

Fact Sheet

A late break and cold weather can often stall the growth of sown or self-sown pasture to the point where sheep can lose condition unless costly supplementary feed is provided. If you have some early sown crops, it is very likely they can be used to fill the feed gap until pastures really kick in later in the season. If you get the timing right, taking advantage of this resource is easier than you think.

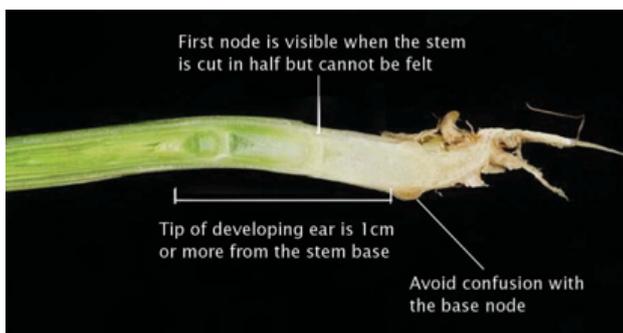
the aim to get as close as possible or even exceed the yield of ungrazed crops, getting stock out by GS30 is the best way to reduce the risk of missing that target.

An easy way to monitor the growth stage of the crop your sheep are grazing is to establish a stock exclusion area in a paddock with weld mesh or portable sheep yards. Grazing delays the transition from tillering to stem elongation by a few days so when the main stem on these ungrazed plants begins to elongate as GS30 approaches, the rest of the grazed paddock will not be far behind.

Canola can recover after grazing with no seed yield penalty if grazing is completed when the plant is in a vegetative stage. So the message for canola grazers is to get the stock out as soon as the crop starts to bolt upwards.

How to dissect a cereal plant to determine growth stage

1. Pull up a plant and shake the dirt off the roots
2. Pass your hand around the plant and draw upwards to identify the tallest leaf (this will usually be attached to the main stem of the plant)
3. Peel off any dying leaves
4. Cut the roots from the plant at the base
5. Cut the stem lengthwise along the stem to expose the embryonic ear. Want more information? Refer to the Cereal Growth Stages booklet available from the GRDC. It can be ordered from the GRDC website www.grdc.com.au in the publications section.



How do I know when it is safe to put the sheep on the crop?

The most important rule of thumb here is that you don't want the sheep to be able to pull the whole plant out of the ground. Use the old pinch and twist test:

Pinch the top leaves between the thumb and forefinger, pull the leaves upwards while twisting your wrist. If the leaves break off and the plant does not pull out of the ground, the crop can be grazed. It will enable you to get a few days or several weeks of grazing respite for pastures to get away.

When do I take the sheep off the crop?

Assuming a normal spring, there is little risk of a major effect on grain yield from early grazing of cereal crops right up to mid-tillering (Growth Stage 22-25). If you graze longer than that, recovery for grain production can be affected. At GS30 the risk of reducing grain yield starts to become a reality. With



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Tip: Remember to top up with nitrogen after removing the stock.