

Implementing whole farm grazing strategies at Holbrook

John Keogh set out to implement a grazing strategy which would allow him to run a productive sheep enterprise at high stocking rates without losing his phalaris.

“My undulating country (350ha) is predominately sown to phalaris and sub clover. The remainder is crop (50ha), which is available to graze for part of the year, productive native pastures (30 ha) and native scrub (50 ha). The stocking rate varies from 10-15 DSE/ha during the year. There are 47 paddocks on the farm.

After nine years of below average rainfall, many of the phalaris pastures were dominated by annual grasses and broadleaf weeds.

Together with the Holbrook Landcare Grazing Group we recognised that rotational grazing should address the problem. But we were uncertain how to organise the grazing system to integrate management of different land classes and stock classes. Time management was also an issue.

So we participated in the EverGraze Whole Farm Grazing Strategies pilot training program with Kate Sargeant and Tim Ekberg. During the six sessions, we developed a whole farm grazing plan accounting for seasonal management objectives of pastures and livestock, mob sizes, where they would graze at different times of the year, risk management, calving/lambing strategies, water

and fencing requirements.

This autumn and winter, I will run two mobs - 1900 spring lambing ewes and 900 weaners. I hope to bring on more

cattle which will graze with the weaners on the highest quality feed. The ewes will move about every second day (consuming approx 500 kg/ha/day), and will be useful for increasing utilisation and improving pasture composition.

The paddocks in the rotation need to be ordered according to what we are trying to achieve. We need to be flexible and target the biggest problems at the right time.

This season is proving difficult to manage as we are still building our numbers and have a lot of dry standing feed. We need to eat this off to allow clover germination.

We are prioritizing paddocks on the south facing slopes which are low in clover. The weaners are grazing the shorter, higher quality feed. The ewes will crash graze the north-facing phalaris just prior to lambing in early August to prevent barley grass from seeding. I will set stock during lambing (15th August – 1st October) to reduce the chances of mis-mothering and lamb losses.

Ewes and lambs will be mobbed up

EverGraze Supporting Site

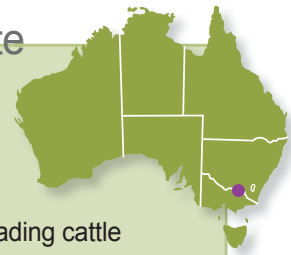
Producer: John Keogh

Location: Holbrook, southern NSW

Property size: 480 ha

Enterprises: 1900 Merino ewes, 250 trading cattle

Pastures: phalaris/clover, native pasture



into one big mob after marking in October. We will try using the big mob to eat off the flowering silver grass in the native paddocks in early October with stocking rate 180 DSE/ha.

The late-flowering native grasses should then produce seed and quality green feed in summer.

Results from the Holbrook EverGraze Proof Site showed there was little or no reduction in lamb growth from grazing native pastures while still on their mothers during spring compared to lambs grazing phalaris.”

Three paddocks will be monitored for perennial persistence, ground cover, composition and feed quality and the results shared on. <http://holbrookgrazing.posterous.com/> and www.evergraze.com.au

John will also use the EverGraze stocking rate tracker (soon to be released) to monitor the grazing days in each paddock on the farm.

contact

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Landclass & description	Pasture composition	Management objectives	Management Strategy
Landclass 3 North facing undulating slopes	23% Phalaris, 16% sub clover, capeweed, barley grass	Reduce capeweed and barley grass and maintain phalaris persistence	Rotational grazing: Graze phalaris at 4-leaf stage with rest periods:(20-30 days spring, 70 days summer, 30-50 days autumn (allow 4 leaves to appear before first grazing), 40-60 days winter). Maintain ground cover > 75% and FOO >800 kg/ha dry matter, especially in Autumn to minimize capeweed and barley grass germination. Use a big mob to crash graze barley grass in early spring to 500 kg/ha in early August
Landclass 3 South facing undulating slopes	18% Phalaris, 4% sub clover	Increase phalaris utilisation, increase sub-clover % and overall feed quality	Rotational grazing as above. Fence off from north facing slopes to increase utilisation. Reduce FOO to 800-1000 kg/ha prior to the autumn break to allow for clover germination
Landclass 4 multiple aspects, rocky slopes	Approx 50% native grasses - danthonia (wallaby grass), microlaena (weeping grass), 50% annual weeds (silver grass, capeweed)	Increase/maintain proportion of native grasses, reduce silver grass and capeweed, maintain clover % for feed quality and nitrogen fixation	Rotational grazing throughout the growing season. Put stock in when FOO is 1500-2000 kg/ha and remove when it reaches 1000 kg/ha. Apply phosphorus to increase clover %. Heavily graze mid spring to reduce biomass and weeds and allow for late maturing native grass to grow and flower. Maintain >75% ground cover at all times.