

☐ Brothers Alex, 5, and Connor Middleton, 2, having fun in the Souwest pasture mix at Esperance.



IRWIN HUNTER & CO SOUWEST PASTURE MIX

For silage and grazing in Esperance

ESPERANCE sheep farmer Andrew Middleton is amazed at the growth of his trial paddock of the Irwin Hunter Seed Company pasture mix known as Souwest.

He said the mixture of sub clovers, Persian clovers, annual ryegrass and Roper perennial ryegrass had risen like a phoenix from the ashes after being drowned in its first few months following prolonged rain in the southern district.

"The pasture mix bolted out of the ground once we finally had warmer weather in October and by the time it was cut it was over a metre high where it had not been waterlogged," Mr. Middleton said. "The rest averaged 700-800mm in height."

Mr Middleton, together with his wife Carolyn, farms 830ha 20km east of Esperance on land that is prone to water logging and has a rainfall of more than 550mm.

Almost half of the farm has been leased to the bluegum-growing Integrated Tree Cropping company and Mr Middleton runs 100 breeding cattle and mates about 1400 ewes a year on the rest of the property.

Fine wool Merinos have given way to cross-bred lambs on the property in recent years as the wool price continues to falter and prime lamb prices hold at profitable prices.

The Middletons intend to increase the area of the farm planted to the Souwest pasture mix this year from 12ha in 2005 to 20-30ha this year after the mix made a stellar comeback from severe waterlogging and managed to cut excellent silage and continued to outdo itself with good regrowth.

"We've got 16 heifers in there at the moment munching away very happily," Mr Middleton said. "The regrowth could have been better if the pasture had been cut [for silage] a week earlier but the

perennials are coming back well and the Tetraploid's [annual ryegrasses] are doing well."

Mr Middleton managed the 12ha pasture paddock with an early application of clay in February. The clay was applied at 130t/ha and is a once in a lifetime operation because of the cost. "It is quite different to applying lime, for example, which should be repeated every 8-10 years," he said. The clay application is part of a whole of farm approach to non-wetting soils. "We clay 10-15pc of the farm each year," he said. "It helps to fix non-wetting soils and assists with good establishment but it makes the ground hungry for nutrients."

To combat the problem of the subsoil clay tying up the nutrients, Mr Middleton applied 1t/ha of gypsum and 1.5t/ha of lime plus 150kg/ha of a CSBP Tek Phos 2:1 superpotash fertiliser (6.1pcP, 16.3pcK, 7pcS, 12.6pcCa, 0.4pcCu, 0.2pcZn, 0.04pcMo) immediately after the clay application.

The paddock was then sprayed for weeds on May 23 and again on June 6 and the pasture mix was seeded on June 8 at 10kg/ha with an extra 6kg/ha of Cadiz, a soft seeded yellow French Serradella.

"We had the Cadiz and I thought it might help on some of the sandy patches in the paddock but I won't do it again," Mr Middleton said.

"The pasture is so thick once it gets going that it just outcompetes the Cadiz."

The paddock was fertilized with 100kg/ha of CSBP AgYield Plus, a phosphorus/nitrogen fertilizer with trace elements, at sowing, deep banded under the seed. When the pasture emerged he sprayed for late hatching earth mite.

Andrew intended to apply more nitrogen to the pasture later but nature had other plans. It became

so wet that it was impossible to get on the paddock to apply fertiliser and it appeared that the pasture had become so waterlogged it would be unlikely to survive.

However, by late September it had stopped raining and Mr Middleton was able to apply a dressing of 80 to 90 kg/ha of urea by early October.

"Then we had sunshine for a week or two and the pasture went ballistic," he said.

"It was awesomely thick and the best quickly grew to 1.2 to 1.3m high."

Mr Middleton cut some other paddocks for silage and did some contract silage making for a neighbour before cutting the ungrazed pasture using a mower conditioner on October 24. It was picked up with a precision chop forager on October 24.

"It was so thick we had to use two gears lower than usual to get through it."

"It was magnificent material, I certainly wasn't disappointed with the silage quality despite cutting a week later than optimum."

Recent analysis of the silage has revealed that it has 38.4pc DM, 31.9pcADF, 67.6%DDM, 10Mj/kg ME and 13.2pcCP.

Mr Middleton is getting good grazing out of the regrowth from the pasture mix now and intends to graze the pasture he puts in this year before cutting.

"We would have grazed the pasture last year but the spring was so kind to us we had plenty of annual feed and didn't need to."

☐ **More information: Irwin Hunter & Co**
Ph: 9383 4708 Fax: 9384 8029
www.irwinhunter.com.au