

## MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2013

### Opening the gate to graze crops

To graze or not to graze crops – is a question many mixed farmers will be asking themselves following a good start to the season.

With crops out of the ground, farmers are being encouraged to give grazing traditional crops like canola and cereals a go.

Trials conducted as part of the Grain and Graze 2 project have shown that the practice has little or no impact on grain yield, if livestock are removed at the right time.

However in a dry year like last year, some trials resulted in a yield reduction which was attributed to late and/or heavy grazing and moisture stress, which reduced the ability of crops to recover from grazing.

The project, which is funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and the Federal Government's Caring for our Country initiative, has seen trials conducted over the past three years.

agVivo agronomist, Sam Taylor who has been involved in the project said grazing crops provides farmers with a great opportunity to defer grazing their pastures and build up a pasture wedge.

"Early sown cereal and canola crops are best suited to grazing and farmers need to select a paddock that is grass free and will fit in around the grazing withholding periods (WHP) of crop protection products used in the paddock.

"Farmers really need to be mindful of seed dressings and pre-emergent sprays that they applied earlier as the withholding periods can range from 4-12 weeks, which may limit the possibility for grazing.

"But in saying that grazing is really a bonus to the pasture and cropping system, so you don't want to compromise good weed control and crop protection in order to graze." Sam said.

Research shows that grazing crops is best suited to the higher rainfall mixed farming zone, but it can be undertaken anywhere if the conditions are right.

Sam said plants need to be well anchored in the ground before you open the gate to let the livestock in to graze the paddock.

"For cereals, you need to do the "pinch and twist" test – if it breaks off and the plant doesn't pull out, the crop is ready to graze. This is about the 4-5 leaf stage and in the case of canola, it should be 4-6 leaf.



“The correct stocking rate is hard to determine but typically farmers can get away with running two to four times their normal stocking rate to ensure they get a short sharp early grazing.

“If the stocking rate is too low, the stock are selective and grazing is uneven and if it is too high, they will heavily graze one area.

“As the crops are readily digestible and high in energy, grazing is better suited to animals with a high feed demand such as ewe weaners that are being grown out or pregnant ewes prior to lambing.

“While the stock are grazing crops it is recommended to have some straw or hay available ad lib and in the case of cereal crops, provide a loose mix of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> each of Causmag/Salt/Limestone (Ca/Na/Mg).

“Livestock need to be removed from cereal crops at the detection of the 1<sup>st</sup> node, (Zadocks GS 30/31) and no more than 10 centimetres of stem elongation in canola. If you see a flowering bud in canola, the stock need to be pulled off straight away.

Sam said crops should not be grazed after mid to late July as they need enough time to fully recover, otherwise you run the risk of a reduction in grain yield.

“An extra measure is to only lightly graze those crops grazed in July, as heavy grazing at this time is a major cause of yield decline.

“Once stock are removed, a final Nitrogen (N) application should be applied, but no more than you would otherwise apply and if you didn't choose a grass free paddock to graze and weeds have been stimulated – you will need to monitor for new weed emergence and spray as necessary.

“While some farmers may think people are crazy to graze their crops, Sam said they need to look at the benefits and build a system to get value out of the practice.

He said this only really works when farmers graze several paddocks over a 3-4 week period and rest their pastures for a longer period. You won't get any significant benefit if you graze one mob for a short time.

“There have been some excellent results from grazing crops and it can certainly complement both the cropping and livestock enterprises.

“Livestock producers get the benefit of additional high quality feed; deferred grazing of pastures with the opportunity to build up pasture feed prior to lambing along with the potential to increase their cropping area without reducing stock numbers.

“In terms of the cropping enterprise, there is no impact on grain yield if managed correctly; and a reduction in barley powdery mildew has been observed in grazed barley crops. This in turn can reduce the need for



fungicide applications, and by using phenoxy herbicides in cereal crops, extra pressure can be put on weeds such as radish and capeweed.

“Therefore it can be a win/win situation for both enterprises,” said Sam.

#### Tips for grazing crops

- Adhere to WHP’s for chemicals
- Graze early (pinch & twist) and evenly
- Supplement stock with Ca:Na:Mg (cereals) and fibre
- Don’t graze too late (before GS 30, Bud 10cm and mid-late July)
- Clip rather than crash graze when approaching Z30 or Bud 10cm
- Apply top-up Nitrogen after grazing, not before

For further information about grazing crops and to read case studies that highlight farmers’ experiences, head to the Grain & Graze website ([www.grainandgraze2.com.au](http://www.grainandgraze2.com.au)).

#### MEDIA CONTACTS

Sam Taylor  
agVivo agronomist  
Mob 0429 332 593

For further information about Grain and Graze 2, contact Phil Barrett-Lennard on 0429 977 042.



CARING  
FOR  
OUR  
COUNTRY

**Grain and Graze 2**  
**Western Australia**

[www.westernaustralia.grainandgraze2.com.au](http://www.westernaustralia.grainandgraze2.com.au)  
<https://www.facebook.com/GrainandGraze>

**GRDC**  
Grains  
Research &  
Development  
Corporation