

Increasing fodder yields with forage cereals and annual ryegrass

The dry seasons and lack of easily sourced and expensive fodder has resulted in a renewed interest in forage cereal crops in recent years. As a result farmers have sought to reduce their exposure to high prices and unpredictable fodder availability by increasing the production of their own supplementary fodder from home-grown feed. This feed may be grown on the home farm or from nearby run-off blocks.

For annual ryegrass, farmers and contractors have also been trying out increased sowing rates and seed treatments of ryegrasses to lift pasture production and to overcome weed problems after establishment.

Although forage cereals have been tried in the past with variable success, their further development through breeding may prove very worthwhile in many situations in the current conditions.

To provide further information on forage cereals suited to the dairy industry, Joe Jacobs of Project 3030 has been carrying out much research into both forage cereals, summer crops and annual ryegrasses at DemoDairy.

Joe has tried to answer many questions related to establishing, growing, grazing and harvesting a range of forage cereals, and recently legume/cereal mixes. When and how often can forage cereals be grazed? What are the different characteristics of the various species (oats, wheat, barley and triticale) and some cultivars within each? What potential do they have as a feed for dairy cattle? When should they be cut for silage? What are the trade offs between yield and nutritive value? Can the nutritive value of cereals be increased by including other species such as legumes? Etc.

Joe investigated increasing ryegrass sowing rates in 2007. He also has some insights into the possible effects of seed treatment on establishment and early pasture production from 2008 work.

Project 3030 is holding a specific Discussion Day to focus solely on when, where and how forage cereals may fit into dairy farm systems along with some latest findings on sowing rates and seed treatment of annual ryegrass.

The Forage Cereal and Annual Ryegrasses Field Day is being held on 3rd September at DemoDairy, Terang, with a 10.00 am start and 12.30 pm finish. Lunch will be supplied. For further details, please contact Frank Mickan,, DPI, Ellinbank, 03 5624 2259, 0427 317 471.