

Integrating forage sources for success

Growing and integrating a mixture of forage types is the key to a tactical approach John and Laurie Chaffey have taken to managing their property 'Weerona'.

They believe it is essential to grow alternate forage sources for a specific reason, particularly to fill feed gaps or supply quality green feed at key times of nutritional demand for grazing animals.

They spoke with Lachlan Rowling.

"Cropping on some of our old farming country was no longer profitable or sustainable. Over time the soil condition was taking a real hit through declining organic matter, structure and fertility. We needed to address this.

We were losing confidence in the climate and seeing greater variability in rainfall events. We saw a need to build a system that capitalised on variable and unreliable rainfall events. We are also keen to see better natural resource outcomes through ground cover management and improving the use of rainfall and water on the farm.

We are still settling into what is the best system for Weerona but our main goals are to fill seasonal feed gaps and match a range of forage types to the nutritional requirements of the grazing animal.

I think it is important to grow alternate forage types for a specific purpose and not just for the sake of it. We now grow pastures which include native pastures, tropical grasses, lucerne, and forage crops and these are matched to variation in soil types and landscape position across the farm.

We wanted to increase our area of tropical grasses as we thought it a good option on former cropping paddocks and areas that were 'tired'

Producer: John and Laurie Chaffey

Location: 'Weerona', Somerton, north of Tamworth,

Property size: 1,800 ha

Soils: range from light meta-sedimentary loams and shallow sedimentary hills through to heavier and deeper alluvial flats

Enterprises: 1000 Merino ewes, 700 wethers and 150 Hereford cattle

Pastures: Lower input native pastures, tropical grass pastures, lucerne, winter and summer forage crops.

farm info.



or affected by hard setting soils. We sowed a mixture of Premier Digit, Panics (including Bambatsi) and Rhodes Grass. In good years the tropicals produce a huge bulk of feed over a long growing season. It is the average to poor years when they really come into their own producing solid growth after just small rain events. The tropicals also keep some green leaf even in the driest of times and are therefore ready to capitalise on rain. Establishment costs are a one off compared to forage crops.

Some of our better quality native grass paddocks receive inputs. Native pastures remain a key part of the farm and through reduced inputs and good grazing management help to complement other forage types.

There are many benefits for integrating forage sources. They include increased area and density of perennial plants across the farm, better water use and less soil erosion, reducing the autumn feed gap, better understanding the triggers for supplementary feeding & increased stock carrying capacity.

There are some disadvantages. We have less time on our hands due to the demands of a mixture of land-uses. Grazing management can be tricky but not impossible. Especially



John and Laurie Chaffey

key points

- ▶ Grow alternate forage types for a specific purpose, not just for the sake of it.
- ▶ Native pastures remain a vital but mostly lower input aspect of our grazing system
- ▶ Integrating forage sources meets stock nutritional needs

if you are prepared to measure and make an educated decision on the amount of green feed and the corresponding livestock condition. We also use sacrifice (stock containment) paddocks to take pressure off our best paddocks at times, including during drought.

On the whole I think the advantages out weight the disadvantages. We are looking forward to meeting future challenges, knowing we have a good range of forage types available."

contact



Sean Murphy

P: 02 6763 1100

sean.murphy@industry.nsw.gov.au



Weerona.

Photo by Mark Brennan