



## PROGRAZE™ and PROGRAZE™ PLUS

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*Abstract:* This paper looks at the results of PROGRAZE™ as an extension program, then the development of PROGRAZE™ PLUS as a planning framework, to utilise the skills and knowledge of PROGRAZE™ across the whole farm.

### What is PROGRAZE™?

It is a course aimed at developing, in producers, pasture and animal assessment skills to assist in decision making in matching pasture and livestock requirements. The format is 8 on-farm meetings 3-4 weeks apart. The structure of the course has taken account of how adults learn. Listening, seeing, doing, re-visiting ideas are all involved in each meeting. Experiences of the group and people trying new ideas during the course and then talking about the outcomes is important.

Old information about pastures and animal management is combined with new data and skills which are the tools to enable producers to manage the interaction of pasture, animals, environment and markets. For example, "How do I achieve the desired weight gain without degrading a new pasture"?

### How has PROGRAZE™ benefited producers?

So far, I have been involved with a total of 360 producers in PROGRAZE™ courses. The following comments are based on my experiences with these producers. Evaluations carried out 1 year after producers completed the course have recorded the following results:

The course structure is similar to a ladder (Figure 1). Each step has to be completed before the next one is attempted. However, what happens at the top of a ladder? Most of us feel uncomfortable because we feel unbalanced. Well, so did producers

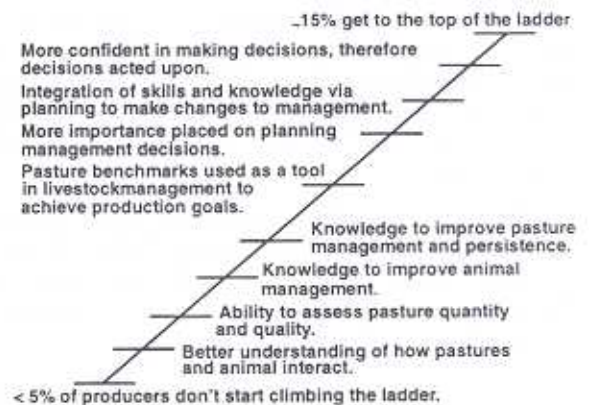


Figure 1. Steps in gaining skills from the PROGRAZE™ course.

after completing PROGRAZE™. They were having trouble balancing all the conflicting factors on the farm: time, environment, marketing, number of paddocks and mobs.

The following comments were made at some review meetings:

- "I can implement aspects of PROGRAZE™ at a paddock or mob level, but have difficulty doing it across the whole farm".
- "Am I losing on one part of the farm what I'm gaining elsewhere"?

### PROGRAZE™ PLUS

PROGRAZE™ PLUS was developed to help

Question	Responses	
What impact has your participation in PROGRAZE™ had or will have on the grazing management of your farm?	Major	17%
	Moderate	62%
	Minor	21%
	No impact	Nil
Do you believe your participation in PROGRAZE™ has/will result in improved financial returns to your farm?	Yes	88%
	No	12%

producers manage these concerns. PROGRAZE™ PLUS relies on producers using the skills and knowledge from PROGRAZE™. It combines these into a whole farm planning framework. It allows producers to test their whole farm grazing plans for periods of their choosing from 1 month up to 12 months. In these plans the following issues are considered:

- different pasture and soil types
- varying livestock requirements
- varying pasture requirements
- market targets
- seasonal risks
- trading opportunities.

ProPlus™ is the software which enables producers to carry out this assessment. Producers can quickly try a range of management options to test the robustness of their plans. For example, "What is the impact on lambing ewes if I sell the wethers 1 month earlier"?

Over time, producers will build up specific information about production capabilities of their paddocks. This means that in future years the planning process will become more accurate, because the input data is more accurate.

In 1998 ProPlus™ was awarded second prize in the Royal Easter Show decision support software competition.

## How is PROGRAZE PLUS™ run?

The course is run over a 12 month period with 5-6 meetings. The first two meetings focus on collecting the necessary farm information needed to run ProPlus™. Entry of the data and the assessment of the grazing plans is carried out by the producers at home.

The next stage is using this information to manage on-farm problems. As with PROGRAZE™, the group discussion on these issues is most important, as it enables a range of views to be discussed, plus everyone takes something home that they can use. Subsequent years will utilise and build on information from previous years. It should be noted that just completing a PROGRAZE PLUS™ course is not sufficient in itself. It must be implemented on-farm for people to gain anything out of it.

The cost of the program is \$350 which includes the software and course meetings.

## Conclusion

PROGRAZE™ and PROGRAZE™ PLUS provide skills and knowledge for improving pasture and livestock management, while meeting production and marketing targets without causing land management problems. This is a challenging task, but a most important one. All benchmarking groups within the grazing industries are showing the "pasture/animal box" as being the major factor controlling on-farm profitability differences between properties.