

# Grass trial to assess grazing best-practice

Well known grazing educators, Mick Alexander and Shane Krafft of Grazing BestPrac has established the first two on-farm research sites to assess the ideal timing of grazing (best practice) in central Queensland. The trials are being run by Grazing BestPrac as a tool to help local graziers to better understand the impact of various grazing practices. Mr Alexander said, the most important aspect of our industry is the management of our soils and our pasture to minimise the impact of climate change. However it is rare to find hands on research being done in the region to assess grazing management.

Grazing BestPrac have had many requests to set up trials in the past year to assess the value of free feed and the pasture recovery

not know where to begin. In fact, most forward thinking graziers realise the old ways are not working and want support to make changes, but also want some data to demonstrate the best way to go. The trials (grass plots) have been established on two properties at Ridgeland and Thangool, to compare a number of different grazing models and to give local groups their own research sites.

The first of the new trials has been established at "Bindaree", Garnant (near Ridgeland, 40 kilometers west of Rockhampton). Local grazier, Trevor Jones, was excited to finally establish the trial in December, to compare some of the new ideas on grazing management. Mr Jones said, he had been working closely with

grass and bagging, drying and weighing it according to the program. One of the

number of animals a property can run, without understanding the real science and

create the optimal conditions to grow grass. In this grazing trial, we are comparing:

1. Light graze
2. Moderate graze
3. Heavy graze
4. No Graze

The main pasture base is a native pasture mix, including Queensland Bluegrass, Kangaroo Grass, Black Spear Grass and Indian Couch, with several annual species. The trial will be completed in late May with the final cut and weighing sessions and the collation of the results for each



Trevor Jones Bindaree Garnant

phase. Recent research has shown, most primary producers would like to grow more grass and have healthier pastures, but do

Mick Alexander to design the trial and to make sure it was well managed. Then every few weeks, we've been cutting the



Trevor Jones collecting grass samples in the trial

important outcomes so far is that the plots which were not cut at all, have already hayed off, while the ones being cut are still actively growing. This research is important to have as a guide for our own paddock decisions. He continued, I've had a mob of breeders in a four paddock rotation for four years and we are now splitting another paddock up so we can rotate our steers as well.

Mr Alexander continued, the reason we decided to undertake this research was because we could not see any other group being bothered to carry out what would be deemed to be basic research, which should have been done in the past. And it would have taken another couple of years to organise and find the funds to pay staff. We need to conduct this research before government decide to place a limit on the

it is probably better to be producer driven and that way the results are locally owned.

For many years, producers have argued the benefits of rotational grazing versus a continuous grazing model and it has divided the industry. Every producer and extension officer in the land has an opinion and believes they are right. Obviously, there is an ideal grazing methodology and we want to find out which is the most appropriate to improve the health of our pasture, soil and livestock. Mr Alexander commented that the science of grazing management has come a long way in the past 5 - 10 years and we need to begin utilising that knowledge. He said, sound grazing management is fairly simple, you just need to know how to



Comparison between light and heavy graze in the trial

methodology. Mr Jones said the trial is simulating patch grazing, with some areas being overgrazed and some areas being lightly or not grazed at all and some areas being grazed correctly.



Pasture assessment plots on Bindaree Garnant.

## Why does grass grow so well in cattle yards?

By Mick Alexander

The cattle yards are the best example of rotational grazing principals working on most



properties. This is the best time of year to inspect your paddocks to compare the effect of resting pasture, herd effect and grazing density. And the best place to compare it to is the cattle yards. Most people would expect that the stock yards would be the most devastated part of the farm because hundreds if not thousands of head of cattle trample the ground and destroy the soil structure each year. This practice is simply mimicking the natural cycle of large herds grazing an area and moving on to another area once feed runs out.

True, they do cause a large impact on the soil if mismanaged, but they also do something which is totally natural in a strange kind of way, if well managed. Our stockyards are trampled heavily for a few weeks and then rested for a long period. The biggest impact will be at branding and then at weaning for a few weeks. That means the cattle yards are an extreme method of rotational grazing (high density/ short duration), which if managed for rest will turn country around in a very short period of time.

Cattle in stock yards also deliver concentrated



dung and urine to the soil to kick start the mineral cycle and add nutrients to the soil. The trampling action incorporates the grass and weeds which are growing in the yards and mulch them into the soil, so the microbes are being fed for the next season. If we also feed weaners in the yards, we are adding a larger organic base to the soil as stock will often trample much of the hay back into the soil as well. All in all, this one method should be used as a standalone concept to rehabilitate scalded areas and bare gullies.

The photographs are inside and outside the stockyards at Marlborough.

- In a set stocked paddock, the pasture base is mostly Indian couch and a large number of broad leaf weeds (filling the bare space) and
- Inside the yards, is a dense sward of Buffel grass, Green Panic and Rhodes Grass, with very few weeds. The few Parthenium weeds are mostly shaded out by the pasture.



The yards have been locked up for four months, since the rain and allowed to recover. This example is hard to accept unless someone points it out to you. It is even less of an issue if you are in a good season and have got plenty of grass. This and many other exciting grazing management tools will be discussed at the upcoming "Technology of Growing Grass" workshops, being held at Tambo 6th and 7th May, Barcaldine 10th and 11th may, Emerald 17th and 18th May and Wandoan 27th and 28th May. For more information, on the "Technology of Growing Grass" workshops or for more grazing management information, contact Noela on 0749 383919 or Shane on 4995 8330.

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