

2000/W01



Producer Research Support

Rotational Grazing

Gingin Prograze Group



The Gingin Prograze Group was keen to investigate the benefits of rotational grazing to increase stocking rates and improve enterprise profitability.

They were also interested in gaining experience in the establishment and grazing of summer active perennials, to extend the growing season and enable more stock to be carried over summer.

Rotational grazing was widely adopted among group members with all participants reporting increased carrying capacity.

Key points

- Most group members have moved to some form of rotational grazing.
- All participants reported significant increases in carrying capacity.

Contact details

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The project

After participating in a PROGRAZE course in 1999, a group of Gingin producers were interested in investigating the benefits of rotational grazing to increase stocking rates and improve enterprise profitability.

The group identified advantages and disadvantages associated with rotational grazing.

Advantages

- increased livestock and pasture production;
- increased stocking rates and consequent increased profitability;
- greater awareness of pasture and livestock;
- more control over pasture and livestock;
- even pasture utilisation; and
- more preferred species can be incorporated into the pasture mix.

Disadvantages

- labour intensive; and
- fencing and water points expensive to establish.

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Reducing costs was identified by the group as another way to lift profitability. Because fertilisers are a major cost, the group was interested in determining whether implementing rotational grazing would reduce the amount of fertiliser necessary.

Objectives

1. build group member understanding of, and expertise in, rotational grazing to enable group members to implement rotational grazing on their own properties;
2. understand and utilise perennials in grazing management systems;
3. understand soil dynamics and make informed choices about fertiliser application; and
4. increase stocking rates up to 50 percent on member properties, once members have become confident with the new system.

What was done

A series of activities were planned in 2000, and implemented throughout the year. These activities included:

- workshop on rotational grazing and feed budgeting;
- field walk around the local area at Bibby Springs looking at perennial systems;
- committee meeting to discuss and plan a study tour of the south west region of Western Australia;

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Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to \$15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

These activities include:

- Producer Initiated Research and Development
- More Beef from Pastures demonstration trials
- Prime Time Wean More Lambs demonstration trials
- Sustainable and productive grazing grants.

Contact Stephen Feighan - MLA Project Manager, Producer Delivery and Adoption.
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Gingin Prograze Group

September 2005 / PIRD OUTCOMES

- a 'Soils are Alive' workshop held by the Land Management Society;
- finalise study tour itinerary and field walk on property of group member who had implemented rotational grazing;
- rotational grazing and perennial study tour of south west;
- farm walk and evaluation of activities held throughout the project; and
- compile a booklet to assist participants to record information.

What happened?

Most of the planned activities were completed, with the exception of the final field walk.

A group meeting was held in December 2004 to discuss on farm changes since the start of the project. Of the nine producers in the original project group, only three participated in the discussion day. Another phoned to report feedback about a month later.

Three of the four group members that provided project feedback had previously used set stocking grazing management. One of these producers still uses set stocking, while the other two have moved to some form of rotational grazing.

The fourth member moved stock fortnightly during the growing season, but only on one block. This producer has since progressed to moving stock every two to three days during winter, but set stocking over spring. He acknowledges that he could also rotate through spring, but is currently cutting back on stock numbers and wants to spend time doing other things.

All four workshop participants have established and are utilising areas of perennials. The areas established range from 50 hectares to over 300 hectares. Species planted included Rhodes Grass, Green Panic, Kikuyu, Signal Grass and the Evergreen Mix. Some participants are considering incorporating chicory and lucerne into future mixes.

Three of the members are pleased with perennial performance and planning to establish more, while the other member was expecting to get more dry matter production. Although feed on offer hasn't been objectively measured, he estimated feed production by the number of days the paddock lasts under grazing.

Carrying capacity on two properties increased by 50 to 60 percent. Another member reported that since the project, stocking rates had increased from 11 dry sheep equivalent (dse) per hectare, to 20 dse per hectare. The final member reported an increased carrying capacity of 25 percent.

All members reported increases in fertiliser use since the project, although the increase was gradual and proportional to the increase in stock numbers.

Discussion

Most of the project members that participated in the feedback session have moved to some form of rotational grazing and all have established and are using perennial pastures.

All participants reported increased carrying capacity. This was attributed to using feed more efficiently by rotational grazing, growing more feed using perennials to extend the season, and using fertiliser on the annuals.

Project participants were not able to objectively measure increased profitability as a result of the new pastures and management strategies, but were confident that it was positive.

Next Steps

Although new pasture management strategies were developed and adopted, economic data to quantify the benefits of these new practices was not collected.

Subsequent projects would involve financial data collection and analysis of all group member enterprises.