



Grazing Crops in Practise

Name:
Kolindale Merino & Poll Merino Stud

Producer:
Luke Ledwith

Location:
Dudinin

Farm Size:
8000 ha

Average Annual Rainfall:
325mm

Soil Type:
Mixed duplex

Enterprise Mix:
Mixed crop and livestock

Luke Ledwith runs a mixed crop and livestock farm east of Dudinin and have been grazing their crops for around five years. The Ledwith's have a merino sheed stud and with contacts made through this, they decided to begin grazing crops.

The Ledwith's see grazing as a tool within their farming system to ensure additional food is available for their livestock, and allows them to put in more crop while being able to run the same amount of sheep each year. Luke estimates that by grazing they are able to increase their cropped area by around 10%. Grazing crops also allows them to spray out all of the grass weeds in their pastures as they can be confident that there will be sufficient supplementary feed. Ultimately it allows them to set up pastures for following years and provides an excellent feed source.

Most cereal and canola crops can be grazed when set up and managed appropriately, but the Ledwith's primarily graze early sown barley and oats due to their tendency to have vigorous early growth. Wheat is generally not grazed on their property as they have found the impact on yield seems to be greater and there is not as much feed available early on. Through trial work with Facey Group and DAFWA, as well as personal experience, Ledwith's currently ensure all grazing is done by mid to the end of July so as not to impact on yield.

The Ledwith's use twin sowing of sub clover with canola to effectively control grass weeds in one year. This eliminates weed pressure in the following year when the paddock is in pasture, and also means the paddock is clean when planted into cereals and grazed in subsequent years. As weeds are seen as the number one issue with grazing crops these practises are utilised by the Ledwith's to ensure paddocks are as clean of grass weeds as possible.

Some of the challenges faced over the years, besides an ongoing battle with weeds, include working out how late in the season crops can be grazed without

impacting on yield. Mid-late July has become their standard as well as only grazing oats and barley, as they found there was less impact on yield than wheat.

Luke also believes using older sheep for grazing can be better than the younger ones as they digest the feed better resulting in lower instances of flystrike. Supplementing with hay /straw in addition to grazing also seemed to make the green feed more palatable. Some calcium/magnesium supplements are also used but as they mainly graze barley and oats they haven't found lack of nutrition to be a major issue.

The Ledwith's have been involved in trials with Facey Group and DAFWA, researching the impact of grazing different crop varieties, changing the dates of grazing and looking at the amount grazed. They have been great supporters of local research and are keen to see the findings of the Grain and Graze 3 project over the next few years. The 2014 Grain and Graze 3 small plot trial at Wickpepin was set up to look at the impact of (and interaction between) grazing and frost damage on the grain yield and quality of a range of winter and spring cereal varieties sown at two times of sowing. Another trial will be set up in 2015 utilising the feedback, findings and learning's from 2014. Luke would like to see more research into grazing crops, particularly nitrogen rates, topping up with nitrogen during the season and time of sowing, especially for wheat as it tends to have a less vigorous initial growth than barley and oats.

As extension to the Grain and Graze 3 project Facey Group ran one Discussion Group and Field walk in August 2014 and are having a follow up meeting and Discussion Group in February 2015. The purpose of these discussion groups is to discuss the objectives and management of the trial site and ensure research is locally relevant. It is envisioned that the Grain and Graze 3 project will give more growers the knowledge base to utilise grazing crops as part of their farming system, such as what the Ledwith's are already doing.



Facey Group Discussion Group August 2014 at the Grain & Graze 3 trial



Grain and Graze 3 Time of Sowing 1 wheat plots after first grazing cut with lawnmower (10th June 2014).



Bannister, grazed and ungrazed Time of Sowing 1 (23rd April 2014). Grazed plot on the left (grazed twice) is later maturing than the ungrazed plot on the right.



Bannister, grazed and ungrazed Time of Sowing 2 (27th May 2014). Grazed plot on the left (grazed once) has very similar maturity to the ungrazed plot on the right.

Key Steps in Luke's Experience for successfully grazing crops:

- Graze early sown barley and oats for vigorous early growth
- Ensure all grazing is done by mid to late July so as not to impact on yield
- Use twin sowing of sub clover with canola to control grass weeds in one year
- Using older sheep for grazing is better as they digest feed better resulting in lower instances of flystrike

More information

Consultant: Sheree Blechynden, Facey Group
Email: tfo@faceygroup.org.au
Phone: 0409 868 514