

Best Practice for Grazing.

with Mick Alexander



Cows sequester carbon

Your cattle are your most important tool to use in managing for climate variability.

Graziers need to become savvy about how cows can manage for climate change and sequestration of carbon. This knowledge and practice will make or break your business in the future.

For many years, the environmental lobby groups (not our industry groups) and the mining industry have had more control with developing government policy than our rural industry groups. Mining is a short term industry which swings in destroys the biodiversity, adds to the CO₂ in the atmosphere and creates havoc for future food production. The grazing industry has the ability to sequester huge amounts of carbon and provide even more food for the world in the process. Agreed, the two industries must work together at some level, but only grazing can be sustainable and must be nurtured. When the coal and other minerals are all eventually mined, this land must still be able to provide food for the world.

I am completely lost as to how rural communities are being ignored in this debate when two of the most important issues being discussed in Australia in the past five years have been climate change and the environment. Graziers are managing the majority of the land surface in this country, which has the biggest impact on our environment. Is the real message not getting across to the urban community or the governments? The grazing industry today is a factory run on solar energy, capturing carbon for use by plants and producing meat and fibre products for the world. Yes, this is a vast factory with the meat and fibre being produced from the atmosphere. The factory formula – In school, most of us learned about photosynthesis being the conversion of sunlight energy and carbon dioxide into plant food and oxygen. The formula is $6\text{CO}_2 + 6\text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{Sunlight absorbed} = \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 + 6\text{O}_2$.

The C₆H₁₂O₆ chain is a carbohydrate which is the building block of all plants and the oxygen is released to the atmosphere for living

organisms to breathe. Now in this process, there is no carbon released to the atmosphere. A portion is used in building cells in plants (green leaf, roots and shoots) and part is used to feed microbes and the remainder is pumped into the soil as carbon forms. This remainder is some of the sequestered carbon.

The levels of carbon in your soil will directly impact on the amount of water your soils can store and the fertility of your soils. Now the way in which you manage your cows in your paddocks and the grazing system you use will determine the health of your pasture, the amount of carbon being sequestered in any cycle and the ability to withstand variable climatic conditions. Grazed and rested plants are in effect, carbon pumps, which convert carbon into plant material and store it underground. The plants need to be lushly growing diverse ecosystems that are grazed to keep them in phase 2.

Your cows are the tools which are used to graze the pasture to the ideal height and then allow it to rest and recover, thereby pumping more carbon. Each grazing and resting phase will grow more roots and shoots and also pump more carbon into the soil. The debate still rages as to how much carbon can be sequestered in various soils, as scientists simply can't agree on who's science is best. However, the innovators are leading the way and the scientists are playing catch-up. The Rotational Grazing Field Day which was to be held at "Albeni" Springsure, has been postponed to the 9th December. For more info ring 07 4938 3919.

If you would like to learn more, we will be presenting the two day "The Technology of Growing Grass" workshop at Emerald on the 2nd and 3rd December, Moura on the 7th and 8th December and Goondiwindi on the 15th and 16th December. Mick is the Principal of Grazing BestPrac, Yeppoon, and works with innovative farming and grazing families in Qld and NSW. For more information, contact Cathe or Noela on 4938 3919 or 0438 395 255.



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Emerald – 2nd & 3rd December

Moura – 7th & 8th December

Goondiwindi – 15th & 16th December

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