Over The Fence Newsletter

AUGUST 2008

www.grazingbestprac.com.au
214 Quay Street
Rockhampton
Office: (07) 4927 6790
Mick: 0438 395 255

FEATURES

Transfer your PASSION from your CATTLE to your GRASS

Other Articles

Predator Control Field Days in CW Qld.

Grazing BestPrac welcomes Philip Tindall

Have you done your FEED BUDGET for the season?

How much rest do your pastures get?

Show casing the best in Landcare and NRM:

Australian Government

New funding programs announced-

Caring for our Country

The new Federal Government NRM program for rural industry is "Caring for our Country". It will cover 6 priority areas -

1. Rescue the Great Barrier Reef $200M
2. Repair fragile coastal ecosystems $100M
3. Save the Tasmanian Devil $10M
4. Improve water quality of Gippsland Lakes $5.25M
5. Fight the Cane Toad $2M
6. Employ additional indigenous rangers $90M
7. Expand protected indigenous area $50M
8. Assist indigenous Australians enter the Carbon trading market. $10M

This will mean the past NHT, NLP, ESP and Indigenous and environmental programs will all be managed under this one program. It will also fund a number of smaller grants Community Coastcare, Reef Water Quality and Landcare, replacing Envirofund. Two of these programs have just closed in late July and will be announced in late August.

Other grants available include:

1. Professional advice and planning.

2. Farmready which was only released a few days ago. Watch this space or give Mick a call to find out more in coming months.

3. EC interest rate subsidy.

4. Special Disaster Flood Assistance

For More Information please ring your local NRM body or go to the websites www.nrm.gov.au and DAFF.gov.au and qraa.qld.gov.au

Editors Desk….

A new era has begun in the field of natural resource management in Australia. You like myself have probably just gotten used to the way the old systems worked and now we have to start again. However, just like every drought (dry spell), it is an exciting new challenge to progress our businesses, our resources and our minds, to an even higher level. Now is the time to look for opportunities, which may now be available and would never have occurred before.

Many people I speak with are extremely upset that we have lost our FarmBis, Envirofund, NLP, Agfund and many other Govt supported industry programs. In fact every industry is going through similar upheavals, something we have not seen in more than a decade. In many ways, it is refreshing to review the old systems and upgrade or make them even better. I am a firm believer that any program that has had excellent past results will continue in the future, be it with a new name, new delivery method or will be replaced with an even better program.

Now, if we focus on the things we can manage, have a clear vision of where we want to be in the future, work with the available resources/ programs/ people or even create new resources and make sure we take action, our future will be exciting.

Congratulations, if you are managing your land and stock in good condition, because these future programs need to support you.

Mick

BESTPRAC

Blackall E-Sheep Project

Members of the Blackall BestPrac Group will be demonstrating the latest in Electronic sheep handling and management systems at the WESTECH Field Days at Barcaldine on the 9th and 10th September. The demonstration is part of the federal government Agfund project and will be utilizing Prattley auto drafting systems, electronic recognition of ear tags, weighing, bar code scanning etc. Please check out the site at the show or give Bill Cripps 0746575955, Jack Banks 46575 958 or Peter Evans a call on 46574313.

Would you rather pay $91,000 or $710,000 to run an extra 74 breeders?

More than 80 graziers from as far away as Monto and St Lawrence flocked to Melrose near Rockhampton last week to learn about successful rotational grazing and how it can reverse degraded pastures even during drought. As Nev and Jeff Mills, Melrose demonstrated, "the secret to successful pasture management and recovering flogged country is to **transfer your passion from your cattle to your grass**". The field day was organised by the Morinish Landcare Group as an ongoing role to highlight the success of local grazing families in the region. The day was supported by the National Landcare Program, FBA, FRCC, Grazing BestPrac, McCrackens and DPI&F. While opening the field day, Morinish Landcare Chairman, and neighbour John Ellrott commented "I have never seen this country in such good condition in decades. This grazing system shows us we can have our cattle eating their way to producing more grass. We can have our cake and eat it too." Guest Speaker, Paul Jones QDPI spoke of the long term trials being run by CSIRO, DPI and MLA to compare the differences between grazing systems in Queensland. He showed data from the 2006 and 2007 years and agreed that it seems the cell grazing paddock on Melrose is able to carry more stock, while in a similar condition to other paddocks. "It doesn't matter what you call the grazing management system (cells, rotation or something else), the most important issue is to get some rest into your pasture. This was the golden rule which drove the family to seek training and professional support, and to commit to reversing the degradation."

The Marys Paddock development was initiated in 2004, with the assistance of Mick Alexander and Peter Hunt, water specialist with McCrackens, both of Rockhampton. The property plan was set up on a computer program 'GP Mapper' and then ground truthed with a Garmin GPS before the hard work began. The plan included dividing the 3 original paddocks totalling 1134 ha (2800 ac) into 25 paddocks of 35ha to 50ha in size. This would allow 24 paddocks to be rested at any one time and enable pasture to re-establish. The overall plan cost was $91,000 (materials) and included:

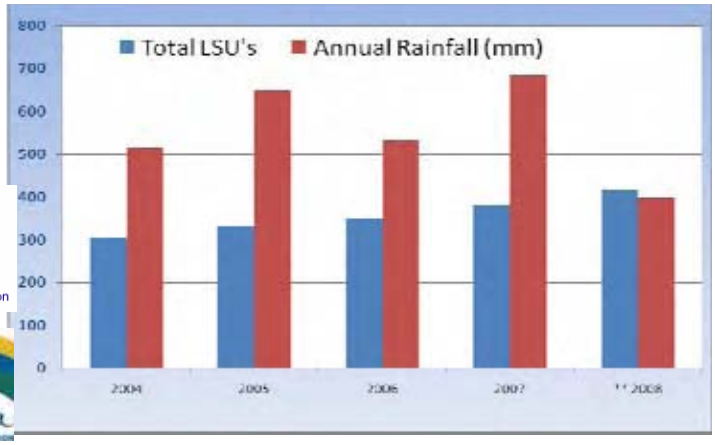
Development	
Reticulated pipeline	12 km
Troughs	9
Dams	1
Storages	67,000 l
Fencing (electric)	26 km

Peter Hunt explained the watering system needed to supply 2litres per second at the trough for larger mobs to ensure stock would not be stressed and 240 volt power was not available, so the system was established on solar power. He explained the need to ensure there is good backup supply of 2 – 3 days minimum. Marys paddock is just one part of the overall development on Melrose a 8,000 hectare breeding and growing property 60 km from Rockhampton. In total, the Mills family have 3 separate mobs with a total of 600 Brahman and Brahman cross breeders being managed in either rotation or cell grazing systems. The system is so successful that Nev and Jeff continue to develop more paddocks with reticulated water and electric fencing.

The Mills have a passion for the land and making the country better today than when they took it over. Nev says, The changes are worth every penny. He said "our goal was to increase ground cover, grow more grass and fix the bare patches and the benefits are that we will carry more stock." The Mills family have developed parts of Melrose with tree clearing, ripping, pasture renovating and improved pastures and Leucaena and now have one of the best improved properties in the district. However, this grazing system is by far the most sustainable if they continue to rest paddocks and manage as they have in the past few years. Nev and Jeff's results and passion really excited the large crowd about the future of the beef industry". When they bought the property in 1994 and were told it could run 300 breeders, they stocked it at 300 breeders and the country kept getting worse during the drought years of the 90's. Nev said, "Before we began this development, the paddocks were nearly bare and we had reduced our stocking rates from the 300 to only 167 breeders and it was still getting worse. We decided to have a go at developing and setting up rotational/ cell grazing. Now our decision is well justified, as we have steadily increased our stocking rate to 244 breeders and can carry lots more. We have also branded 200 calves from the block and are also carrying them at this time". "We could carry a lot more cattle this year, but are making sure the country continues to get even better. Our aim is to maybe even increase the stocking rate to more than the original 300 breeders. He admitted that it required much work and trial and error establishing fences and watering points, but that it was worth the effort.

At this point in time, we probably have less work load with the 244 breeders even if we are shifting them regularly (2-3 times per week) as we only check on one trough and they can all be easily counted and managed. It takes about 5 hours a week to move this mob and that's five pleasurable hours" In 2004, they ran 306 lsu (large stock units) (400kg steer at maintenance), which increased in consecutive years to 329LSU, 351LSU and 382LSU this year. In 2004, they ran one breeder to 6.7ha and in 2008 one breeder to 4.6ha (before the rain). Mr Mills explained, it was cheaper for us to develop what we have than to buy more land. Local grazing land values are $2000/ha ($800/ac), or about $9600/breeder area (4.65ha), then to buy the area to run an extra 74LSU would have cost $710,000. Its not just a good business deal, its also good for the country.
Jeff Mills explained that the cattle quickly warmed to the system and the temperament improved under cells. He said they soon learned to associate the movements with fresh feed and were eager to move into the next paddock. "We think it is pretty good to have fat cows and fat calves at the same time. Nev Mills said, "It's about taking that passion you have for your cattle and applying it to grass."

Photo 3 and 4 – Site 3 Main photo April 2008 and inset photo May 2005



Grazing Systems …. How much rest do your pastures get?

In any grazing situation, grazing patterns (distribution) are dictated by position of water (Q&Q), quality and quantity of pasture, slope and physiological state of the grazing animal. The only times these will change are in extreme periods of drought. All of these factors are largely controllable if they are understood. Figure 1 outlines the various grazing systems, being used around the world. The right grazing system for any grazier will be determined by individual goals and resources. However, any system which allows the pastures time to recover from grazing is a good system.

In the past two centuries, we have seen many different names for various grazing systems. In that time, many so called specialists (some of which are focussed on a single issue) have attempted to examine the success or failure of various grazing management strategies. The problem is simply that the grazing system is exactly that, "A SYSTEM", not a single issue. Scientists and graziers have paradigms, as do all of us. Science has not yet attained the level of accepting that most complex systems cannot be separated and analysed on an individual basis. The system needs to be analysed on a whole. That is take one part away and the system is no longer as effective. Such is the argument that MLA, CSIRO and DPI&F are undertaking a study to compare various grazing systems at present and will be better able to define the "Best" system by 2010. However, at this stage, on one of the trial properties "Melrose" near Rockhampton, the rotational forms of grazing are able to carry more stock than conventional systems, with no detriment to the land or pasture. It is well known that if we just monitor our pastures (carry out a feed budget or a grass check) as a first step, we will see an improvement in the pasture.

However, the major difference between any two systems will be the amount of rest which pasture is allowed for recovery from grazing. Too little is deadly to the plants and too much is not beneficial. As you move down through the various systems, in figure 1, managing individual plant rest is increasing. Focus on the pasture and forget about what they system is called, who really cares—**just aim at managing the grazing**.

The most important job right now is to do your Feed budget:

How much GRASS do you have right now.??

Could save you or cost you $000.00's

It is imperative to carry out at least one annual (more often if possible) feed budget, to assess the ability of the land and pasture resource to adequately feed the desired stock numbers for the full period until the next expected rain. In the past we have used experience to help us make decisions. However, in many cases, experience is a poor teacher as we are sometimes too conservative and sometimes too hard on stock numbers or amount of grass.

Three basic methods:

- Photo standards (Kg/Ha)
- Cut and weigh pasture biomass
- Estimate standing feed in stock days

Grazing BestPrac welcomes Philip Tindall.

Philip is an excellent resource for clients in all areas of Queensland. If you have an issue, looking at changes to enterprises, feed budgeting etc, give him a call.

He has recently started teaching and consulting for Grazing BestPrac, teaching the "Technology of Growing Grass" and business analysis. Philip's speciality is managing grass pastures. He and his wife Judy and family have recently sold an extremely profitable grazing operation "Hillview" in the Muttaburra district.

Philip is available on 46 155184 Toowoomba.

Nev and Jeff Mills, "Melrose" Morinish, near Rockhampton.

System or method	Definition	Notes
Continuous or set stocking	Plants continuously exposed / Stock stay in set paddocks	Leads to under-stocking and overgrazing NO REST for some plants.
Annual spelling/ resting	One or two more paddocks than mobs of stock (spelled paddock)	Wet season resting/ burning/ drought reserve/ seeding. SOME REST for some paddocks.
Rotational grazing	2 or more paddocks / mob Moves maybe based on time or growth rate of plant	Affects depend on the number of paddocks/ distance to water and pasture rest periods. MORE REST—good system if managed
Time Control Grazing Or Cell Grazing	Usually 20-40 pad / mob Moves based on growth rate of plant/ animal production focus	More effective use of plants and rainfall/ highly intensive on management and requiring specialised training. WELL MANAGED REST if done properly

Productivity increase equals water.

Whether in the sheep or cattle business, the single biggest factor in increasing production is the supply of lots of clean water, firstly, then high quality forage second. However, without water, they will last only a few days. In every property development in the past 15 years, water has been the single biggest cost and also the biggest single benefit. It seems science the world over has come to pretty much a standard agreement in the past 20 years and yet many people still do not utilize the knowledge available. Table 3 from 1988, below demonstrates the reduction in grazing capacity to 0% after 3.2km and is seriously reduced (50%) at 1.6 km from water. Every hundred metres extra stock walk away from water, they have to walk back as well … (walking off energy). So if you can reduce the distance between watering points, you will make money. We have a standard in the cattle industry which states stock should not have to walk any more than 1.5 km to the back of the paddock in the most extreme situations and the distance should be reduced as low as 300-400m in intensive grazing high productivity grazing (Brigalow and high rainfall regions).

Table 3. Approximate reductions in cattle grazing capacity as distance from water increases

Distance from water (miles)	Distance from water (km)	Reduction in grazing capacity (%)
0- 1	0- 1.6	0
1- 2	1.6 - 3.2	50
>2	> 3.2	100

Source: Holechek 1988

www.grazingbestprac.com.au
214 Quay Street
Rockhampton
Office: (07) 4927 6790

Succession by DEFAULT

What will happen in your business tomorrow if you don't make it home tonight? Who will take over the ship and do everything which has to be done? For that matter, what has to be done?

I realise it is a scary thought, but this happens to many thousands of people every day in Australia. This is a topic we have been talking about a bit lately as we like many of you have had a tragic death in the family. While things are going along nicely, its all roses and fun, but when things go wrong, we are never in the frame of mind to deal with it. And, it's too late, when it's too late.

Let's face it, the average age of primary producers is heading up in the late 60's and Succession is a huge issue in rural industry today. Just a little to think about – Communication, yep, just talking as often as possible is the best start and continuation you could have for your succession. Whether you are 30 or 90, you are all part of a succession process, right now. Either we are having our parents succeeding to us or we are succeeding to our children. And the same questions come up in every family –

- Do you have wills?
- Who are the executors?
- What are you going to do with the farm/ estate?
- Who gets what?
- When do they get it? (before or after death)
- What is your vision for the business?
- Do those close to you know?
- Are you being fair or equal?
- How are you going to pass on the business?
- What structures will you use?
- And many more …

There is a whole process to create true family harmony and it all starts with Communication, communication, communication. The most successful families use a neutral facilitator to create an open and friendly environment and work on a step by step process. Succession is a process, not a single event.

This is the most difficult issue for most families to discuss as many people still today believe it's no-one's business but mine. They can find out when I'm gone. However, if most people knew the anxiety this causes within their family, they would probably think differently. If you are interested in finding out more about the facilitation process or coming succession planning workshops, please call 0438 395255.

Date	Activity
4th Sep	Beef Up Forum (Mackay)
5th Sep	Beef Up Forum (Clermont)
22 - 24th	State Landcare Conference Monto.
9-10th Sep	Westech Field days "Barcaldine"
23rd Sep	Predator Control Field day at "Tarbarah" Blackall
24th Sep	Predator Control Field day at "Hazelwood Isisford
26th Sep	Predator Control Field day at "Dunluce" Hughenden
29 - 30th Oct	National BestPrac Forum (Broken Hill)

g.bp grazing bestprac
McCRACKEN'S WATER SERVICES Pumps & Irrigation