, according to Ms McEvoy.

Figures from Teagasc - the Irish farm advisory ser-

vice - showed that the average dry matter (DM) production of Irish grassland was 9.1 tonnes per hectare (t/ha).

"In the UK I believe it is about 7.2t/ha DM. There is obviously huge potential in both countries for improvement. In the Cork area good producers are now producing 12 to 14t/ha and one farm in the more challenging centre of the coun-

try is now producing around 19t/ha. The conclusion is that it shouldn't be too hard to lift the average to 14t/ha across the country. Reseeding alone lifts yields by 3t/ha DM," she said.

The financial incentive was certainly there with calculations showing that each additional tonne of DM was worth £161 per hectare.