

Prime Pasture Program II - "Making Perennial Pastures Permanent"

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The original Prime Pasture project (1991-1993) was a unique association between NSW Agriculture, agribusiness and graziers. It aimed to increase the success rate of perennial pasture establishment in the higher rainfall areas in order to reduce soil degradation.

This new project continues the same association with agribusiness and graziers with the emphasis on pasture management to achieve:

- persistence of the perennial pasture species;
- reduced degradation of the land; and,
- profitable livestock production.

Operating funds are provided by the National

Landcare Program (NLP).

Healthy perennial pastures reduce various forms of soil degradation while providing high quality feed for livestock production. There should be no conflicts in achieving these divergent outcomes with good pasture management practices. The aim of good pasture management is to balance inputs and all factors placing pressure on the pasture, against efficient animal production and export of products.

Description of the program

Prime Pasture Program II will aim to demonstrate and define practical issues to ensure that pastures:

- Maintain the useful species, especially perenni-

als;

- Maintain 70%+ ground cover to reduce erosion, acidity and salinity problems;
- Maintain a good legume/grass balance;
- Maintain healthy productive pasture growth and, thus, livestock production;
- Reduce weed invasion/occurrence.

The bottom line must be to maximise returns from \$'s invested in pastures, livestock and the whole farm enterprise.

The three main activities in the project will be to:

1. Establish 12 paired paddock comparison sites to demonstrate various pasture management options. Sites will involve Landcare or other local landholder groups in determining the most important issues and to participate in their management.
2. Develop a pasture management check system;
3. Produce a pasture management field guide covering:
 - pasture and animal assessment;
 - animal health and grazing management;
 - plant nutrition, soil tests and fertiliser strategies;
 - weed and pest control options;
 - effects of grazing on plants.

The area covered by the project is the slopes and tablelands where temperate perennial pastures are grown. Two sites have commenced, one at Bombala and one near Walcha. Other possible locations are Albury/Holbrook, Wagga Wagga, Harden, Cowra, Bathurst, Wellington, Coonabarabran, Tam-

worth/Manilla, Glen Innes and Inverell.

Pasture management

Management is the art of balancing animal needs and demands within the constraints of the farm environment (soils, climate and finances). The Prime Pasture Program II Field Guide, Check and demonstration sites will consider issues like the following and their interactions:

1. Soil fertility, nutrient removal, fertilizer needs. *Soil test*
2. Pasture production, species balance, pasture quality. *Pasture assessment (PROGRAZE)*.
3. Sustainable pasture production, reduced land degradation. *Healthy perennial pasture*.
4. Healthy, weed free productive pastures. *Strategic fertiliser use*.
5. Animal condition, feed requirements, production targets. *Animal assessment (PROGRAZE)*.
6. Efficient animal production, reduced worm burdens. *Pasture benchmarks, Worm tests*.

PROGRAZE is a course in assessing pastures and animals run by NSW Agriculture. These skills enable managers to make better grazing management decisions.

Prime Pasture Program II will help develop an efficient pasture management system that maximises profit and reduces soil degradation. Landholders or groups interested in participating can contact the authors at NSW Agriculture, Queanbeyan (06) 2971861.