

The Sustainable Grazing Systems Program on the Southern Tablelands and Monaro of NSW

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The Sustainable Grazing Systems (SGS) Program is an initiative of Meat and Livestock Australia. Its principal aim is to promote the development and adoption of grazing systems which are sustainable in an economic, environmental and production sense. This will be achieved in part by establishing a series of paddock scale co-learning demonstration sites in close collaboration with local producer groups. These so-called 'Regional Sites' seek to address issues which have been identified by producers as being of critical importance for their long-term sustainability and economic productivity. The Southern Tablelands and Monaro SGS Committee is one of eleven Regional Committees throughout Australia which are currently establishing these Regional Site activities. A brief overview of the currently approved Regional Site projects on the Southern Tablelands and Monaro is described below.

Managing bent grass in perennial pastures (Gurrundah). Bent grass is a rhizomatous, highly competitive perennial grass weed which is common throughout the wetter areas of the Southern Tablelands and Monaro. This project aims to replicate the proven and accepted management approach to controlling this plant in Victoria and New Zealand (Anon. 1999) in which a combination of the use of herbicides (spray-topping for seed-head suppression), fertiliser application and strategic grazing management are used to help manage and better utilise bent grass.

Sustainable grazing management of the Monaro native grasslands (Cooma). This major project aims to help determine the most appropriate system of grazing management for the 100,000 ha. of native grasslands on the Monaro. It involves an evaluation of different systems of grazing management and the economics of fertiliser application in this environment.

Evaluation of Time Control Grazing (Cell grazing) (Crookwell). Cell grazing and continuous grazing of highly improved pastures are being compared in the higher rainfall Crookwell area to help determine what constitutes a sustainable grazing system. An assessment of alternative fertilisers will also be undertaken at this site.

Use of nitrogen fertiliser to overcome the win-

ter feed trough (Bombala and Braidwood). Overall stocking rates and farm productivity in this Region are determined by availability of feed during winter and hence, winter pasture growth rates. The strategic use of nitrogen fertiliser is a recognised means of increasing winter feed supply. The responsiveness of pastures to different forms of nitrogen (*i.e.* urea vs ammonium nitrate) and the economics of application will be monitored. An adjunct to this project is an evaluation of the economics of sowing winter forage crops.

Maintaining and protecting perennial pastures during times of moisture deficit and drought by strategic use of feedlots (Bobundara, Bombala). This project aims to help address the increasing concern of overgrazing of pastures during times of moisture deficiency and drought, which can have a major and permanent impact upon their sustainability. Opportunistic use of feedlots can help to protect this resource and allow increased winter growth rates of pastures by deferral of grazing. The practical use and implications of sheep feedlotting will be measured and assessed at two sites on the Monaro.

The role of Caucasian clover in sustainable grazing systems (Gurrundah). Caucasian clover is a persistent, rhizomatous, perennial summer-growing legume which has significant potential in sustainable grazing systems in the higher rainfall zone of Australia. Its role will be assessed on the Southern Tablelands in 2 situations:

- a low-input native pasture, where it will be direct-drilled with and without the use of herbicide and,
- a conventionally-prepared, high-input system where it will be compared to lucerne, forage Brassica and a typical improved pasture under a cross-bred lamb system.

Improving the utilisation and digestibility of native pastures through the use of animal supplements (Nimmitabel, Delegate). A range of supplements will be compared by investigating their effects on utilisation of native pastures, changes in botanical composition and on animal production. Cost effectiveness will also be determined.

Economics of applying fertilisers to native pas-

tures for beef cattle production. (Lake Bathurst). The responsiveness and cost-effectiveness of fertiliser application to native pastures will be evaluated using a 'paired-paddock' comparison of low and higher input fertiliser programs. Due to the scale of this demonstration (75 ha.) and the extent of native pastures throughout the Southern Tablelands this site should be of great interest to cattle producers.

Grazing management to prevent serrated tussock re-invasion (Mulwaree Ponds). This topical project aims to develop a "best bet" management package which incorporates strategic grazing management and fertiliser inputs as a means of increasing the capacity of native pastures to prevent serrated tussock seedling re-invasion. It is part of an SGS program to seek alternative non-chemical approaches to serrated tussock control since the market withdrawal of Frenock®.

Managing and utilising serrated tussock through sustainable grazing (Berridale/Dalgety, Goulburn). This ambitious project is closely related to that above but seeks to convert a major weed problem into a potential feed resource through a combination of grazing management, fertiliser application and nutrient supplementation. Potential

sites and cooperating landholders are being sought.

Comparing the productive potential and management of native and improved pastures (Bombala, Goulburn, Yass). This will be an evaluation of grazing management and fertiliser application for obtaining maximum production of native and improved pastures. Potential sites and cooperating landholders are being sought.

Developing skills in ground cover assessment and plant species identification. A 'Ute-guide' pictorial flip-card showing various levels of ground-cover (photo reference standards) is being developed to assist producers in making critical decisions about livestock movements between paddocks. A special section on plant species identification will be included.

For further details on these projects and any other Sustainable Grazing Systems Program matters, contact Stuart Burge, phone/fax 02 6453 3322.

Reference

- Anon. (1999). Grazing Management of Bent Grass. SGS Tips & Tools No 12. (Meat Research Corporation).