

Species and cultivar selection:

Assisting farmers to select pasture varieties

Warren McDonald

NSW Agriculture

Centre for Crop Improvement, PMB 944, Tamworth NSW 2340

The number of pasture varieties available to farmers is large and will continue to grow. While this means that we have more options at our disposal to improve the efficiency of production, it also means that the choice between varieties is becoming more difficult.

Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) legislation has encouraged breeders (both agency and private) to release new varieties, but there is no requirement to prove the agronomic merit of a variety. Previously, breeders registered new varieties with the Herbage Plant Liaison Committees (now Pasture Variety Committees [PVC] in NSW and Victoria), as a means of demonstrating agronomic merit. The variety would not be registered if it were not superior in some respect to other varieties. Extension agencies would then use this information as a basis for recommendations.

A new national merit-testing scheme conducted by the Australian Pasture Plants Evaluation Committee (APPEC) has been commenced. The approval scheme is run in NSW by NSW PVC Inc., a body representing a wide cross section of the industry (including the Grassland Society of NSW). An approved list of varieties has been introduced to assist the industry. This is linked to the merit-testing scheme for the most important species, so that the agronomic merit of potential new varieties can be proven.

It is the responsibility of the owners of a new va-

Table 1. Procedure for testing and approval for release of new pasture varieties.

Major species (e.g. ryegrass) * APPEC Merit Test Scheme *		Other species * Trials and commercial use *	
<i>Review of trial results by NSW PVC</i> Is the variety better than or equal to other varieties listed in respect of important characteristics for that species? Are there adequate seed supplies of quality seed available? * * * *			
Yes (To both questions) APPROVED General (G) rating or Special (S) (i.e. niche)	No (To either question) REJECTED Resubmit to future meeting possible	No (To either question) REJECTED Resubmit to future meeting possible	Yes (To both questions) APPROVED General (G), Special (S), or Provisional (P) *where only 2 years of satisfactory data are available

riety to submit it to the PVC for approval. Information submitted on a variety must indicate that the variety is as good as or better than current varieties on the market. The procedure is different for major species (e.g. ryegrass, white clover, lucerne) and other species as shown in Table 1.

This new scheme will ensure that the development of new varieties will be controlled, so that only the best selections will be released as commercial cultivars, and that seed supplies will be readily available on release. These measures will assist farmers in making the correct choices for sowing pastures in the future.