

## Helping graziers manage soil & landscape variability

M. Keys and W. Schumann

*NSW Agriculture, PO Box 408, Queanbeyan 2620*

NSW Agriculture has developed a six session workshop that concentrates on identifying and managing the variable soil and landscape features of your property. The focus is on managing for sustainable production from perennial pastures and the target area is the tablelands and upper slopes of NSW. Sessions are half a day and the format is 50% indoor theory and 50% in the paddock.

The workshops involve taking participants through a process that covers:

- important visual indicators of paddock potential
- soil types and important physical characteristics
- soil testing to determine nutrient status, limitations or problems
- an understanding of nutrient cycling and soil fertility problems
- prioritising paddock inputs and management options based on paddock potential

Below is an example of the feedback received from graziers after pilot workshops were run at Crookwell (1999) and Bathurst (2000). While the first pilot emphasised sustainability, the format was expanded in 2000 to include extra emphasis on cause and effect, perenniality and the water cycle. Further questions were asked after the second pilot as to whether there was sufficient emphasis on sustainability. The final comment summarises this response.

- *"A very informative & interesting workshop, which will make me think a lot more about improvement strategies, especially involving individual paddocks."*
- *"I found the format of the course, with the formal talks, reinforced by paddock visits to illustrate points made, was terrific."*
- *"This course was one of the most informative workshops I have done. In particular I liked the way everything was linked together to show us what was happening."*
- *"Perfect complementary course to PROGRAZE – both essential for any modern agricultural enterprise."*
- *"My "poorer" paddocks that I had thought would need sowing down with pasture, I now find would be a waste of money. So will concentrate on fertilizer which makes decisions easier & then I can put more money in the future into better soil type paddocks."*
- *"It depends on your definition of sustainable. I believe you have to be economically sustainable, ie replacing your nutrients lost (from) running high stocking rates and building up capital to target problem areas, such as erosion, remnant veg. etc. To me that was what the course was all about – being economically sustainable, (while) working with your soils to get the best out of them."*

Responses to five specific questions covering the main outcomes from the workshop are tabled below.

| As a result of the workshop I am better able to:-        | Yes  | Unsure | No  |
|--|------|--------|-----|
| 1. visually assess the strength & weaknesses of paddocks | 100% |        |     |
| 2. assess soil type and depth                            | 90%  | 5%     | 5%  |
| 3. take and interpret soil tests                         | 75%  | 20%    | 5%  |
| 4. decide on the type and rate of fertiliser/lime        | 57%  | 33%    | 10% |
| 5. prioritise my paddocks for inputs                     | 90%  | 10%    |     |

The course principally aims to provide knowledge and skills to land managers to enable them to make better decisions in prioritising funds spent on pastures, fertilisers, fencing etc. in the extremely diverse tableland landscape. Courses will commence this autumn. For further information contact Mike Keys at NSW Agriculture on (02) 6297 1861 or email [mike.keys@agric.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mike.keys@agric.nsw.gov.au).

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