

# An Evaluation of Prime Pastures I

Darren Bayley, John Fairley, Rowan Anderson, Rod Grant, Frank Kelleher  
and Alan Andrews

*University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury  
Richmond, NSW, 2753*

The Prime Pasture Programme (PPP) is a NSW Agriculture initiative to increase the rate of success in establishing perennial pastures on the coast, tablelands and slopes. The program has been running for three years and, in September 1993, PPP managers approached the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury for a group of students to evaluate its effectiveness. The task was to determine whether the PPP had reached its objectives, and whether its principles had been accepted by the farming community. Attitudes to pasture management were also sought.

The two primary objectives of the PPP were stated as:

- To have 80% of farmers aware of, and willing to use, the recommended pasture establishment procedures;
- To increase pasture establishment success rates to 70%.

The PPP devised an 8-point plan for establishment which had three principle objectives, viz. Absolute weed and insect control, Adequate soil moisture and Accurate seed placement (the "Three A's").

## Methods

2000 mail surveys were distributed to randomly selected farmers on the northern, central and southern tablelands of NSW to obtain data on awareness of the

through a broad distribution of information brochures. The six most important objectives for establishment as rated by farmers are shown in Table 1. Compared to a survey conducted in 1989 by the PPP (M. Keys, personal communication), there appears to be a greater awareness of the importance of sowing depth and soil moisture at sowing amongst the farming community.

The farmers had access to a variety of information sources and used parts of the PPP strategy depending on their particular area, farm, economic status and goals. The strength of the program according to all survey respondents, was that it addressed the basic agronomic principles of sowing in a simple, easily followed checklist (data from both Survey and Focus groups).

With the exception of Picton, management rather than establishment was the topic which dominated discussion. The following lists the management issues identified in order of priority:

- grazing management;
- acidity, affecting persistence of pastures;
- pasture competition versus chemical means for weed control;
- cultivars - lower persistence of new varieties;
- the role of native pastures; and,
- salinity.

The following quote summarises the overall find-

ings from the focus groups participants, who believe they had increased their pasture establishment success rate. "If you get the Prime Pastures Project and follow it to a 'T', the technique is simple. It is all written down, and all you have to do is follow it. It is the management of pastures that is difficult, and there is very little work that has been done on it, particularly in Australia".

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## Results and Discussion

The mail survey indicated that 51% of respondents were aware of the PPP, with 63% believing they had improved their success rates and 68% were satisfied with their latest establishment success rates. Raising the awareness level is currently being addressed

**Table 1.** Farmer ratings of the most important criteria for pasture establishment (% nominating the particular criteria)<sup>1</sup>.

Freedom from Weeds <sup>2</sup>	74%	Adequate Fertilizer	38%
Soil Moisture <sup>2</sup>	50%	Seed Placement <sup>2</sup>	31%
Plant Cultivars	41%	Soil Testing	15%

<sup>1</sup> Based on 118 mail surveys where farmers were asked to nominate the 3 most important criteria; <sup>2</sup> 3A's criteria of the PPP.

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## References

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