

Management increases value of native pastures

Grazier Ian Locke from Holbrook in southern NSW has tried a number of tactics to utilise the rougher, more native portion of his undulating property. Ian has gradually developed an understanding of how best to graze and manage his native pasture species to promote production and persistence. As a result, he has reduced fertiliser and weed control costs on his native country while maintaining annual stocking rates by strategically grazing his native pastures as part of his integrated, whole farm production system.

Our property is located in a winter-dominant rainfall area, where spring rainfall events are traditionally very reliable. In contrast, 60 percent of our autumn breaks fail to materialise.

As we grow 80 percent of our pasture in spring, we calve, lamb and grow out animals during this season to best match our pasture production curve.

Our cattle and sheep breeding enterprises are pushed as hard as we can, with performance per hectare the focus rather than production per head.

If the season allows, we background feeder steers to utilise surplus feed from July until December.

Powerful pastures

About 80 percent of the property has been improved and sown down to perennial pastures. These are predominantly phalaris and sub clover.

We also have some 'feed gap' pastures such as lucerne, ryegrass and forage rape, and sow small areas of grazing crops such as oats and triticale as a form of weed control to later establish permanent pasture.

Native pastures

Native based pastures make up 15 percent of the property, including the steep and often rocky hill country.

The native hill country initially bore the brunt of our high stocking rate regime by being heavily grazed with dry sheep.

The pastures would soon be grazed bare, exposing the soil to erosion from summer storms and creating ideal conditions for rampant broadleaf weeds such as Paterson's curse. Our management of the existing native pastures had to change.

Management the key

After scrutinising some alternate grazing systems being used by producers and trialling 'crash grazing' techniques in various treelots and fenced off areas of the property, we were keen to try a new management regime.

From our studies, we believed we could maintain production from our native country with no inputs by grazing it with large mobs of stock at specific times of year.

The hill country is destocked from late spring through to autumn each year, to allow the predominantly summer active native species such as red grass and Wallaby grass to grow and set seed.

From mid-May to July, 500 spring-calving cows and heifers graze the hills to chew back the mature, mostly low-quality standing feed. This herd is removed in the third week of July, about a month before they start calving, to maintain their nutritional requirements.

Three months later in late October, sheep or backgrounding cattle are introduced to utilise the higher quality native grasses (such as *Microlaena*) and heavily graze the exotic annuals such as clovers, broadleaf weeds and grasses.

Many benefits

This grazing regime on the native hill country is paying off in terms of maintaining excellent groundcover for most of the year.

The heavy grazing in late spring followed by total destocking creates space for the summer active native perennials to grow and establish, inhibiting the broadleaf weeds which were typical in autumn.

EverGraze Case Study

Producer: Ian Locke

Location: Holbrook, New South Wales

Property size: 1520 hectares

Enterprise: beef cattle, prime lamb



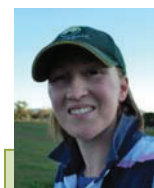
Cattle and sheep grazing on Ian Lockes property at Holbrook, NSW

The constant groundcover has improved moisture retention, resulting in the environmental benefits of more diverse and healthier plant life.

From an economic point of view, we have increased our average annual stocking rate in our native country from 5.6 to 6.1 DSE/ha while eliminating all costs associated with using aerial fertiliser and herbicide.

The hill country is now effectively a winter haystack of low quality feed, ideal for the spring-calving breeders.

Destocking of our improved, phalaris-based pastures over late-autumn and winter gives these pastures a chance to gain sufficient leaf area after the autumn break. This ensures excellent productivity over late winter and spring to coincide with peak animal production.



See our other case studies at www.evergraze.com.au/fact-sheets

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