

Mixed Pasture to Protect Soils and Fill Sheep Bellies



Project Snapshot

Land Manager Names:	Alan and Nigel Gelmi
Property Name:	Pareora
Property Size:	2300ha
Location:	Quairading
Annual Rainfall (mm):	300mm
Enterprise Mix:	Mixed cropping and Merino's
Soil Types/Vegetation Types:	Yellow sand to heavy red clay.
Local Community Group:	Quairading LCDC

Key Messages

- Direct seeding is an option to reduce costs of planting a perennial pasture system with mixed species.
- Weed control is essential for good early establishment.
- Hold off on grazing until plants are well established, can be up to 3 years.
- Research the species that will suit your landscape and soil type

The Story so far

Alan Gelmi has a long running involvement in landcare initiatives and has always researched alternative avenues for production and sustainability of his farming land. Alan planted 100ha of mixed species fodder shrubs in May and August 2012 to a saline valley floor to assist with water erosion control and to provide a sustainable grazing system.

Prior to adoption of the current system, Alan established the area in 1999 as an annual pasture with clover and barley this practice was ineffective in holding the water table at a manageable level for an effective pasture system and so alternatives were sought.

Alan's research included a number of site visits and field day attendance. Successful sites visited included the pasture species Elisa Serradella, Chicory, Tolga Rhodes Grass and Kikuyu for perennial pasture options. Fodder shrubs observed were Blue Bush, Old Man Saltbush, River more Saltbush and Creeping Saltbush.

In addition, Alan previously had completed his own trials with Puccinellia and Blue bush. He found however, that the Puccinellia was unable to self sustain and was outcompeted after the first season of growth.

The species chosen for this project were Elisa Serradella, Tolga Rhodes Grass, Simitar Medic, safeguard ryegrass, Blue Bush, Old Man Saltbush, River more Saltbush and Creeping Saltbush.

The site was direct seeded at a rate of 2kg/ha in comparison to planting seedlings as a way to lower cost of planting and also to determine establishment rates from direct seeding. The seed was skim ploughed using a disk combine with rotating chains on the back. It was however, recommended that it be planted with a seeding bar and press wheels although equipment was not available. Early establishment has proven the direct seeding method to be successful however, time will tell the success of the pasture establishment.

Alan aims to utilise the pasture system in approximately 2-3 years for grazing over the Autumn Feed Gap, when stock feed is usually in demand.

Lessons learnt

In future, further action may be needed with site preparation to alleviate persistent native weeds as some weeds are starting to emerge and have the potential to be an issue in the future. In addition, site establishment may also be improved if you can plant the seed deeper to 2cm.

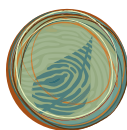
Right: Mr Gelmi



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