IN THIS ISSUE
- Financial assistance available for flood-affected producers
- Flood recovery tips for pasture, pests and disease
- Increase production through phosphorus supplementation
- No silver bullets in extensive grazing
Welcome to Northern Muster 49

Welcome to the first issue of Northern Muster for 2019. This is shaping up to be another significant year for the northern beef industry after the devastating flood event in the north-west earlier in January/February and with the rest of Queensland still in drought.

A reminder for those in drought-declared regions that all fodder freight and emergency water infrastructure rebate claim forms must be submitted within six months of the date of purchase. Assistance for drought-affected producers is still available under the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme at dat.qld.gov.au.

The Australian Government’s North Queensland Livestock Recovery Agency recently announced a new suite of measures to support the recovery of the beef and sheep industry. Measures include immediate recovery grants of up to $75,000, livestock industry recovery concessional loans of up to $1 million, restocking and agistment freight subsidies up to $100,000, a weed and feral pest initiative, industry recovery officers, additional financial counsellors and a Biosecurity Entity Registration Fee Exemption. These measures will be delivered under joint funding by the Australian and Queensland governments under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and are part of a larger long-term recovery package.

In addition, the Australian Government is fully funding a $300 million recovery grant scheme for grants of up to $400,000, which the Queensland Government will deliver on the Australian Government’s behalf. Further details surrounding the application forms and guidelines are being developed and will be available shortly.

Before restocking after the floods, check your eligibility for further assistance with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) by calling 13 25 23. Restocking may impact the type of financial assistance you can receive.

More financial-assistance information is available through Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (qrida.qld.gov.au), information on the recovery of flooded Mitchell grass and the disease risks associated with carcasses and wet weather can be found in this issue.

If you did receive good grass-growing rain, there’s a timely reminder to make sure your phosphorus supplement is doing its job. Check out the two articles in this issue on the benefits of feeding phosphorus. If you are unsure if you should be supplementing with phosphorus or you would like to know more, please contact your local beef extension officer, who will be more than happy to provide you with the latest information.

On the social front, this year looks like it’s going to be a busy one, with a number of great events planned. Kicking off with the Northern Beef Producer Expo in Charters Towers on the 7-8 June, this is a premier event not to be missed, showcasing all facets of the Australian beef industry. Then you will be able to find out the latest beef research at the Triannual Northern Beef Research Update Conference, held in Brisbane on 19-22 August. You can register for this event at nbruc2019.com. Check out the FutureBeef website futurebeef.com.au for other events.

We hope you enjoy issue 49 of Northern Muster—please contact the editorial team with any inquiries or feedback. For an online version of the Northern Muster, subscribe at futurebeef.com.au/resources/newsletters or email northernmuster@daf.qld.gov.au.

Financial help still available for flood-affected producers

Primary producers recovering from widespread flooding in North and north-western Queensland can apply for financial help.

Special Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants of up to $75,000 are available to help with the costs of immediate clean-up and restoration of businesses in the aftermath of the historic flooding event in January and February.

Uptake of the recovery grants has been strong, with more than 128 producers in McKinlay Shire Council area alone accessing the grants. As of 9 April 2019, over $45 million in these grants were delivered to more than 950 producers and small businesses in the impacted area.

Disaster Assistance Loans of up to $250,000 can be used to purchase replacement livestock, replacement infrastructure and for working-capital expenses such as paying salaries or wages, creditors, rent or rates.

Disaster Assistance Essential Working Capital Loans up to $100,000 are also available for businesses indirectly impacted during the disaster event to assist with working-capital expenses.

Disaster freight-subsidy loans of up to $5000 are jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland governments and delivered by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF).

More recently announced financial assistance for producers that will soon be available include:

• Restocking, Replanting and On-farm Infrastructure Grants of up to $400,000 funded by the Australian Government and delivered by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA).

• Exceptional Disaster Recovery Loans of up to $1 million—the first two years are interest and repayment free—jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland governments and delivered by QRIDA.

• Restocking and agistment freight subsidies of up to $50,000 per year for two years, jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland governments and delivered by DAF.

QRIDA Disaster Recovery Manager Craig Turner said primary producers affected during the flooding still had time to apply for assistance to help ease the financial burden of cleaning up and returning their business to normal.

“While some producers in North and Far North Queensland are still coming to terms with the damage caused to their property and livestock, they can take some comfort knowing there is financial help available,” Mr Turner said.

“Producers are reminded to take photos of the direct damage to accompany their application.

“In addition, you can provide other evidence such as relevant quotes, estimates or tax invoices as you would retain in the normal course of your business.

“While it is not a requirement, the more information you can provide to support your application will help us process your application as quickly as possible.”

For more information visit qrida.qld.gov.au or freecall 1800 623 946.

Editorial committee
Alice Bambling
Enquiries
Alice Bambling
99 Hospital Road, Emerald Qld 4720
Phone: 07 4981 0837
Email: alice.bambling@daf.qld.gov.au
© The State of Queensland, 2019

Reproduction of articles
The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries welcomes reproduction of articles appearing in this newsletter providing the source is acknowledged, the article is reproduced in full and technical information is confirmed with the editor before publication, ensuring the recommendations are still accurate at the time of printing. The Queensland Government shall not be liable for technical or other errors or omissions contained herein. To the extent permitted by law, the reader/user accepts all risks and responsibilities for losses, damages, costs and other consequent results directly or indirectly from using the information contained herein. Advertisements included in this edition were accepted on the understanding that they complied with the relevant provisions of the Competition and Consumer Act and with the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Practice. No endorsement by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is intended or implied by the advertisement of any product in the Northern Muster.
Flooding—Weeds, pests, diseases and your health

Now that the floodwaters have receded, there are a number of factors for your pasture, livestock and your own health to consider.

Weeds
Weed seeds will have been distributed widely in both water, soil and through emergency fodder drops. If you have received donated hay during the flood, keep track of the locations where hay has been fed out and re-visit them over the coming months and years after rain to check for any new or strange plants. If you see a plant that you are unfamiliar with, make a note of where you found it and take detailed photos of any seed pods, flowers or identifying features. For help in identifying and controlling weeds, contact your local DAF office or shire weeds officer.

Pests and diseases
Cattle ticks also flourish in warm and wet conditions. A large increase in tick numbers could cause issues in cattle that may not have been exposed to cattle tick previously and could increase the occurrence of tick fever. A preventative chemical treatment will help keep cattle tick numbers down until the animal will have receded. Preventative chemical treatment will help keep cattle tick numbers down until the animal will have receded.

The larval stage of the tick organism is spread by the larval stage of the tick organism. The tick organism is spread by the larval stage of the tick organism. Preventative chemical treatment will help keep cattle tick numbers down until the animal will have receded.

Vaccinating against botulism is also recommended as the toxin-releasing bacteria that cause botulism live in decaying matter. Botulism is normally associated with phosphorus-deficient cattle but the presence of large numbers of carcasses may increase the risk even on the better downs country. Preventative chemical treatment will help keep cattle tick numbers down until the animal will have receded.

For assistance with sick or injured animals or specific advice on a vaccination program please contact the Australian Veterinary Association hotline 1800 621 918.

Your health
Your health and safety and that of those around you is of utmost importance. There may be an increased risk of mosquito-borne disease in the flood-affected region. It is important to protect yourself against mosquito bites. Search for mosquito-borne diseases visit conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/home/topics/14/33/bacterial-infections.

NQ Connect is providing mental health support for flood-affected Queenslanders. NQ Connect is a free phone and online counselling service connecting people to mental health services. NQ Connect can be reached on 1300 059 625, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For more information on these bacterial diseases visit conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/home/topics/14/33/bacterial-infections.

New video on making best use of NLIS tags available now

A new video produced by DAF beef extension officers describes new ways that producers can use the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) to improve data collection and decision making for their herds.

NLIS tags are mandatory in Australia for livestock traceability, market access and food safety purposes. As animals are bought, sold and moved they must be tagged with an NLIS-accredited tag or device. But there is a lot more that can be done with the NLIS tag to get value out of the investment.

By using a scale indicator, an NLIS reader and herd management software or Microsoft Excel, individual animal information can be recorded against each NLIS tag. These tags enable faster data collection and producers can view an animal’s life history and performance crush side. This easily accessible information allows producers to make informed decisions regarding culling or drafting and information collected in the yards can be easily and quickly uploaded to herd management software back in the office, saving the time that manual data entry requires.

NLIS tags can be used to track average daily gains, enabling producers to identify poor performers and note their parentage, allowing removal from the system. Producers can record reproductive information such as pregnancy status, foetal age and lactation status. Having this information easily recorded and accessible in the yards ensures unproductive females are not being missed.

Decisions surrounding supplementary feeding, paddock shifts and drafting for market specifications can be made using weight gain and body-condition data. Temperature and a comprehensive treatment history can also be kept for each animal. This information may have all been recorded manually in the past, but the significant advantage of linking individual animal information with NLIS tags is the reduction in time required for manual entry, the accuracy of the information and the reduction in paperwork.

To see how you can get the most value out of your NLIS tags, head to youtube.com/ QldAgriculture and search for Making better use of your NLIS tags.
Encouraging Mitchell grass recovery after the 2019 flooding across north-western Queensland

Mid-April is a good time of the year to assess your pasture recovery and the amount and quality of feed on offer. Usually the pasture has hayed off and you are able to estimate how much livestock you can run through to the next expected rain around Christmas time. With devastating flooding, the growing season has usually not started and most of us have not had to face such widespread damage to Mitchell grass pastures.

Mitchell grass is the mainstay of grazing businesses across large areas of north-western Queensland and we aim to offer advice to help your pastures recover and grow feed to rebuild your livestock production.

Good condition Mitchell grass country in the north-western area will have a healthy Mitchell grass tussock every pace, or better. This will be achieved by:

- allowing seedlings to grow, ungrazed, for 4–6 months (March to August 2019)
- monitoring seedlings at easy-to-access sites you are likely to revisit every 3–4 weeks
- budgeting stock numbers to leave a minimum of 15–20 cm residual Mitchell grass stubble height by the end of the year
- avoiding high impact grazing that results in trampling of seedlings and weak tussocks
- reviewing stock numbers and pasture recovery (July to August 2019)

Everyone reading this article will understand how their pasture has responded, and every situation will be different.

Most areas had Mitchell grass seedlings germinate over mid to late February. Where these have taken root and survived, every pace of Mitchell grass plants recovering over time following a flood event received in February, should still have green in the tillers of Mitchell grass plants. The deeper the soil moisture extends, the longer the tillers will remain green. Coupled with the residual tillers, this provides a good basis for the tussocks to respond efficiently, and to rebuild their vigour.

High-impact grazing, where livestock density is high, risks further damaging the crowns of weakened Mitchell grass tussocks, of cattle grazing pulling weak tillers out of the ground, and of Mitchell grass seedlings being trampled. We recommended avoiding high cattle numbers in smaller paddocks to avoid further damage to weak tussocks and seedlings.

A word on lick troughs

Lick troughs do not need to be elaborate. Drums cut with slits, old tractor tyres with the side wall cut out, or hollow logs that let water drain are handy options for feeding loose licks.

When feeding molasses, troughs should be fitted with a form of grip (e.g. weldmesh) in the base of them in case an animal falls in. The deeper the soil moisture extends, the longer the tillers of Mitchell grass plants. The deeper the soil moisture extends, the longer the tillers will remain green. Coupled with the residual tillers, this provides a good basis for the tussocks to respond efficiently, and to rebuild their vigour.

High-impact grazing, where livestock density is high, risks further damaging the crowns of weakened Mitchell grass tussocks, of cattle grazing pulling weak tillers out of the ground, and of Mitchell grass seedlings being trampled. We recommended avoiding high cattle numbers in smaller paddocks to avoid further damage to weak tussocks and seedlings.

Dry lick and phosphorus supplements don’t require the same space allowance because the low intakes mean animals don’t spend as much time at the trough.

A safe guide when feeding any supplements is to ensure that the size of the trough is big enough to provide access to all stock. It should also be a reasonable size to ensure enough supplement is on offer and to help minimise the number of times the trough needs to be re-filled.

Byrony Daniels
Beef extension (FutureBeef)
DAF Emerald
0427 746 434

**INCREASE YOUR GAINS, HAVE BETTER HERD HEALTH, USE A SUPERIOR TMR FEED MIXER**

QUEENSLAND MACHINERY AGENCY PTY LTD

T: (07) 4696 3350 • M: 0447 965 555
8 Nobby Connection Road, Nobby QLD 4360
E: mark@qma.net.au | W: www.qma.net.au
Focus on phosphorus

2018 was the year to “Focus on Phosphorus”, with two sold-out seminars at Beef Australia in May, and more than 340 attendees.

A few months later, in September, 300 viewers tuned in for the Beef Connect phosphorus webinar series.

The grand finale was in October and November, with a series of workshops in the Fitzroy and Burdekin catchments, attended by 145 producers across eight locations.

Run by DAF extension staff, the aim of these workshops was to assist producers in creating a phosphorus (P) management plan to enable year-round, cost-effective supplementation in P-deficient country.

Participants learnt how to:

- identify P-deficient land types
- assess the P status of cattle
- understand the impact on productivity P deficiency has on breeding and growing cattle
- cost-effectively supplement with P
- manage grazing pressure and ground cover when cattle have adequate P.

Beef experts, Mick Sullivan (DAF), Rob Dixon (University of Queensland) and Kylie Hopkins (DAF), provided several new resources, templates and tools to help producers manage P nutrition at the on-farm level.

P deficiency is a major problem for grazing cattle in much of northern Australia. While P is important in all bodily processes, the major impact of P deficiency on cattle is a significant reduction in appetite. Therefore, when the grass is green, cattle on P-deficient pasture just won’t eat as much as they would, if P was adequate.

Less grass consumed means a lower nutrient intake, affecting the breeder’s ability to maintain body condition. This leads to lower wearing rates and increased mortality. Milk production is also reduced, meaning lighter weaners. In growing cattle, the lower nutrient intake produces lower growth rates. Lower reproduction and lighter cattle all add up to less kilos to sell.

The welfare implications of P deficiency include bone chewing (increasing the risk of botulism), stiff gait or peg leg, bone breakages and chewing objects such as rocks, sticks and wire.

The good news is that economic analysis shows management of P nutrition on deficient country is very profitable, with the cost of supplement being well worth it.

For more information check out the new phosphorus page on the FutureBeef website futurebeef.com.au, including all of the updated information, resources, templates and tools presented at the workshops.

Key points

- Phosphorus supplementation is a major consideration in northern grazing
- DAF extension activities in 2018 were aimed at improving access to information on supplementing with phosphorus
- New resources are available on futurebeef.com.au, including a phosphorus management plan

Is your registration with Biosecurity Queensland up-to-date?

A message from Queensland’s Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Allison Crook.

A new, online customer portal is now available to manage your biosecurity entity registration.

Registration is a critical part of effective biosecurity management in Queensland. It enables Biosecurity Queensland to trace animal movements to determine the origin and spread of a pest or disease, and allows us to contact you quickly and directly in an emergency.

Entity registration works with the property identification code (PIC) system. When an application for entity registration is made, the PIC that relates to the land where the animals are kept will be issued. When the registration requirements commenced on 1 July 2016, anyone who held a PIC was automatically registered as a biosecurity entity. This means if you own any cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, other livestock or a horse, you may already be registered.

If you held a PIC on 30 June 2016, or if you’ve registered as a biosecurity entity since then, you can now access the Biosecurity Entity Registration Portal to manage your registration and renewal.

If you don’t already have an online portal account, the first step to gain access is to check if you’re registered. Once you’re logged in, you need to review and update your contact details if they’ve changed. This is an important step so we can contact you in the event of an emergency situation and email you registration renewal reminders.

From mid-May 2019, you’ll also be able to use the online portal to renew your registration and pay the fee if it applies. The fee is currently $136.80 every three years if you keep livestock and applies if you meet the Australian Taxation Office ruling of carrying out the business of primary production as a result of owning your animals.

Check if you’re registered and update your contact details at qld.gov.au/BiosecurityRegistration. If you need help, or to find your nearest DAF customer service office, please call our Customer Service Centre on 13 25 23 between 8am and 5pm Monday to Friday. You can also email us at info@daf.qld.gov.au.

“ I had cattle and sheep drinking on the line and I was not getting enough water through the system because my mineral-laden bore water was blocking my main pipe. I was quite stressed. The DELTA unit got things working straight away. It was a great relief.”

Steven McCracken, Eyre Peninsula SA

Eliminates scale buildup
Improves palatability
Prevents algae in troughs

www.deltawater.com.au 1800 283 600
Does supplementing cows with P during pregnancy alter post-weaning performance of progeny?

The availability of phosphorus (P) is often an important restriction to beef production in northern Australia. When an animal’s P demand cannot be met either from the diet or by mobilising body reserves, dietary intake and growth are dramatically reduced. Therefore, heifers and cows should be supplemented during late pregnancy and while lactating on low P country.

A trial at the Victoria River Research Station, ‘Kidman Springs’, Northern Territory (NT), has reported substantial reproduction and productivity gains from P supplementation. The pre-weaning gain of calves and consequently weaning weights was constrained when cows were on low P diets during late pregnancy and lactation.

A pen study was recently conducted at the Katherine Research Station in the NT, investigating the effect of P supplementation to cows during pregnancy and lactation on post-weaning performance of progeny when fed high and low P content diets.

Method

Weaners were produced from four-year-old cows. Approximately half of them had access to supplemental P (COWP+) and the other half had no access to supplemental P (COWP-). They were all grazing P-deficient paddocks at Kidman Springs. There were 30 and 43 mixed-sex Brahman calves weaned from the COWP- and COWP+ groups respectively in June 2018.

In September 2018, at 8 to 10 months of age, after co-grazing native pasture paddocks of Kidman Springs, the weaners were relocated to Katherine Research Station. They were fed a low P experimental diet for nine days, so that they could become accustomed to the diet before being introduced the pen trial area and randomly allocated to either a low P (WnrP-, 0.5 g P/kg DM) or high P (WnrP+, 2.8 g P/kg DM) weaner diet group. Each treatment was replicated three times, with each replicate equal to a pen of two to four animals.

The weaners had unlimited access to the experimental pellet for 64 days, with changes in weight measured. Liveweight was recorded at the beginning of the experiment, with interim un-curfewed weights recorded weekly.

Results so far

At the beginning of the experiment, the average weight of weaners differed between cow diet. Heifers and steers from P- cows were 6.4 kg (174.5 vs. 168.1) and 23.9 kg (183.2 vs. 159.3) heavier, respectively, when compared to similar weaners from P+ cows. These differences are thought to reflect differences in quantity of milk delivery and cow body condition score at calving.

Weaner diet in the pens had a highly significant effect on growth (P<0.001), which was independent of cow diet. Therefore, differences in weaning weight were retained irrespective of weaner diet.

Growth of weaners fed high and low P diets

Overall, the average growth of weaners on the P+ diet was 40.9 kg greater than the P- weaner diet. The growth of weaners on the P- diet appeared to plateau after approximately four weeks of receiving the diet. Differences in growth are likely to be a consequence of reduced intake of weaners on the P- weaner diet.

Throughout the trial, changes in hip height, feed intake and blood samples for measurement of Plasma Inorganic Phosphorus have also been collected and will be analysed sometime this year.

For more Information contact Kieren McCosker, Senior Livestock Scientist, NT Department of Primary Industry and Resources, Tel: 08 8973 9771, Kieren.Mccosker@nt.gov.au.

Business improvement strategies of Pilbara and Kimberley pastoralists—from fundamentals to innovation

Growing global demand for Australian beef products, driven primarily by Asian countries, presents opportunities to expand livestock production and value add in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia.

In 2015, the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development’s Northern Beef Development project implemented an incentive-based Business Improvement Grants (BIG) program. The program assists commercial cattle producers in the Kimberley and Pilbara pastoral regions enhance their competitiveness and growth prospects by connecting them with professional business advice and mentoring support.

The program reimburses approved applicants with up to $25,000 (excluding GST), including up to $10,000 to engage a consultant to review current performance and develop a business plan, and up to $15,000 to implement key business improvement strategies as identified in the business plan.

Forty-eight pastoral enterprises participated in the initial round of BIG, using the grant in a range of business improvement areas (see Figure 1).

An additional 20 enterprises from two regions, consisting of family, corporate and Indigenous-owned stations, participated in round two of the program last year.

Data recording

The extensive production systems in northern Western Australia can see pastoral enterprises manage anywhere from 1000 to 80,000 head on land parcels of up to 400,000 ha and more.

Terrain, mustering method and the sheer size of northern cattle stations mean that achieving clean musters is a challenge and some animals may not pass through the yards each year, resulting in inaccurate recording of livestock numbers. While traditional methods, such as a bangalow muster, can provide the opportunity to identify previously-mustered livestock, they do not allow pastoralists to retain additional information on individual animals.

Through linking an electronic identification (EID) tag to herd recording software, pastoralists can build a history on individual animals, providing invaluable data on both cattle and business performance. Data collected may include age, weight, body condition, pregnancy status, wet/dry status, and vaccination history. Weight recording can be used to assist pastoralists drafting lines of cattle by weight class, as well as those wishing to calculate average daily gains.

Some pastoralists in the BIG program invested in crush side hardware, including scales, an EID reader and a data box. Others opted for in-paddock recording systems such as walk-over-weighers.

Water and fencing

The primary limiting factor of infrastructure development on pastoral leases in the Pilbara and Kimberley is the availability of, and access to, capital. While increases in corporate ownership are resulting in an injection of capital across the region, significant opportunities to open up previously ungrazed areas of the rangelands through the development of water points remain.

Some BIG participants used grant funding to partially reimburse the cost of sinking a bore, installing solar panels and troughs and piping off existing water points.

Focus on fundamentals or venture into innovation?

The BIG program provides pastoralists the opportunity to pursue a low-risk investment to trial a new business improvement strategy such as water monitoring equipment or herd recording software or hardware. It also offers pastoralists the freedom of choice to align their chosen business improvement with their professional business plan.

Some pastoralists trialled innovative new technologies while others invested in fundamental business improvement practices. Investment choices reflected a number of factors, including the developmental stage of the enterprise, the risk profile of the pastoralist and the guidance of their consultant. For some pastoralists, new technologies to improve efficiencies were considered to be the greatest return on investment while for others, it was opening up new country.

Participant feedback indicated that as a result of the consultation process, their reimbursement was applied toward a different strategy than the one they had originally envisioned. The value of taking the time to plan and review business operations, as opposed to purely working in it, has been a major outcome of the program. In an occupation where business owners and managers are required to possess an extensive skill set, the use of external consultants and mentors has been invaluable, planting the seed for paradigm shifts in pastoral operations.

The BIG program has proven to be a catalyst for intra-industry engagement, delivering the pre-conditions to drive transformational change and a conduit for information flow to and from industry. The high level of participation in the program is testament to pastoralists’ ability to embrace change and new ideas—ultimately enhancing their resilience, adaptability and competitiveness.

CONSIGN YOUR CATTLE TO DALRYMPLE SALEYARDS

Combined Fat & Store Sales | Wednesdays

Saleyard will be closed for maintenance from 13/12/18 to 2/1/19

More Competition – Higher Returns

Features offered: Accredited Export Cattle Holding Facility, Accredited Tick Clearance Centre, Cattle Spelling, Cattle Weighing, NLIS Reading & Public Weighbridge.

Saleyard Superintendent - 0427 875 638 | Council - 07 4761 5300 | Fax - 07 4761 5344 | Email - mail@charterstowers.qld.gov.au
No silver bullets in extensive grazing

A common misconception in the beef industry is that unless you are cell grazing, you are not a good grazier and a poor manager of grazing land. However, over time we have witnessed many graziers who have jumped head first into intensive systems, then gone into receivership or sold their properties soon after making the change.

So what is going on?

Upfront capital costs to implement an intensive grazing system are high, particularly if a large proportion of the property is to be converted.

Experience has shown that the days of the silver proportion of the property is to be converted. is unless you are cell grazing, you are not system is frequently viewed as a way out of a change.

A common misconception many graziers who have jumped head first into extensive systems, then gone into receivership and if they cost money, produce a good return on the investment.

THE FUNDAMENTALS

What are they?

1. Know what drives pasture growth. There are only three things:
   - land type
   - land condition
   - climate (rainfall and frost).
   Only land condition can be managed.

2. Adequate distribution of stock water. Having man-made waters any closer than four kilometres apart (maximum walking distance of two kilometres) is over capitalisation. If you are on 100 per cent buffel pastures in Central Queensland, the economics may support waters a bit closer.

In paddocks with a range of land types, locate waters on country that cattle do not prefer, to draw them away from heavily-grazed areas.

3. Fencing. Erect only enough fencing to support your style of operation and scale. Paddock sizes should carry the number of cattle that you can comfortably muster and process in one or two days. Fence to land type where feasible or at least fence land types with a similar grazing preference into the one paddock.

4. Matching stocking rate to carry capacity. If you are on country that is rated at one adult equivalent (AE: 450 kg dry animal) per 6.5 ha this is the long-term carrying capacity. The short-term carrying capacity is based on how good the last wet season was and how much grass grew. So using the same scenario, in a good season the short-term carrying capacity may be 1 AE/6 ha and in a dry season 1 AE/8.5 ha.

Stocking rates should be matched to the short-term carrying capacity.

5. Wet-season spelling. Ensure that there is sufficient room to allow country to be locked up without crucifying other paddocks. The type of wet season spelling depends on the land condition in the individual paddock. For example:
   - Paddock in land condition A—a short wet season spell from the first growing rains for six to eight weeks to allow the grass to ‘get ahead’ of the cattle.
   - Paddock in land condition B—a late wet season spell for two months to allow seed set to boost the soil seedbank for future wet seasons.
   - Paddock in land condition C—full wet season spell from opening rains to first round muster i.e. five months to allow new plants to establish and seed set to occur.

The frequency of spelling also depends on land condition. The poorer the condition of the paddock the more frequent and longer the spell. If a paddock is spelled and the season fails, abandon the spell rather than over-grazing the paddocks that are carrying the extra cattle. Consider spelling the same poor-condition paddock for two consecutive wet seasons. Heavy stocking after a spell will undo the benefits from the spell, so ensure that point 4 is adopted.

6. Control weeds early. Controlling small weed outbreaks will prevent large costly weed infestations down the track. Consider the following research results for prickly acacia on Mitchell grass downs:
   - 30% canopy cover of prickly acacia halves pasture production i.e. 2000 kg/ha down to 1000 kg/ha
   - Prickly acacia is palatable with high protein leaf, but the leaf yield in central-western Queensland is only 85kg/ha, which will not compensate for the loss of 1000 kg of pasture.

7. Sow legumes. A well-established legume/grass pasture is the closest thing to a silver bullet that graziers will find, as it will increase carrying capacity by at least 50 per cent. Select the legumes that are best matched to your soil types e.g. stylos for lighter country and Desmanthus, butterfly pea and Caatinga stylos for clay country. Get advice on sowing and establishment methods as pasture seed is expensive. To reduce seed costs, obtain uncoated seed where available.

8. Burn country. Fire is not for every situation, but the lack of fire can allow density of woody plants to increase, causing declines in pasture production. The higher the natural fertility of the land type, the more dramatic the reduction in pasture growth. Fire will help to suppress woody plants (both native and exotic species). Fire can also play an important role in changing pasture composition e.g. reducing wire grass and increasing black spear grass, or preparing a seedbed and reducing competition before over-sowing legumes. In paddocks with a mosaic of land types, burn the least-grazed land types to encourage grazing next year.

Bob Shepherd
Principal Extension Officer
(Grazing Land Management)
DAF Charters Towers
Bob.Shepherd@daf.qld.gov.au
0467 802 430

Livestock Connect
Get the edge with Livestock Connect

Stay ahead with livestock news and information that matters from across the country.

Find commercial and stud stock - all in one place!