

MEDIA RELEASE
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Light stubble grazing has no impact on grain yield

Farmers can safely graze their cereal stubbles, lightly, over summer with no impact on yield in the subsequent crops.

This is contrary to concerns that the trampling of stubbles by livestock reduces water retention, causes surface compaction and incorporates weed seeds, which in turn decreases crops yields.

Research undertaken through the Grain & Graze 2 project assessed the impact of sheep grazing over summer on crops residues, soil quality and no-tillage crop establishment and yields.

The project, which is funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative, found that light grazing over summer had no effect on crop yield.

Dr Ken Flower an Agronomy Lecturer at the University of WA has been involved in the research project.

He said the majority of farmers have moved to a zero/reduced till farming system that involves full residue retention to maintain favourable soil structure and high yields.

"This has been a major concern for livestock producers who remove the stubble through grazing.

"However through our research, we have been able to show that light grazing mainly loosened and flattened the stubble residue and had little effect on the amount of stubble.

"Our results also showed that grazing had negligible detrimental effect on soil properties and grain yields.

Therefore it is safe to say that sheep producers will not be disadvantaged and their no-till crop gross margins will not be impacted by light summer grazing with sheep," said Ken.

The trials were run over four years and were undertaken by WANTFA at Cunderdin and Meckering, and by the Facey Group, at Wickiepin and Yealering.

The stocking rates and grazing intensities used in the trials were about 2- 4 dry sheep equivalent (DSE) to the hectare for a total of about 150-200 DSE-days/ha over summer.

Ken said overgrazing can result in soil erosion and reduced crop yield.

"This was shown at one site, which was put to pasture for a year, where relatively heavy grazing over winter and summer caused surface crusting, reduced water infiltration and lower crop yield.



“The amount of stubble that needs to be retained in order to have no impact on yield is likely to vary with the soil condition (texture and moisture) and stocking rate that is used for summer grazing, and this level is yet to be determined,” Ken said.

For further information, head to the Grain & Graze 2 webpage at www.grainandgraze2.com.au.

Photo caption: Recent research shows that light grazing of stubbles over summer has no effect on crop yield.

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