

MEDIA RELEASE

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Grazing crops in the eastern wheatbelt?

Grazing crops is catching on and is being trialled in a low to medium rainfall environment in Western Australia this year.

The practice has proven to be very successful in the high rainfall zone and has resulted in a significant boost in farmer's profitability through increased stocking rates and cropping area, with little or no impact on yield and quality.

Following the identification of a research gap in lower rainfall areas, Grain and Graze 2 has incorporated two trials into the project to determine if grazing crops would provide these farmers with the same opportunities and outcome.

This year the Kellerberrin Demonstration Group in the eastern wheat belt, which has an average rainfall of 300 millimetres, undertook two small scale trials that comprised of 10 hectares.

Overseeing the trials was ConsultAg agronomist, Ryan Pearce who said this year has been one of the driest 10% of years on record.

"This year has definitely put the concept of grazing crops to the test.

"If it is successful this year, farmers in the region will have the confidence to incorporate the practice into their operations next year and going forward", said Mr Pearce.

One of the trials was at North Kellerberrin, Ryan Forsyth grazed Magenta wheat which was put in on the 12th of May before the gates were opened for 11 days in early July at 10 DSE.

Another trial was undertaken at David Leake's farm at Doodlakine where Tanami TT canola was dry seeded at the beginning of May and grazed at 20 DSE for 7 days in early July.

Local field days held in July attracted a lot of interest from local farmers to the extent that a book has been opened to bet on the predicted result of the canola trial.

Mr Pearce said the majority of farmers were still coming to terms with the practice and have bet a 20-50% yield loss, as they thought the grazing pressure was too high.

"I am quietly confident that there will be no yield loss attributed to grazing the crops, but we are all eagerly awaiting the results.



“Grazing did push back the flowering dates however the crops have recovered very well and surprised a lot of the Kellerberrin farmers”, Mr Pearce said.

Farmer Ryan Forsyth said looking at his wheat crop now, he wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between the grazed and ungrazed sections – if he didn't know where the line was.

“It was really hard to let the sheep onto the crop, especially in such a dry year and it looked terrible after they had mowed it down to the ground.

“Grazing did delay grain fill by a week and I think there will be a slight yield reduction as a result which can also be attributed to the season as the later sown crops haven't fared as well.

“I believe we grow too much bulk in our crops and we need to use it in some way, and if we can make use of crops to assist with the livestock enterprise, it will benefit both.

But time will tell if grazing crops is another suitable management tool for us to use in the eastern wheat belt once the trials are harvested”, Mr Forsyth said.

Mr Pearce said because the farmers had had no experience in grazing crops, they were reluctant to put the sheep on the crop too early and it resulted in them going in too late, at the five leaf stage.

“When the sheep were introduced, they tended to ‘camp’ and overgrazed certain parts of the paddock instead of roaming the paddock and grazing it evenly.

“The paddocks in the eastern wheat belt are a lot bigger and the sheep numbers are lower, than in the higher rainfall zone and hence the sheep don't graze the crops as evenly.

To overcome this, they really need to go in at the three leaf stage and we need to do a broader scale trial to determine the ideal paddock size”, Ryan Pearce said.

Grain and Graze 2 is funded through Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program.

For more information about grazing crops, check out the Grain and Graze 2 webpage at www.grainandgraze2.com.au.

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