

95/N05



Producer Research Support

NSW producers compare time controlled grazing with set-stocking

Central Tablelands KIT



The project

The project was an extension of the time controlled grazing trials funded by MLA as part of its Temperate Pastures Sustainability Key Program (TPSKP) which has since been upgraded into the Sustainable Grazing Systems Program. The TPSKP program researched the sustainability of temperate pastures.

One of these trials was established on the property Bantry Grove, which is owned and operated by the secretary of this Producer Research Support group.

Objective

The aim of the project was to compare the impact of time controlled grazing (or cell grazing) with that of set-stocking on the ecology of a perennial grass-legume pasture.

What was done

The trial conducted in the Producer Research Support project monitored changes in:

- pasture plant size;
- water infiltration rates;
- soil strength;
- soil chemistry;
- soil water content;
- nutritive value of the pasture; and
- earthworm activity.

In addition to assessing changes in pasture composition, the temperate pastures sustainability study recorded climatic data and soil surface moisture levels, the details of all grazings (date, duration, livestock type and number) and pasture yield estimates prior to and after each grazing.

What happened?

The proponents of time controlled grazing methods claim two main benefits over set stocking. These are an improvement in pasture quality, and an increase in animal production.

To achieve these benefits, however, it is important to develop a pattern of grazing and rest periods that favour the pasture species preferred by stock, without favouring other species.

This means varying the pattern of grazing and rest depending on the weather conditions and the time of year and varying the stocking rate-grazing pressure to match the amount of feed available at each grazing.

This trial used a fixed stocking rate in both the set stocked and time control treatments. Records were generated on all of the parameters monitored.

The lack of objective data on pasture performance under time controlled grazing methods compared with set stocking methods resulted in the Central Tablelands KIT Group comparing the systems.

Key points

- There were some slight positive changes in the botanical composition of the time controlled grazing treatment.

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.

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Discussion

There appeared to be some slight positive changes in the botanical composition of the time controlled grazing treatment with no similar changes occurring in the set-stocking treatment.

Some of the changes have been observed but it is too early to determine that they are caused by different grazing methods.

For this reason, the project has received further PIRD funding until July 2000.

Results of the trial are being promoted through seasonal farm walks conducted by the Regional SGS Committee.

MLA also recommends

PROGRAZE

PROGRAZE, a joint initiative of Meat & Livestock Australia and the State Departments of Agriculture is now delivered as part of the EDGENetwork suite of workshops.

Towards Sustainable Grazing

The Towards Sustainable Grazing package is the culmination of MLA's highly successful Sustainable Grazing Systems (SGS) project.

There are three parts to the package:

1. The professional producer's guide - www.mla.com.au or call 1800 675 717;
2. EDGENetwork workshops; and
3. SGS Tips & Tools - downloadable PDFs from www.mla.com.au

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