



# Trialing ryegrass varieties for winter productivity

Steve & Sharon Fagg, Mt Mercer

As members of the Mount Mercer Neighbourhood Group, in the eastern section of the Woody Yaloak Catchment, Steve and Sharon Fagg volunteered to trial three different cultivars of ryegrass.

The aim of the group's trial was to see which of the cultivars were more productive than the traditional varieties, and hence which could help lessen the need for supplementary feeding over the winter months.

## Preparing the trials

Steve chose his worst bent grass infested paddock on the property.

He planned to sow down three 10ha trial plots and compare growth and production rates of three cultivars - traditional 'Vic' and two newer winter active varieties - 'Roper' and 'Meridian'.



Steve checks the Roper plot.



The Mt Mercer trial from the air. The Roper plot (middle) stands out from the other two varieties, Meridian and Vic Rye.

"Before we sowed the pasture trials, we cropped the paddock with turnips over the first summer to break up the bent grass, and followed with oats over the next season."

Steve said he harvested the oats in summer 1997, after which he burnt the stubble.

"We left the paddock fallow over the summer before working the ground up lightly and sowing the three ten hectare plots down in late April early May 98" Steve said.

## The trial plots

Steve explained that the three plots were all treated exactly the same in respect to fertiliser rates (super - 184kg/ha) and lime (2.5t/ha).

"The baste pasture mix for all the plots was Condor cocksfoot (1.1kg/ha), Dementer fescue (3.3kg/ha), and Gosse and Sub clovers (both 3.3kg/ha)."

"The Meridian, Roper and Vic Rye were all planted at a rate of 4.5kg/ha."

## Grazing

In the first season, the autumn break never arrived, and the paddock was not grazed before late July into August.

"We cut nothing off the paddock in 98, but decided to fence it in half to help get a more even grazing."

In late summer 99, Steve ran 450 cross bred through until May and after spelling the trial site through into June, he ran 800 weaners until July.

"We were happy with the response to a good heavy graze. The weaners were rotated on and off until we locked the paddock up at the end of August."

"That year we cut the top half of the paddock and yielded 80 round bales."

Steve followed exactly the same practices in the following year, without the need to carry out any supplementary feeding.



The base mix contained Condor cocksfoot, Demeter fescue, Gosse Subclover and Trikkala

In the 2000 hay season, the whole paddock was again cut for hay, and yielded over 296 bales.

While Steve was happy that the productivity had been drastically increased since the bent grass was tackled, that was not the total answer.

Steve Fagg checking the progress of the trial prior to cutting the area for hay. The area yielded 290 round bales compared to 79 prior to the renovation program

"After a couple of seasons, the Roper appears to be the most productive, however we are really after a pasture mix that will persist - the answer to that lies in time," he said.

#### Measuring the differences

To get a better measure of the difference between the cultivars, the group is looking to place pasture cages in the different trial plots.

Steve said the aim of the cages was to stop animals grazing the area under the cage so it could be harvested.

"The pasture produced can be measured to estimate the dry matter production per plot," he said.

At this stage the group has not measured production from each plot.

"It is something that we plan to do so we can get a better measure on the actual differences between the cultivars rather than just an anecdotal measure," he said.

Sustainable grazing systems have been assisting in the project and will be helping in the collection and processing of the data.

#### Alcoa and the Woody Yaloak Catchment Project

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Project is an Alcoa Landcare sponsored Catchment Partnership.

Since 1993, the Alcoa Landcare Project has contributed to the development and implementation of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Plan.

The Mt Mercer Pastures Neighbourhood Group is part of a new initiative reviving involvement at a subcatchment level.

For more information on the Neighbourhood Group Initiative, contact Jen Clarke on (0407) 331 720

#### The Budget

**Lime**  
2.5t/ha @ \$12.50/t    \$31.25/ha

**Sprays**  
Roundup CT Xtra  
1l/ha @ \$8.50/l    \$8.50/ha

**Fertiliser**  
Superfect  
185kg/ha @\$180/t    \$33.30/ha

**Pasture Seed**  
Average    \$72.50/ha

**Total per hectare**    \$145.55/ha  
*Machinery time not included.*

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