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Information for rural business in Central Queensland

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Pasture dieback options are showcased in trials

PASTURE dieback remains a serious issue for graziers in eastern Queensland and north-eastern New South Wales. However, new research by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) is shedding light on the best ways to manage affected pastures.

DAF senior agronomist Stuart Buck said results from 10 research and demonstration trials had helped DAF develop management options, which had recently been presented at Pasture Dieback Management Workshops across Queensland.

"Depending on the situation, an area of country might benefit from a combination of management strategies," Mr Buck said.

"For example, a grazier might decide to burn an affected pasture, sow it to a forage hay crop for a few years, then return the area to a diverse legume-grass pasture.

"There is a larger range of options for arable country, particularly if machinery is available."

Grazier Warren Luhrs is hosting a trial on his Moura property Wonga, which has been badly affected by pasture rundown, Indian couch and dieback.

"The country where the trial is located on Wonga was originally planted to Gayndah buffel grass and had since become quite run-down," Mr Luhrs said.

"We first noticed dieback in 2013-14 after we had a good season. After the buffel died in large patches, the Indian couch was able to get away and take over the area.



Warren Luhrs, Ridgedale and Wonga, Moura, is hosting a trial on his property which has been affected by pasture rundown, Indian couch and dieback. He recently hosted a pasture dieback field day.

Management options for pasture affected by dieback:

- manage for recovery
- improve pasture (e.g. through introducing legumes)
- sow a break crop
- treat a pathogen.
- Learn more at www.futurebeef.com.au

"We cultivated the area with offsets several times, did a soil test, fertilised, planted and rolled the seed just in time for rain in March 2021. In total, the area was fallowed for about six months before planting.

"The trial area as a whole is looking very good. After



going through the process of establishing the trial area, I have decided to establish new pastures in other dieback-affected areas on Wonga and my other property Ridgedale.

"I will be choosing the more tolerant grasses and lots of legume species and following the same regime

that we used in the trial."

Recently, Mr Luhrs hosted a field tour of the trial area, enabling 19 attendees to see the growth of various pasture species in the previously dieback-affected area.

The field tour followed a pasture dieback management workshop. The workshop group also visited

Torsdale - owned by Will Wilson at Biloela - to inspect another trial site. The Torsdale trial was showing signs of dieback in control plots (no treatments) while plots replanted to new grass and legume species were green, dense and healthy.

For more information about pasture dieback - including fact sheets, an identification guide and upcoming events - search 'pasture dieback' online at www.futurebeef.com.au.

DAF acknowledges Meat and Livestock Australia's funding support for these activities.

■ Kylie Hopkins, beef extension officer, DAF Rockhampton, 0467 726 349.

Legumes are handy in the mix when it comes to pasture dieback

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) researchers have been testing tropical grass and legume species to see how tolerant they are to pasture dieback.

DAF senior agronomist Stuart Buck said findings from these trials - along with observations from researchers and graziers across Queensland - were used to compile a list of species and their relative tolerance to pasture dieback.

"Grass species like Biloela buffel, purple pigeon, panics and the native grasses, black speargrass and forest bluegrass are generally at the more tolerant end of the scale," Mr Buck said.

"Gayndah and American buffel, bisset bluegrass, pangola, paspalum and sabi grass are consistently heavily affected by dieback.

"This list is a generalisation - and we do see exceptions - however, the more tolerant species tend to be the last affected."

He said species diversity in a pasture was critical when it came to dieback.

"The impact of dieback can be severe in monoculture pastures as total paddock productivity can be lost," he said.

"We are seeing the importance of legumes in a pasture.

"When grasses are killed off by dieback, legumes provide high quality feed for cattle.

"When establishing a new pasture - irrespective of a dieback situation or not - legumes should always be included in the seed mix," he said.

■ Kylie Hopkins, beef extension officer, DAF Rockhampton, 0467 726 349.

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What backgrounders do

FUTUREBEEF asked Queensland graziers Ian McCamley and Bruce Mayne how they operated their backgrounding businesses.

Ian McCamley, MCC Pastoral, Lowesby, Rolleston

We aim for a heavy feeder steer with a curfewed weight of as close to 520 kilograms as we can - we get discounted over that. While cattle are expensive to replace, we'll aim for the top weight.

Weaner training

Cattle are bought at around 260kg and are worked through the yards and kept in holding paddocks for up to a week. Some may need more time in and around the yards, especially if they've never seen a horse or dog.

If they are fresh, we tail them out during the day and bring them back into the yards overnight until they are settled. Cattle that have already had a good amount of weaner training won't need so much handling.

We get our cattle used to going through gates and through the race. We purposely put our cattle under pressure so they learn to handle stress and recover quickly.

We want our cattle quiet so they come up to you in the paddock, rather than run off when we drive around.

Everything has been on a truck at least twice: once on the way to the saleyards and again from the yards to here.

We feed them a good quality grassy hay while they are in the yards to keep their gut microbes going to reduce performance setbacks.

Background induction

At induction, cattle receive tick fever vaccine, a management ear tag, pour-on for ticks and worms and are weighed. The ear tag is correlated to the NLIS tag for traceability and for tracking weight gain.

The pour-on has both Ivermectin (broad spectrum anti-parasitic) and Flu-azuron (tick development inhibitor).

Weight line drafting

We draft cattle into weight lines up to four times with the first split at induction.

The lighter cattle do better when they are with cattle of a similar weight, and we segregate heavy lead cattle so we are not mustering mobs unnecessarily.

Cattle drafted into a line all within 20kg of each other can often have a 70kg to 80kg difference between tops and tails a few months later.

If cattle need to come through the yards for tick treatment, we use the opportunity to draft them into tighter weight groups.

We're using Optiweigh units in the paddock to identify when cattle are ready to market.

Markets

We have transitioned from sending a finished grass-fed certified bullock to turning off feeder steers. If we stay with the feeder market, we will give HGP's some consideration. We dropped HGP's when we were focusing on the MSA market.

If the feedlot is using them, then we may as well be getting some weight benefits from them too. However, they do reduce eating quality, so I will be watching for what the market signals.

It will be interesting to see



Lowesby cattle at Rolleston surrounding an Optiweigh unit in the paddock, which helps to identify when the cattle are ready to market.

“

The lighter cattle do better when they are with cattle of a similar weight, and we segregate heavy lead cattle so we are not mustering mobs unnecessarily. Cattle drafted into a line all within 20kg of each other can often have a 70kg to 80kg difference between tops and tails a few months later.

Ian McCamley, MCC Pastoral - Lowesby, Rolleston

if it becomes more economic to finish grass-fed ox rather than sell feeder cattle once the Australian herd numbers build up again.

Bruce Mayne, Fairview, Calliope

We buy weaners through the saleyards, and because of that they come with some yard and truck experience. A lot of the time they come straight off mum, and we will re-wean them in the yards for five to seven days on hay. This also gets any weeds out of their system.

HGP's

We use HGP's on the Brahman-type cattle, not the flatbacks. The flatbacks get a premium price from Coles - a non-HGP market. When we give the HGP to the Brahman-type cattle depends on the season and what sort of

feed they are going on. We won't use a HGP until we know feed quality is high.

Vaccination

At weaning we give them 5 in 1 and botulism vaccines. We've had high three-day losses the last couple of years, so we are going to start with a three-day vaccine too. They get a long-action injectable at weaning to treat inside and outside parasites.

The feedlot the Brahman cattle go to offers a premium to cattle treated with Bovi-Shield MH-One. We've been giving them a shot at least 10 days to a month before they go, so the cattle can build up some immunity to bovine respiratory disease (BRD).

Weight

We buy animals around 180kg to 200kg, aim to put at least 200kg on them and sell at 380kg to 420kg. The last time I weighed cattle off leucaena they had gained 2kg a day, but there are times when they only do 0.3kg or 0.4kg. It averages at around the 0.65kg to 0.7kg a day.

My son Kurt loves his Optiweigh in-paddock weigh system, and I can see why they are beneficial for a larger operation.

We've only got 1400 hectares here and it's easy for us to go grab 230 head off a water and weigh them. Leucaena has made a massive difference to our business, both here at Calliope and when we were at Rolleston. We also have a centre pivot over grass pasture.

It's all about the trade. If we sell a 400kg animal and replace it with a 200kg animal, with a price margin of \$600 to \$700 between them, we are happy.

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Hitting optimum weight

Cattle weighing units play big role in accuracy

KURT Mayne is busy: when you background cattle, farm 3000 hectares and do some contracting on the side, it's going to be that way.

So when he came across the Optiweigh in-paddock weighing units, he was keen to give them a try.

"We turn off a heavy feeder at 480 to 500 kilograms," Mr Mayne said.

"As soon as they go over 500kg we lose \$150. It's a minimum of four to five weeks between when you book cattle into the feedlot and send them. To be able to weigh cattle in the paddock with no labour and get accurate data is a game changer.

"I estimate the accuracy is probably enabling us to put on an extra 20kg per beast because I can make better decisions about when cattle need to be sold. It stops the weights blowing out over the top of the feeder market and I no longer have a bull-neck paddock. Feeders make more for us than bullocks, plus it's saving me six months of feed on these animals."

Mr Mayne says younger cattle are run in mobs of 600 to 700. When they are almost ready to go to the feedlot, the mob size drops to 300 to 400 - and that's when he uses Optiweigh units.

"It takes twice as long to draft a mob of 600 as it does



Weaner cattle stay in the yards as long as necessary, with access to plenty of hay. Weaner training is also an important part of this time in the yards.

300 and curfew is a massive consideration for us. When we go to sell cattle, they're on hay as soon as they hit the yards. We'll get them in at daylight the day before and have them drafted by 10am. By midday, they've been through the plunge dip and from then until 4am they're in the yards on a hay feeder.

"We'll truck them in the dark while they're calm and they're at the feedlot off the weighbridge by 11am or 12pm. The feedlot is 500km away. We budget for them to lose three to five per cent of their bodyweight in transit.

"We have 2800ha of Leucaena. It's the only crop you can grow once and reap re-

wards from for years and it's the only crop you can inherit. We've just fertilised every row on one side with mono-ammonium phosphate (MAP): its first expense in 30-plus years. I estimate it has given us an extra 0.2kg a day in that time. It allows us to background cattle all year and helps us handle droughts. Our paddocks are rotationally grazed."

Mr Mayne said he didn't use HGPs. "We blood (tick fever vaccine), Dectomax and use the plunge dip. We cross the tick line into clean country on route to the feedlot. Cattle are cleared on-farm."

The only supplements Mr Mayne feeds are blocks

to entice cattle onto the Optiweigh units. Currently, a trace mineral block, but when the feed dries off he'll use Uramol.

The cattle use the Optiweigh units well. Mr Mayne puts this down to the fact that they are always tipping cattle into the mobs using the units and the original cattle teach the others. If the units have weighed 50pc of cattle in the paddock, Mr Mayne is comfortable that it's reliable data.

"Even at 30pc of the mob using the units we're getting good data," he said.

"We use a buying agent but sell direct to the feedlot. Lately we've bought from Gracemere, but we use Auc-

tionsPlus and paddock sales when we can find them."

Mr Mayne employs a man who is happy to spend a bit of time weaner training.

"They'll stay in the yards just as long as they need to," he said.

Mr Mayne hires a consultant to analyse his own weight data, along with data from the feedlot including the kill sheets.

"I'm going to be able to work out where I get the best 10pc of my cattle from and I'll be happy to pay an extra 10 cents if I know they are going to perform better."

Byrony Daniels, beef extension officer, DAF Emerald, 0427 746 434.

Monitor your land with help of app

WHEN monitoring land condition, the best technique is repeat photography accompanied by detailed notes. The Stocktake GLM app can help you achieve this and more.

"When selecting a monitoring site, the most important thing is to select a location that best represents the area you want to monitor," Department of Agriculture and Fisheries senior beef extension officer Greg Bath said. "Pick a spot that is typical of the pasture species, tree density and slope in your paddock. If you have multiple land types in a paddock, you might like to choose several monitoring sites."

"The Stocktake GLM app has been designed to take out the guesswork of what to record each year. Once the site is set up, the templates prompt the user to record key information such as pasture and soil condition, and ground cover and tree coverage. There is also the opportunity to record pasture species, weeds or other anomalies (e.g. fire)."

Stocktake GLM also features a forage budgeting tool for all grazing systems. The app does not require internet connectivity and is compatible with Android and iOS devices. Download it for free by searching for 'Stocktake GLM' in your app store or visiting www.stocktakeglm.com.au.

DAF hosts regular Stocktake workshops. Email info@futurebeef.com.au to register or for help creating monitoring sites or forage budgets.

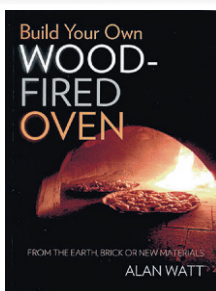
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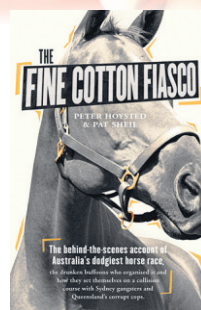
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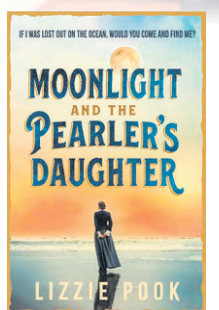


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FutureBeef video gives advice for producers

Vaccination for healthy herds

FUTUREBEEF recently released a video for producers who want a refresher on best-practice vaccination.

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries extension officer, grazier and veterinarian Andrea McKenzie said in the video that vaccination was important to keep cattle herds healthy and productive.

"Vaccination is usually low cost and there is a quick pay-back if you vaccinate for the right diseases," Ms McKenzie said.

"Here are some of our top tips for effective vaccination."

- Treat your vaccines like you treat your milk. Heat, light and freezing will cause the vaccine to break down, impacting its effectiveness.
- Some vaccines need to be used within a day of opening, while others can be used up to 30 days after opening. Check the label to make sure your vaccine is still effective.
- Check expiry dates. Expired vaccines are likely to be ineffective.
- Use clean vaccine guns. Reusable guns should be



DAF extension officer, veterinarian and grazier Andrea McKenzie gives some good advice in the Vaccination Best Practice for Healthy Herds video, which can be found on FutureBeef's YouTube channel.

- disassembled, cleaned, sterilised, reassembled and calibrated between uses. Disposable guns should be discarded after use.
- Use clean, sharp needles.
- Replace them often to keep them sharp.
- Use 16-gauge half-inch needles for adult cattle and 18-gauge needles for calves.
- Always have spare guns and needles on hand.
- Avoid vaccinating cattle in the rain or in extreme dust. These conditions will increase infections and abscesses.
- Never inject two vaccines in the same spot. Try to keep them at least a hand span apart.
- Read and follow the instructions for storage, handling and use of vaccines. The instructions

will give you important information about the timing of vaccinations and the need for and timing of booster shots.

Ms McKenzie said cattle vaccines - such as botulism, leptospirosis, vibriosis, 5 in 1 and 7 in 1 - should be given under the skin in the neck.

Keeping the needle at 45 degrees and the bevel parallel to the skin allowed the needle to rest under the skin but above the muscle, she said.

"Remember you need to keep good vaccine records for your Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) accreditation," she said.

"Records to be kept include vaccine name, date, number of doses used, batch number, dose rate, withholding period, expiry date and who administered the vaccine."

- Templates for vaccine record keeping can be found online at www.mla.com.au/lpa
- Head to FutureBeef's YouTube channel to watch the video. For further advice, contact your local veterinarian or beef extension officer.

Preconditioning feedlot cattle is important

WHAT do feedlots look for in backgrounded cattle? Sarah Donovan, of Donovan Cattle Co, shares some advice with FutureBeef.

We maintain a commercial breeding operation and buy in weaners to fully stock our backgrounding block. We operate a small feedlot which allows the finishing

of our cattle, the buying in of feeders when the market allows, and the custom feeding of outside cattle.

The preconditioning of feedlot cattle is paramount to good performance. Early vaccinations and follow up boosters, tick/worm control, and a low stress weaning program prove highly favour-

able to good average daily gains (ADGs). Maintaining good rumen health via solid nutrition is also important. Feedlots obviously chase consistency in performance and will pay a premium to acquire cattle from proven suppliers.

We get a variety of animals into the feedlot and those

that are drought affected have a much slower start than those that have had good nutrition. It can take these animals two to three times longer to move on to a finisher ration - therefore, overall ADG can be greatly impacted. We've seen variances in ADGs from 0.4 to 0.8+ kilograms and higher

mortality rates, mainly due to impacts of prior nutrition and lack of handling. Genetics play a role as well.

Thorough mob socialisation well in advance of feedlot entry is also important. The mixing of mobs on entry increases stress and in turn the instances of bovine respiratory disease (BRD),

which is the most common cause of death in feedlots.

Where possible, feedlot cattle should receive all treatments in advance of feedlot arrival - including vaccinations, tick/worm control and HGP.

- Contact Byrony Daniels, beef extension officer, DAF Emerald, 0427 746 434.

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Wool is so much more than just winter wear

AS THE temperatures drop and we find ourselves reaching for warm clothes, it's worth considering how much of our wardrobes contain wool and how technology has changed the way we wear it.

Long gone are the itchy, heavy jumpers we once knew. Modern wool textiles are designed to be worn next to the skin in garments ranging from underwear to baby onesies, knitwear, luxury fashion and high-performance activewear.

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries extension officer Jed Sommerfield said textile and fashion industries were showcasing the benefits of Australian Merino wool in their marketing campaigns to appeal to new generations of consumers.

"The technology used to create modern wool textiles is highly sophisticated, resulting in lightweight, comfortable and soft-to-the-touch wool garments," Mr Sommerfield said.

"Wool is breathable, meaning it changes with your body temperature so you're never too hot or too cold. It is also naturally resistant to odours, stains and wrinkles, so it requires less washing.

"Different garments have different washing methods, however, most wool garments produced today can go in the washing machine and don't need to be hand-washed.

"Wool has a natural ability to absorb and release twice as much moisture vapour as cotton and 30 times as much



Modern Australian wool can be worn next to the skin in a huge range of garments, from underwear to baby onesies, knitwear, luxury fashion and high-performance activewear.

as polyester. Wool is the only natural fibre that is hollow. The fibre is coloured from the inside out during the dyeing process, creating a more vibrant, longer-lasting colour. It is fine enough to go through a custom printer and have an image directly printed onto it."

While wool is perceived by some to be an allergen when worn directly against the skin, several recent scientific studies found no evidence of this. Published by Australian researchers in 2017, the aptly named report *Debunking the Myth of Wool Allergy: Reviewing the Evidence for Immune and Non-immune Cutaneous Reactions* found wearing superfine Merino wool could be beneficial for



eczema sufferers.

Mr Sommerfield said the Australian wool industry's sustainability credentials were another key consideration for consumers and something woolgrowers should champion.

"According to the latest *Pulse of Fashion* report, 75 per cent of consumers sur-

veyed (in China, US, UK, France and Brazil) view sustainability as extremely or very important. Furthermore, 38pc of consumers report actively switching from their preferred brand to another because it credibly stands for positive environmental and/or social practices," he said. "The eco-cre-

dentials of wool are a major asset for the industry. Wool is a natural, renewable and biodegradable fibre and its long lifespan means you can wear it for longer. "As wool is 100pc biodegradable, it does not contribute to microplastic pollution on land or in our oceans - as opposed to polyester, acrylic, nylon and other synthetic fibres which are made from petroleum, oil or basically plastic."

There are a range of online resources explaining how to care for your woollen garments, including how to remove stains and wash, dry and store them to ensure their longevity.

■ Check out these tips at www.woolmark.com/care.



Who wears your wool?

The ability for modern wool garments to be worn all year round makes it the fibre of choice for many sporting teams and organisations.

Most recently, Australian wool was showcased in the formal uniform of the 2022 Australian Olympic Team. The uniform included wool coats, knitwear and scarves created by fashion lifestyle brand Sportscraft, Australia's longest-serving Woolmark licensee.

Australian outdoor clothing brand and Woolmark licensee XTM provided Merino base-layers and accessories to all Australian Winter Olympic Team athletes and team officials at Beijing 2022.

This includes the Merino Woolzy - a one-piece top and bottom base-layer made from 20.5-micron, 100 per cent Australian Merino wool.

The iconic baggy green worn by Australian Test cricketers are also Australian wool.

The Flock to Baggy Green project saw more than 400 woolgrowers from across Australia donate wool to help create the next batch of baggy green caps.

The volume of donated wool was enough to cap the next 100 years of Australian Test cricketers.

The uniforms worn by female members of the Navy, Army and Air Force feature woollen items produced by Australian-based clothing brand and Woolmark licensee - Farage.

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