



final report

Project Code: B.PAS.0349

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Date published: October 2014

PUBLISHED BY
Meat and Livestock Australia Limited
Locked Bag 991
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

Pasture Updates Across Southern Australia

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

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Abstract

Prior to the opportunity to present the “Pasture Updates Across Southern Australia” pasture updates, few opportunities had become available to the Grassland Society of Southern Australia (Grasslands) to transfer scientific information and discuss research within the grazing industry. Grasslands has a long history expanding 54 years and is committed to creating opportunities to convene and develop knowledge and skills relating to pastures, grazing and livestock production from grasslands.

The aim was to provide localised relevant information to assist graziers and agribusiness providers to make the best practice business decisions. Eight Pasture updates were held over Victoria and Tasmania, these combined lecture style presentations, farm walks and participant led discussion directed by a panel of experts. Each pasture update was customized to meet the key topics requested by the local organising committees, consisting of Grassland and local partner groups, which contributed to each update, also providing field sites to view local research, development and extension projects.

Executive Summary

Pasture updates were held in Victoria at Ararat, Casterton, Kyneton, Euroa, Boort, Tallangatta and Bairnsdale; and in Tasmania at Cressy. Each event was individualised to meet the needs of the local community. The Local Grassland Society Branches liaised with like focused local partners to establish the program. Each event was coordinated with administrative, marketing and media support for the Grassland Society Office.

The aim was to provide localised relevant information to assist graziers and agribusiness providers to make the best business practice decisions. Eight Pasture updates were held over Victoria and Tasmania, these combined farm walk, lecture style presentations and participant led discussion directed by a panel of experts. Each pasture update was customized to meet the key topics requested by the local Grassland members. Our localised partners contributed to each update by providing field research and development.

We had a total of 387 participants attend the pasture update series, with 78% being primary producers 15% Agribusiness and 7% a combination of Education Media and undisclosed interest.

23 participants joined the Grassland Society as ordinary members, 1 new corporate membership and 15 new student members.

The GSSA (Grassland Society of Southern Australia) formed productive partnerships with 12 organisations and a further 4 localised groups of EverGraze

Overall, 27 topics were presented and 7 case study / trial sites were visited, these included:

- Managing Farming risks
- Cereal Fodder Crops
- Case Studies – Nullawil PDS Site
- Perennial Pastures
- Brassica Fodder crops
- Setting up your own pasture trial sites
- Deep-rooted perennial species
- Mediterranean Tall Fescue
- Fertilizer and trace element requirements for pastures and livestock
- Nitrogen fixation and rhizobia
- Premier digit grass, tropical variety
- Alternatives to phosphorus fertilizer
- Phosphorus fertility
- Phalaris cultivars
- Target stocking for local soils and rainfalls
- Animal health – soil health
- Tasmanian grazing operations
- Case Study review – Tasmanian Pasture Composition
- Establishing new pastures, economic and methodology
- Field tour – Cultivar plots TIA
- Grazing new pastures
- Trial tour – replicated cultivar trials, discussion on new cultivars and compatibility of various cultivars
- IPM in Pastures
- New Acid tolerant Lucerne

- Evergraze trial review – Bayton
- Evidence based agriculture
- Research in DGT to measure soil phosphorous
- Performance of new cocksfoot cultivars
- Case Study, first year results from PPS pasture trials
- Case Study review – Woody Yaloak Catchment – impact of different fertilisers
- Site visits Seedmark trial phalaris/ cocksfoot
- SARDI lucerne trials Coleraine
- Lucerne EverGraze experience and alternatives
- Grass Gro Impact climatic changes

The Pasture Update series was successful at engaging local pasture industry with current technical information with local relevance. Each partnership worked to provide balance of information and helped in engaging pastoralists who had previously not attended a Grassland Society event.

Take home messages included:

- Grow Eat and Keep.
- Test then re-test.
- Nothing beats trials on your own site.
- Get pastures to work for you.
- Right Plant, Right Place, Right Purpose and Right Management.

The Grassland Society and partner organisation umbrellas were opened to the wider community, which stands to benefit from the direct contact and information provided by the variety of pasture experts and delivery of localised information. Our pastoralists were able to share first hand their technical knowledge and contribute to the forum highlighting localised situations, our agribusiness providers were able to gain valuable training for staff on the latest developments relating directly to the regional requirements. In some cases presentations could be transplanted to other regions with only slight modifications for local conditions.

Local Partners included:

Perennial Pasture Systems, EverGraze, Ararat Rural Council, CMC, Glenelg Hopkins CMA, SARDI, Bestwool Bestlamb, Seedmark, Mckinnon Group, Mitta to Murray Landcare Group, Loddon Shire, Birchip Cropping Group, Making more from Sheep.

Project objectives

- Coordinate the development and implementation of eight pasture technical updates across Victoria, Tasmania and Southern east South Australia.
- Target 400 producers to have participated at the pasture updates
- Partner with regional producer networks to support the development and delivery of the updates.

The Grassland Society of Southern Australia in partnership with 17 local producer networks delivered eight pasture technical update events across Victoria, Tasmania to a 387 pasture industry representatives.

Methodology

By engaging our local branches and development of key local partnerships a series of topics was formulated to best serve the regional pasture industry. Industry experts were given a specified topic and relationship to other topics of the pasture update, this allowed for flow and continuity of the key messages.

Grassland Society of Southern Australia provided the administrative support and gave each branch and supporting partner guidance. Presenters often came from a mixture of local and national experiences to aid with the whole picture discussion. An active media campaign was initiated for each update with press releases for each update being printed in local and State media. Promotion of each pasture update went out to local and general membership of the Grassland Society as well as memberships of local partner organisations and local tertiary education providers. A mail drop to local farmers in a 30 km radius of each update was completed for 5 of the 8 updates.

The Pasture Updates

Ararat

The pasture update series commenced in Ararat in July. A strong partnership with PPS (Perennial Pasture Systems) was further established with the convener being PPS.

Key topic of evidence based agriculture, was further supported by the presentations on new cocksfoot cultivars and the introduction of new aged thinking with the new technology DGT and the trial results of the PPS project. Attendees were asked to question their own farming practices and establish evidence based decision making to improve their businesses effectiveness. A key request from the attendees was the need for more information on a variety of farming topics.

Casterton

The Casterton Pasture Update was held in September with local partners CMC and convener Andrew Speirs, Grassland Society member Western Branch. A variety of topics were covered including effective nutrient sources and biological products and how farmers can set up their own trials and validate the results. Are all perennial pasture varieties the same and how do we make a choice? Evidence based agriculture: sorting out the myth from the reality. Establishing key evidence based information as part of best practice farming.

New Technology and how to measure soil phosphorous. (Still within a research stage.) Explained the process of DGT use of diffuse gradients in thin films to measure soil phosphorous. Site visits to the Seedmark Trial exploring phalaris/cockfoot varieties under grazing over four years at the Tindall family farm, Muntham and the SARDI Lucerne Trial at David Robertson's property, "Austral Park," Coleraine. Key take home message, trials on your own site give the best results for your land.

Kyneton

The Kyneton Pasture Update was held with partners Evergraze and McKinnon Project. Gerald Ryan Convener, Grassland Society Central Ranges chairman. Key presentations on Acid tolerant cultivars, how to select suitable companion planting and persistence. Key message talk to your neighbours, conduct your own trials and share the results.

The Kyenton Pasture Update was an opportunity for a newly formed branch to have a constructive activity as a result 14 new members joined.

Cam Nicolson was very informative; the topic of assessing alternate fertilizers was relevant to local interests and well presented. Stuart McColl presented his topic IPM in pastures. Allen Newman spoke very well about the development of new acid tolerant Lucernes. Tour to Michael O'Sullivan's farm with Lisa Warn, Evergraze site and Poultry litter trial and Michael Joss Perennial Grasses trial was very interesting, although for some of us that have been involved with the site, the information was repeated. Lisa Warn presented the use of the pasture picker application and MLA five easy steps as an easy flow on in her information.

Euroa

The Euroa Pasture update had a focus on Lucerne with convener Alison Desmond DPI, partner Evergraze. This day although well planned suffered from a clash with the Henty field days. Presentations by Jane Court of Grass Gro project and Anita Morant on the Evergraze experience and alternatives was well received by the participants. The EverGraze theme of Right Plant, Right Place, Right Purpose and Right Management was adopted as the key message for participants to take away with them. A follow-up presentation has been organised for spring 2012.

Tallangatta

The Tallangatta Pasture Update was very well attended with a good, logical flow of information, based on the theme of the day, Back to basics: getting your pastures to work for you. Started with two talks on importance of soil fertility for productive and profitable animal production systems, with emphasis on the cost-efficient use of fertilisers, particularly of phosphorus. MLA's Five Easy Steps to Phosphorus Fertilisation was a key part of the second talk. Third talk focussed on pasture establishment issues, choice of appropriate species for appropriate soil types, growing season lengths, and animal production systems, with descriptions of how Pasture Picker selects species and cultivars based on soil and seasonal properties. Grazing management of newly sown perennial grass species, particularly phalaris, was another key part of this talk. The fourth talk on new phalaris cultivars for this high rainfall, acidic soils district was logical and needed but very poorly delivered for reasons outlined below. The fifth presentation focussed on managing seasonal variations in animals' needs for, and pastures' supply of energy, protein and roughage, with lots discussion of feed demand calculators. But the key question of what is the potential stocking rate for this 800-1000 mm rainfall district was not seriously and adequately addressed.

The final speaker dealt with animal health issues linked with soil micronutrient deficiencies that occur locally, particularly selenium, copper and iodine. Some producers commented in their feedback that these issues were minor compared with more common and widespread livestock issues such as grass tetany, milk fever and dystocia.

Boort

Held on April 3rd the Boort Pasture Update attracted over 52 regional rural producers and a further 21 agribusinesses. The purpose of the day was to provide current and new pasture and green feed options for Northern Victoria. The range of topics covered local pasture/feed options such as fodder crops, perennial pastures, brassicas and perennial shrubs. Results from local trials using these feed options were presented to the audience to highlight local performance.

Tim Leeming from Paradoo Prime started the day with a simple message about his pasture management, 'grow it, eat it and keep it'. This simple philosophy set the tone for the rest of the day along with the EverGraze catch cry of Right Plant, Right Place, Right Purpose and Right Management.

Risk management and an economic analysis of Northern Victorian pasture systems to cope with a changing world was delivered by Kieran Ransom. This topic compared the profitability of intensive cropping versus mixed farms of crops and lucerne pasture as well as crops and annual pastures.

Five Seed Companies were present on the day and all participated in the highly anticipated 5 minute Soap Box presentation. Dean Harrington from Harrington Ag Consulting rounded off the day talking about how farmers can undertake their own on-farm trials, questions that need to be asked and who to gather information from.

Given all the information from the day, the audience was asked what they may do differently in future years; 'Protect early pastures to create a feed wedge', 'Determine what is the right pasture/feed to fill our feed gap', 'Review paddock sizes to utilise feed grown', 'Implement a native shrub green haystack'.

'The Pasture Update was well received and I'm sure has rekindled the interest in locally grown pasture management and green feed options for various management strategies'

'Please keep it going in this area as it has been very informative', concluded the day according to those present.

Cressy, Tasmania

The Tasmanian Branch of the GSSA, in conjunction with MLA, conducted a Pasture Update Day on Friday 27th April. It had 46 attendees at the event, and were a mix of farmers, industry personnel and Ag Science students from the University of Tasmania. The day was held initially at the "Burlington Road Grazing Trial" where the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture are conducting trials based on obtaining comparative and quantitative data of new and established cultivars under Tasmanian conditions. This trial and the additional work being conducted here, will become the "hub" of Tasmanian research into persistent and productive pastures for dry land conditions. The second part of the day was to inspect replicated trials at "Strowan" near Nile in northern Tasmania, to evaluate species, and cultivars, in companionship with others to again determine dry land persistent pasture recommendations into the future.

During the first part of the day, attendees heard from Rob Winter, from Heritage Seeds, who

gave an informative presentation on the decision making process of pasture renovations. This presentation

Included key points of planning for weed and insect control prior to sowing, and also determining the best renovation method for your enterprise: sod-sowing into existing pasture, direct drilling with minimal tillage, or full cultivation. David Squibb, from Wrightson Seeds, then discussed the importance of grazing management during establishment, for the benefit of both the grass and legume, and also the benefits of rotational grazing post-establishment. Both of these presentations intertwined with key information, and gave attendees some very relevant local knowledge and experience.

After this, the group moved out to the trial plots, where Rowan Smith, from the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, reviewed findings from a recent study into the botanical composition of pastures in Tasmania. This talk highlighted the fact that most pasture operations were composed of an excessive amount of weed grasses that would lower the productivity of the pastures dramatically. It was also noted that various regions, when overlaid with environmental information, were closely related due to their pasture composition.

At the conclusion of Rowan's talk, Brian Field, from the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, gave us a tour of the trial plots. Here he gave an overview of the species, and cultivars selected for evaluation and noted the seasonal differences in both dry matter production and grazing sheep live weight gains. This was very well received and Brian's key point was that the traditional "shotgun" approach of pasture mixes had no value, and that producers need to look at seasonal requirements on farm when making their pasture selections. Dry matter assessments alone should not be the key driver to selecting a pasture mix, as we know that producers are paid on their end product produced.

After lunch, the group travelled to "Strowan" to inspect the replicated trials being assessed by Eric Hall, from the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture. Eric is not only conducting the evaluations, but is also a plant breeder and travels the world searching for cultivars that may have a fit in the dry Tasmanian regions. The key point from Eric's discussion was around the persistent options that will become available in the near future, and also the relationships between grasses and legumes. It was very interesting to note that some grasses have a negative effect on the legume, whereas in other cases the legume can outcompete the grasses.

Bairnsdale

50 people attended the GSSA pasture update held at the Bengworden Hall on Wednesday the 18th of April 2012. It was very pleasing to see such a crowd for the day, GSSA East Gippsland branch president Simon Hunt said.

The five speakers were very interesting and informative. Robert Dent from Tasglobal seeds, Tasmania, spoke about new cocksfoot, brome and legumes that they have bred and are suited to the lower and spasmodic rainfall environment of East Gippsland. Mediterranean tall fescues, establishment, management and productive potential, and suitability to East Gippsland was discussed by Simon Hunt from Stephen Pasture Seeds.

Sub-Tropical species suited to East Gippsland, their management, sowing and establishment was thoroughly covered by Bob McGufficke, Inverell, NSW Industry & Investment. John Gallienne, Agricultural Consultant, Warragul spoke about fertiliser, lime, gypsum and trace element requirements for East Gippsland, the need to have a soil test done by a reputable laboratory and interpretation done taking into account the stocking rate run on the property and the need to test the livestock for certain trace element deficiencies. The final speaker was Leo Hamilton, farm consultant from Bairnsdale. Leo spoke on the research and trial

work he has done on the lack of Sub Clover vigour and lack of sub clover nodulation in pastures in parts of East Gippsland, and the effects of trace elements and other factors affecting this.

A paddock walk and inspection of Premier Digit grass, a sub tropical species was held on Rick Robertson's property "Gracemere" in the afternoon. There was a great deal of interest in the Premier digit grass, Rick spoke on the method of sowing and his management over the 18 months since the paddock was sown. A feed test was taken in February this year and the Premier digit grass came back with a protein of 22% and energy of 10 MJ/kg ME. Bob McGufficke, the keynote speaker on sub tropicals provided some valuable input to the discussion in the paddock as well.

One of the key messages portrayed by three of the speakers was that deep rooted perennial species are slower to establish and that a weed free and fine seed bed needs to be prepared. Care needs to be taken when sowing that the seed is not sown too deep, and that the soil temperature is not too cold. Once the pasture has germinated, constant monitoring for weeds and insect pests needs to occur.

The people present on the day consisted mainly of local sheep, lamb and beef producers from the Bairnsdale district and some from as far away as Yarram, Sale and Stratford. There were many questions posed to the speakers on the day. The feedback from some of the farmers who attended has been that it was an excellent day all round.

Evaluation

Evaluations were completed at each pasture update and the summarised account is included in table 1*

74 % of all participants completed the pasture update evaluation. Each evaluation was individualised to each pasture update to cover each topic covered and reference to the key theme. Each participant was asked which area of pasture industry they worked in, if a primary producer they were asked primary stock source (lamb / beef / wool) and size of establishment. Agribusiness participants were asked which area of pasture they worked (extension/ education/ retail and R&D)

Most presentations had positive comments. The most successful presentations kept to the theme of the day and of the few low score presentations where the result of original speaker unable to attend at the last moment due to illness. Each provided presentation but without the inside knowledge the fluidity of information was affected.

A key point raised at all updates was a strong request for a continuation of pasture update forums to be held. Publication of notes of all updates be made available. Early Spring and Autumn were the preferred time for future updates to be held.

Results

We had a total of 387 participants attend the pasture update series, with 78% being primary producers 15% Agribusiness and 7% a combination of Education Media and undisclosed interest.

23 new members joined the Grassland Society, 1 corporate membership and 15 new student members.

We formed productive partnerships with 12 organisations and a further 4 localised groups of EverGraze

Pasture Updates were held in Victoria and Tasmania; an additional event was also held in South Australia that was not part of this series.

Discussion / Conclusion

The Pasture Update series was successful at engaging local pasture industry with current technical information with local relevance. Each partnership worked to provide balance of information and helped in engaging pastoralists who had previously not attended a Grassland Society event.

Critical points of being aware of clashes with other events such as when the Euroa event clashed with a much larger field day. Marketing initially was smaller localised to members and partnership members

Grassland Society members and partner organisation memberships this was expanded to the great community and benefited from the direct contact and information provided by the variety of pasture experts delivery of localised information. Our pastoralists were able to have first hand technical knowledge and contribute to the forum highlighting localised situations, our agribusiness providers were able to gain valuable training for staff on the latest developments relating directly to the regional requirements. In some cases presentations could be transplanted to other regions with only slight modifications for local conditions.

Appendices

Media Releases



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

GRASSLAND SOCIETY AND PPS PRESENT PASTURE UPDATE SEMINAR IN ARARAT

Not only should farmers be watching the skies for the latest weather, they should also play detective and be making evidence-based decisions, a pastures update conference at Ararat has been told.

Jim Virgona from Charles Sturt University told the July 15 conference hosted by the Grassland Society of Southern Australia and Perennial Pasture Systems that too many farmers were making decisions based on nothing more than hearsay and good intentions.

Dr Virgona, a senior lecturer in agronomy, said evidence needed to play a central role in decision making for farmers, just as it does for other sectors.

“We don’t have to become statisticians to develop a critical eye when looking at scientific results – but if we don’t we will always be easily taken in by those who, purposely or otherwise, desire to mislead us,” he said.

Dr Virgona said evaluating evidence required subjective judgment but there were definite rules that could be followed.

Grassland Society president and agricultural consultant Tim Prance told the group about the advantages of using cocksfoot.

Mr Prance said cocksfoot is highly tolerant of acid soils, very tolerant of high soil aluminium levels, has an aggressive, relatively shallow root system, can be very drought tolerant, is a hardy perennial grass, moderately frost tolerant, tolerant of many common pasture pests and diseases, and is relatively easy to establish.

He said there were some negatives, such as not being tolerant to waterlogging and paddocks becoming clumpy or accumulating dead leaves, but most of these could be overcome by grazing management.

“Cocksfoot is reasonably easy to control with grazing. Set stocking, especially with sheep during summer, will eliminate cocksfoot from a pasture, whilst rotational grazing with long spells in spring will increase cocksfoot dominance,” Mr Prance said.

“Cocksfoot is sown on low fertility soils, and we know that as soil fertility increases, digestibility also increases, so if you are concerned about poor livestock performance on cocksfoot pastures, then check soil P levels.

Nearly 40 farmers and service providers attended the update was held at the Gum San Chinese Heritage Centre and has been supported by the Ararat Rural City Council.

Also speaking at the event were Dr Sean Mason from the University of Adelaide on new technology to measure soil phosphorous, and consulting agronomist Andrew Speirs who presented preliminary results from the first year of perennial pasture trials being conducted by PPS in the upper Wimmera region as well as other trials conducted throughout Western Victoria.

Perennial Pasture Systems project manager Rob Shea chaired a panel discussion on perennial pastures and said there was strong interest and participation.

The Ararat event was the first in a series of eight pasture update conferences to be staged by the society over the next 12 months.



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

FARMERS TO LEARN HOW TO CONDUCT SCIENTIFIC TRIALS AT GRASSLAND SOCIETY PASTURES UPDATE

Farmers will learn about conducting their own scientific trials to obtain credible data for soil maintenance at a Grassland Society Pasture Update at Casterton on September 1.

Agricultural consultant Cam Nicholson will talk about alternative fertilisers and biological products and how farmers can set up their own tests and validate the results.

Mr Nicholson said suppliers often offer anecdotal case studies about their products but the rigour used in analysis often wasn't strong and the testing not necessarily applicable to local farmers.

“There are emerging opportunities for farmers to conduct their own scientific trials in conjunction with consultants,” he said.

“Farmers need results that are applicable to their soil types and their conditions. Some case study from New South Wales doesn’t mean anything to a farmer in south-west Victoria.”

For the past three years Mr Nicholson has been involved with a Woody Yaloak Catchment Group project funded by Caring for our Country where the impact of different fertilisers has been assessed.

Trials on eight sites between Ballarat and Cressy have focused on alternative fertilisers that farmers were interested in using, including pig and chook manure, biosolids, compost tea and seaweed extract.

The trials compared use of these alternative fertilisers to traditional products and a ‘do nothing’ control site.

“We found that manures work well with the biggest response in the first year,” Mr Nicholson said. “After three years there has been a decline, which is to be expected, so it is probably time for another application.”

Some sites using standard fertilisers haven’t seen the expected results and more testing will be done to determine why.

Mr Nicholson said the trials were designed to help farmers get credible local results to compare additives.

“We look at the composition, quality and quantity of growth and make comparisons. Farmers can do the set-up themselves and then just get a little bit of help from consultants in statistical analysis.

“For farmers to have credible research from their own pastures is incredibly powerful.”

Mr Nicholson will explain at the Pasture Update the steps farmers can take to set up trials on their properties.

The event is being staged at the Casterton Golf Club by the Grassland Society of Southern Australia in partnership with the Glenelg Hopkins CMA.

The program will also include Dr Sean Mason from the University of Adelaide on new soil phosphorous tests, soil testing and nutrient budgeting presented by Andrew Speirs, evidence-based agriculture presented by consultant and Grassland Society president Tim Prance, panel discussions and visits to local farms to insect phalaris/ocksfoot and Lucerne trials.

The event starts at 9.45am and registrations can be made through Andrew Spiers, MS&A, 32 Henty Street, Casterton or phone 0428 685172.

Information about the Casterton update and future events can be obtained from the GSSA office on (03) 5433 5324, email office@grasslands.org.au or the website www.grasslands.org.au.



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

PASTURE UPDATE TO HEAR OF ALTERNATIVE FERTILISER TRIALS

A pasture update at Tallangatta on March 28 will advise local rural producers and agribusinesses to tread carefully when introducing new alternatives to traditional phosphorous fertilisers.

The results of recent trials of alternatives to fertilisers at Holbrook, Yass and Ballarat will be outlined at the update.

Pasture research agronomist and soil scientist Jeff Hirth, who will speak at the update, said the trials showed that alternative fertilisers were inconsistent in their responses.

“It concerns me that some producers might stop using conventional fertilisers and put alternatives across their entire farms,” Dr Hirth said.

“What they should do is trial new products on half a paddock and see how they go, not totally change their system in one go.”

The Pasture Update will be hosted by the Grassland Society of Southern Australia at the Tallangatta Memorial Hall on Wednesday March 28. It will follow the theme of ‘Back to basics: getting your pastures to work for you’.

Dr Hirth said the trials involved low fertility native pastures, high fertility phalaris pastures and mixed farming crops and pastures.

A range of alternative fertilisers were trialled, including organic wastes, manures, composts and natural minerals, as well as biological products claimed to stimulate soil biological activity and/or root and plant growth.

“The issue with some alternatives is that sometimes that the quality of their source material varies, while other alternatives rely on homeopathic effects and it is, therefore, difficult to get consistency,” Dr Hirth said.

Dr Hirth said producers became more inclined to look at alternatives after the price of conventional fertilisers escalated in 2008.

“Producers need to see a dollar return for their investment but they need to use common sense and not throw all their eggs into the one basket. Put something new on half a paddock and then review how that has worked after a season before going across the whole farm.”

Other topics on the program include five easy steps to phosphorus fertility, establishing and maintaining perennial pastures, what is happening with phalaris cultivars?, target stocking rates for district soils and rainfalls and grazing for productive and healthy livestock.

The event is being organised in partnership with the Mitta to Murray Landcare Network.

People wishing to attend can contact the Grassland Society office on (03) 5433 5324, email office@grasslands.org.au or the website www.grasslands.org.au.

The society is hosting a series of eight pasture updates across south-east Australia.



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

GRASSLAND SOCIETY AND PPS PRESENT MLA PASTURE UPDATE SEMINAR IN ARARAT

Not only should farmers be watching the skies for the latest weather, they should also play detective and be making evidence-based decisions, an MLA pastures update conference at Ararat has been told.

Jim Virgona from Charles Sturt University told the July 15 conference hosted by the Grassland Society of Southern Australia and Perennial Pasture Systems that too many farmers were making decisions based on nothing more than hearsay and good intentions.

Dr Virgona, a senior lecturer in agronomy, said evidence needed to play a central role in decision making for farmers, just as it does for other sectors.

“We don’t have to become statisticians to develop a critical eye when looking at scientific results – but if we don’t we will always be easily taken in by those who, purposely or otherwise, desire to mislead us,” he said.

Dr Virgona said evaluating evidence required subjective judgment but there were definite rules that could be followed.

Some of these rules include making sure there is a control treatment – either nil or a district practise - ensuring treatments are replicated (repeated) in a randomised fashion and checking that a basic statistical analysis has been undertaken. “If there is no evidence of statistical analysis then the data should be ignored,” he said.

Grassland Society president and agricultural consultant Tim Prance told the conference about the advantages of using cocksfoot.

Mr Prance said cocksfoot is highly tolerant of acid soils, very tolerant of high soil aluminium levels, has an aggressive, relatively shallow root system, can be very drought tolerant, is a hardy perennial grass, moderately to highly frost tolerant, tolerant of many common pasture pests and diseases, and is relatively easy to establish.

He said there were some negatives, such as not being tolerant to waterlogging and paddocks becoming clumpy or accumulating dead leaves, but most of these could be overcome by grazing management.

“Cocksfoot is reasonably easy to control with grazing. Set stocking, especially with sheep during summer, will eliminate cocksfoot from a pasture, whilst rotational grazing with long spells in late spring and summer will increase cocksfoot dominance,” Mr Prance said.

“Cocksfoot is sown on low fertility soils, and we know that as soil fertility increases, digestibility also increases, so if you are concerned about poor livestock performance on cocksfoot pastures, then check soil P levels.

Nearly 40 farmers and service providers attended the update which was held at the Gum San Chinese Heritage Centre, and supported by the Ararat Rural City Council.

Also speaking at the event were Dr Sean Mason from the University of Adelaide on the new DGT (Diffuse gradients in thin films) technology to measure soil phosphorous, and consulting agronomist Andrew Speirs who presented preliminary results from the first year of perennial pasture trials being conducted by PPS in the upper Wimmera region as well as other trials conducted throughout Western Victoria.

Perennial Pasture Systems project manager Rob Shea chaired a panel discussion on perennial pastures and said there was strong interest and participation.

The Ararat event was the first in a series of eight MLA pasture update conferences to be staged by the society over the next 12 months. The next update will be at Casterton on September 1. For more details do to www.grasslands.org.au.



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

NEW GRASSLAND SOCIETY BRANCH FOR CENTRAL VICTORIA

The Grassland Society of Southern Australia is on the move with the formation of a new branch in the Central Ranges region.

It is the first time the Society has launched a branch for many years and reflects the strong status of the organisation.

The branch covers an area west of Hume Highway, north of Melbourne, south of Bendigo and east of Ballarat.

Baynton farmer Gerard Ryan has been elected the inaugural branch chairman.

Mr Ryan said there was strong interest from farmers in the area about holding events to share information and technology relating to grassland farming.

“There hasn’t been much happening so we thought it would be good to form a branch specifically for this area,” he said.

“We called a meeting and there was strong support for forming a new branch.”

The branch plans to hold four events each year and will start with a Pastures Update at Kyneton on September 23.

“We have a good committee of about 10 people so we hope to remain active,” Mr Ryan said.

Mr Ryan has been a member of the Grassland Society for the past 30 years while he has grown his prime lamb and merino farming property between Kyneton and Heathcote.

“The Society is a network of researchers, agricultural professionals and farmers interested in improving productivity of grass land farming to exchange information and knowledge from research, experimental work and practical experience.

“This region along the Great Dividing Range has acidic soil types and hilly terrain so there is good reason to have our own branch to focus on our specific needs.”

Grassland Society of Southern Australia Executive Officer Clare de Kok said the formation of a new branch in the area was a good reflection of interest in the Society.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES GERARD RYAN 5423 7261



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

FARMERS TO LEARN ABOUT INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT AT GRASSLAND SOCIETY PASTURES UPDATE

Insect pest numbers are at their lowest spring levels for several years but farmers are being warned not to become complacent.

Representatives from **cesar** will address a Grassland Society Pasture Update at Kyneton on September 23 about the benefits of integrated pest management.

The program will give farmers advice on how to properly identify pest insects and how to develop a holistic approach to tackling problem pests.

cesar Sustainable Agriculture consultant Stuart McColl said pest numbers were at their lowest for at least many years which was good news for farmers.

“Seasonal weather conditions don’t appear to have been conducive to insects but there will be a build up in spring with the warmer weather,” he said. “In particular, farmers should start to look out for aphids, caterpillars and snails, but at the same time be careful not to spray the good insects.

“There are more beneficial than bad insects. A vast amount of the insects seen in paddocks are not pests to crops and pastures,” he said.

“Insecticides are often not selective and when sprayed may kill many beneficial insects as well as the pests targeted. In some cases, chemical sprays are simply a waste of time and money.”

Mr McColl said farmers should properly identify insects and try to attain a good idea of their relative abundance across the paddock, rather than “just start spraying when they see a pest”.

“Incorrect identification of pests is a common problem for farmers who haven’t been trained in the field,” he said.

cesar advocates an integrated pest management system which includes chemical spraying but takes a holistic approach involving cultural controls, such as weed control, crop rotations and altering seeding rates and time of sowing when possible.

“The timing of any chemical application can also be very important. You need to be smart in how you use chemicals and it is wise to seek expert advice,” Mr McColl said.

“It is important to have chemicals as part of your plan but you must use them wisely. For example if the red-legged earth mite is a common pest, farmers should now be starting to consider spring spraying to achieve some control for next autumn,” he said.

The update will be held at the Kyneton racecourse starting at 9am

Information about the Kyneton update and future events can be obtained from the GSSA office on (03) 5433 5324, email office@grasslands.org.au or the website www.grasslands.org.au.



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

PASTURE UPDATE TO HEAR OF STUDY INTO LAMB EATING QUALITY

A Tasmanian pasture update on April 27 will find out how one producer predicts the Australian farm lamb industry can increase profit through genetics without downgrading eating quality.

Andrew Heinrich, of Parndana on Kangaroo Island, will present the findings of his Nuffield Scholarship study into the future of lamb production when the Grassland Society of Southern Australia hosts an MLA Pasture Update.

Mr Heinrich said the study was prompted by his concern about “pushing too hard” in the genetics field.

However, an international review has convinced him

“I was concerned that we were going too lean but now I am very confident we are going down the right track,” he said.

The Grassland Society of Southern Australia is hosting an MLA Pasture Update at

People wishing to attend can contact the GSSA office on (03) 5433 5324, email office@grasslands.org.au or the website www.grasslands.org.au.

The Grassland Society is hosting a series of eight pasture updates across south-east Australia.



Grassland Society of Southern Australia Inc

MEDIA RELEASE

PASTURE UPDATE TO VISIT TRIAL SITES

Tasmanian producers are being encouraged to replace poorly-adapted traditional grass species with new varieties that have proven successful in changing local conditions.

A 'Pastures for Persistence and Productivity' update hosted by the Tasmanian branch of the Grassland Association of Southern Australia on April 27 will give rural producers and agribusinesses an opportunity to see the success of new species in local trials.

The update will feature tours of the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) Burlington trial site at Cressy and the Strowan site at Nile.

The research plots have measured differences in legume and grass compatibility across a range of companion plantings to determine which species are best suited to growing in lower rainfall regions.

TIA forage and pasture program chief investigator Eric Hall said seeing the trial results would give farmers more confidence to change to more suitable species.

"Because of our changing rainfall patterns, some species such as perennial ryegrass and white clover are no longer well adapted to local dryland conditions," Mr Hall said.

"Some old favourites such as phalaris and lucerne are still okay but new species of long lived perennial grasses and legumes, chicory and plantain are emerging as good options.

Mr Hall said Tasmania had been through the worst drought in memory and farmers and advisors should consider what works in a changing climate.

"The trial site is well established and it will be a good opportunity for farmers to see different species in the ground."

The site includes seven different species and 11 different legumes and herbs.

Mr Hall said producers could also learn about the competitive interaction of different species. "There is a good indication that some mixtures shouldn't be sown together," he said.

The pasture update, one of a series of eight being run by the Grassland Society on behalf of Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), will also feature an overview from Peter Ball from the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment about Tasmanian grazing

operations, Rowan Smith from TIA speaking about the Tasmanian pasture composition study, Rob Winter from Heritage Seeds on establishing new pastures and David Squibb from Wrightson Seeds on grazing new pastures for long term productivity and persistency.

The event, the only one being held in Tasmania, is being presented with support from MLA and in partnership with Impact Fertilisers.

People wishing to attend can contact David Squibb on 0425 790222 or Sarah Campbell 0417 574307.

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M e d i a M a s t e r s V i c

Summary of pasture update series evaluations & key comments by participants and conveners

	Avg. / 10	Notes - comments
Ararat - Attendees 41		
Dr Jim Virgona, Charles Sturt University	8.2	
<i>Evidence based agriculture</i>		Well presented and well received, many questions and participation by participants
Dr Sean Mason, University of Adelaide	4.8	
<i>Use of DGT to measure soil phosphorous</i>		Seans presentation was very technical and raised more questions than answers at the moment
Tim Prance, Tim Prance Consulting	7.8	
<i>Cocksfoot cultivars whats new.</i>		Very Knowledgeable on cocksfoot
Andrew Speirs, MSA	8.3	
<i>Local pasture trials</i>		Well established trials, well presented
Rob Shea, Perennial Pasture Systems		
<i>Place of perennial pastures in grazing systems</i>	8.3	Rob Led the discussion of a very enthusiastic group
		Many ideas for future updates, extensive list of topics from participants
Casterton - Attendees 45		
Glenelg Hopkins, CMA	8.2	
About the Catchment Management Authority		Many participants had prior knowledge of Glenelg Hopkins,CMA
Cam Nicholson, Woody Yaloak Catchment Group	8.6	
Effective nutrient sources and biological products and how farmers can set up their own trials and validate the results. For the past three years, the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has been exploring the impact of different fertilisers as part of a project funded by Caring for Our Country. Cam will talk about how farmers can set up simple trials on their own pastures to look at the composition, quality and quantity of growth and make useful comparisons.		Very well received many questions and great presentation.
Dr Sean Mason, University of Adelaide	3	Sean was injured and did not attend his paper was presented by Andrew Speirs with no prior notice

New Technology and how to measure soil phosphorous.		
Tim Prance, Tim Prance Rural Consulting	7	
Evidence-based agriculture - Does pseudo science in areas such as soil nutrition pose a threat to farming, farm productivity and profitability?		Presented well and active discussion
Andrew Speirs, MS&A Casterton	8	
Are all perennial pasture varieties the same and how do we make a choice?		Well received presentation, many questions on perennial pastures and cultivars
Panel discussion and Question Time	N/A	
Including discussion about pasture research and extension needs in the region and MLA tools available to producers.		
Site visits	N/A	
Seedmark Trial exploring phalaris/cockfoot varieties under grazing over four years at the Tindall family farm, Featherstone Haugh Rd, Muntham.		This site visit created a lot of continued discussion on cultivar varieties, Tim Prance and Andrew Speirs presentations earlier in the day had presented questions that the field site visit help answer
SARDI Lucerne Trial at David Robertson's property, "Austral Park," Coleraine.		
Kyneton - Attendees 45		
Cam Nicholson - Woody Yaloak Catchment Group	8.3	
Issues around alternative fertilisers and how do you assess how they work for you.		Many Questions and Cameron is a very knowledgeable presenter
Stuart McColl - Cesar Consulting	4	
Integrated Pest Management, in pastures. What we need to be looking out for this spring.		Many participants did not relate to the presentation, those who did had several questions
Allen Newman - Research Manager Heritage Seeds	7.5	
Developing acid soil and grazing tolerant lucerne's for South Eastern Australia.		Created much discussion on current research into Acid tolerance
Arrive at the O'Sullivan's property "Theadon", Pastoria	N/A	
Lisa Warn, Senior Consultant & Agronomist, Mackinnon Group, University of Melbourne	7.6	

EverGraze supporting site – pasture species for prime lamb production and establishment of phalaris on acid soils.		Lisa presented Pasture Picker as a tool for farmers to using relevance to variable soils in the area
Michael O'Sullivan, producer "Theadon", Pastoria.	N/A	
Michael Joss, Territory Manager, Seedmark	6.4	Good explanation on the trail site - Still at early stage many participants would like to see site again in the Autumn
Perennial pasture species trial – featuring varieties of phalaris, cocksfoot, fescue and perennial ryegrass.		
Lisa Warn, Mackinnon	8.7	
Using Poultry litter as an alternative fertiliser.		Organics good support. Had a strong interest in trial results
Euroa - Attendees 16		
		Poor attendance due to clashing date Henty Field day, Another day organised in Spring
Demonstration Site	N/A	
Leave hall and head to John Kelly's MLA Producer Demonstration Site - overview of the day to be done on the bus.		
Alison Desmond • DPI Benella	8	
MLA PDS - Persistent and productive perennial pastures - latest trial results.		
Overview of EverGraze and the Grassland Society of Southern Aust	N/A	
Thanks to sponsors and timeline for the remainder of the day.		
Anita Morant • DPI Hamilton, Victorian EverGraze Extension Co- ordinator	8	
Lucerne - The EverGraze Experience and Alternatives - EverGraze Wagga Proof Site results.		
Kate Sargeant • National EverGraze Extension Leader	8	
Alternatives to lucerne - includes time for questions.		
Jane Court • DPI Seymour	8.2	
Using Grass Gro to investigate the effect of changing climates on livestock systems - includes time for questions.		
Cam Nicholson • Woody Yaloak Catchment Group	8.8	
Issues around alternative fertilisers and how do you assess how they work for you.		

Tallangatta - Attendees 63		
Alternatives to phosphorus fertiliser; any prospects?	8.5	
Summary of recent trials. Jeff Hirth, Springhurst.		
Phosphorus fertility - the key to pasture productivity	8.1	
The five easy steps to P fertilisation. Nigel Phillips, NSW DPI, Wagga		Was a good presentation
Establishing and maintaining perennial pastures.	7.8	
Includes selection of pasture species (Pasture Picker) and grazing management principles. Lisa Warn, Mackinnon Project, Werribee.		
What is happening with phalaris cultivars?	2	Was a last minute withdrawal Jeff Hirth presented
Holdfast GT & Advance AT phalaris in this district? Seed Mark speaker.		
Target stocking rates for local soils and rainfalls.	5.8	
What should producers be aiming for and how to achieve/maintain higher stocking rates. Discussion of the Feed Demand Calculator. Doug Alcock, NSW DPI, Cooma.		
Animal health – soil health.	5.1	
Dr Jeff Cave, DPI Vic, Wodonga.		Good but felt focus was missing on more serious areas of animal health
Boort - Attendees 73		
Tim Leeming		
What can good pastures achieve	8.8	Good presentation with many questions, entertaining presenter.
Case Study		
Local farmer viewpoint. Pasture, purpose, management results	7.6	A good follow on from Tim demonstrating more local angle of business practice variant
Kieran Ransom	7.5	
Managing the key risks of farming; climate, weather and the price variability of grains, meat and wool		

There are many farming systems or rotations of grains and sheep in use on North-Central Victorian farms. This presentation compares the profitability of intensive cropping versus mixed farms of crops and lucerne pasture as well as crops and annual pastures		
Rob Fisher, Grain & Graze VICC	8.1	
Cereal Fodder Crops		Active discussion held, positive
Garry Armstrong, DPI	7.9	
Case study – Nullawil PDS site		
Steve Clarke, DPI	7.8	
Perennial Pastures		
Case Study – Bealiba pasture trial		
Dean Harrington, Harrington Ag Consulting	8	
Brassica fodder crops		Interesting presentation, new developments on the way for plant selection
Jason Emms, FFI CRC	8.2	
Low rainfall options		Showed great knowledge and presented well many questions and new plant selector guide
Perennial Shrubs – Enrich		
Q&A with panel of experts & seed companies	9	
Facilitated by Damian Jones, DPI		Good participant interaction and discussion, well formed part of program brought it all together
What further information do farmers need to know about pastures?		
Dean Harrington, Harrington Ag Consulting	8.2	
How to decide what is the next pasture step		
Setting up your own on-farm trials		
Cressy, Tasmania - Attendees 52		
Peter Ball (DPIPWE)	8.1	
Overview of Tasmanian grazing operations		Key to presentation Persistence of pasture clover to coexist with pasture grasses
Rowan Smith (TIA)	6.9	
Review of Tasmanian Pasture Composition study – what do Tasmanian pastures currently contain?		

Rob Winter (Heritage Seeds)	5.5	
Presentation on establishing new pastures (both economics and methods)		Economic and methods, very good discussions
Brian Field (TIA)	5.2	
Conduct walk through cultivar plots.		
David Squibb (Wrightson Seeds)	8.4	
Presentation on grazing new pastures.		Well presented many questions
Peter Ball	N/A	
Review of first session.		
Ian Morrison	N/A	
BBQ Lunch courtesy of Impact Fertilisers.		
Eric Hall (TIA)	8.8	
Inspect replicated cultivar trials.		Good first hand knowledge
Greg Sheather (Manager “Strowan”)	N/A	
Discussions on new cultivars and compatibility of various cultivars.		Good discussion by all participants, good ending to the day
Bairnsdale - Attendees 55		
Dr Bob Reid/Robert Dent, Tasglobal seeds. Deep Rooted perennial species - breeding and germplasm collection of drought tolerant Hispanic Cocksfoot varieties, phalaris & perennial clovers suited to the east Gippsland environment.	8	
Simon Hunt, Stephen Pasture Seeds. Stratford. Mediterranean (Winter Active) Tall Fescue, a productive and persistent pasture, suited to prime lamb, merino and beef cattle enterprises in east Gippsland.	7.9	Robert Dent, highly topical good presenter
John Gallienne, Agricultural Consultant Warragul. Fertiliser and Trace Elements requirements for pastures and livestock in east Gippsland.	8.8	Seed cultivars for prime lamb, well presented
Bob McGufficke, NSW Dept. Ag. Inverell, NSW Tropical/sub tropical pastures (C4 species), and their suitability to the east Gippsland environment, establishment and management.	9.5	Local knowledge on use of tropical pastures

Leo Hamilton Consultant Bairnsdale. What's happening with sub clover in parts of east Gippsland, research findings into nitrogen fixation and rhizobia.	8.1	Very well presented was highlight of day
Paddock Inspection Paddock inspection at Rick Robertson's property – Premier digit grass- Tropical variety	N/A	Importance of corrective preparation and timely sowing and soil depth is critical