

SAFEGUARD ANNUAL RYEGRASS - BEVERLEY

Reduces ARGT gall counts and provides a productive pasture

JENEASTBURY Poll Hereford stud at Beverley have grazed with extreme caution following stock losses from Annual Ryegrass Toxicity two seasons ago.

The stud, run by Jen Bateman and her mother Carmel, lost six stud cows and three calves over a 10 day period in 2004.

"We were very lucky to catch it in time," Jen says.

"Another two cows survived but lost condition and took six months to recover."

With 810ha, Jeneastbury run 60 Poll Hereford breeders and 20 replacement heifers as well as a fat lamb enterprise comprising 300 Border Leicester ewes crossed to Poll Dorset sires.

Grazing and livestock production is the principal activity, but the family grow their own hay and grain for livestock, together with a 200ha wheat program.

Three paddocks on the stud with long cropping histories had proved particularly problematic as the Wimmera ryegrass had become resistant to herbicide.

"We were well aware of ARGT in the district but with the resistance problem, the Wimmera had taken over in a couple of paddocks that weren't grazed for two years," Jen says.

In 2004, testing showed bacterial gall counts of 1000 - plus in one 120ha paddock and another paddock of 90ha. In an adjacent paddock the gall count was 300.

Last year Jen decided to sow the ARGT-resistant ryegrass, Safeguard on the 120ha paddock that had been cropped for seven years previously.

After three knockdown herbicide treatments and running the Pheonix harrows over the site to encourage germination, she top dressed the Safeguard seed at 7kg/ha in late May and then harrowed it in.

"We left 30ha of the 120ha paddock unsown and that has proved very interesting," she says.

"Bacterial gall counts last spring on the 30ha of the paddock that was not sown to Safeguard were markedly different to the rest of the paddock that was sown to Safeguard.

"The highest gall count was nine in the Safeguard pasture, but in the 30ha that was not sown to the ARGT-resistant Safeguard, the count remained at 1000 galls - plus."

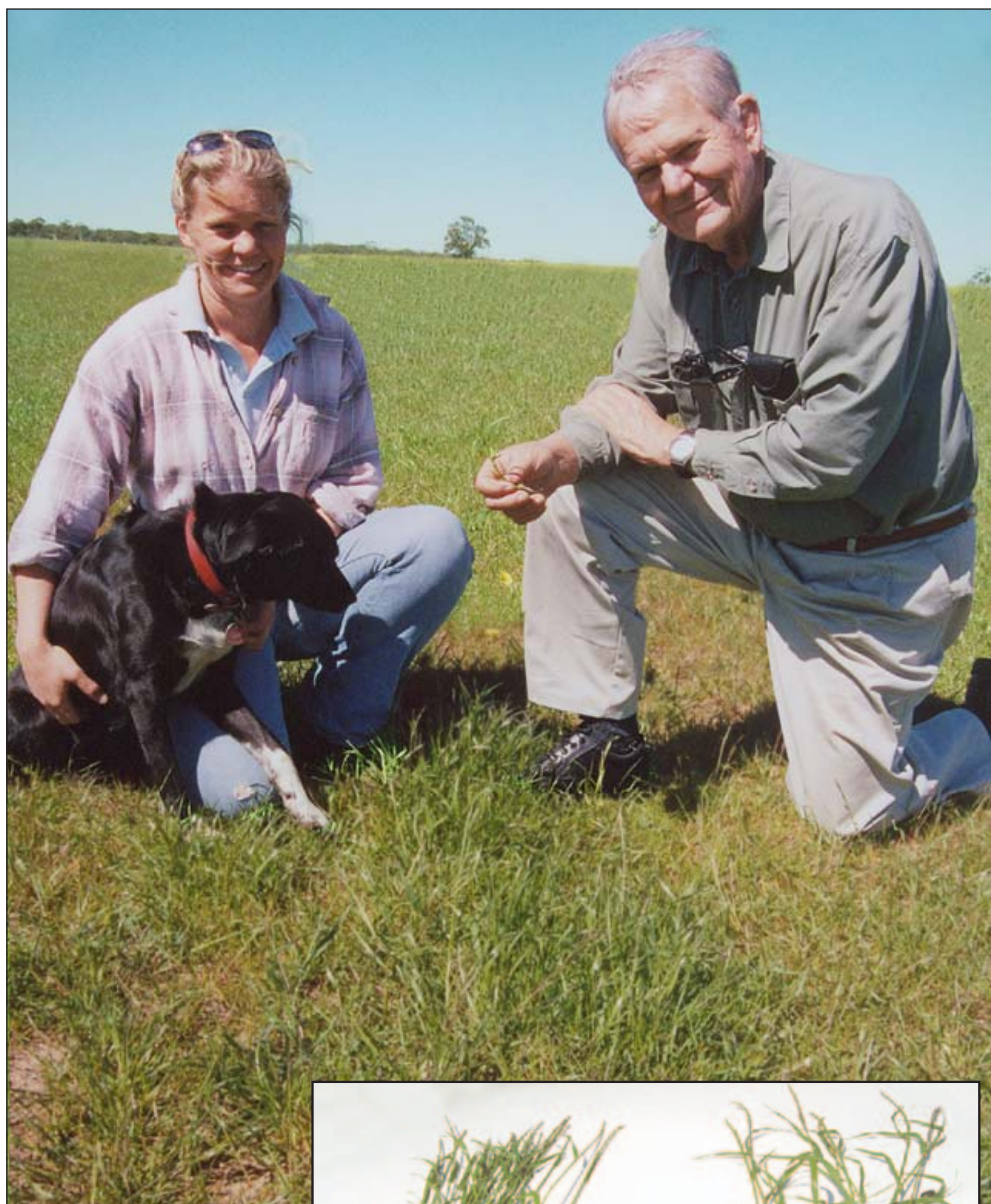
With late rains in spring, Jen tried to blitz the 30ha of the paddock not sown to Safeguard to check the Wimmera population.

She spray-topped four times with Paraquat and then once with Roundup but the bacterial gall counts of 1000 on this section of the paddock left her 'surprised'.

These results will be investigated further through a joint Department of Agriculture and Meat & Livestock Australia project on Jeneastbury which commenced last year.

Agriculture Department development officer, David Kessell says the three year project will look at six trial sites across the state.

"We will be looking at the transference of Safeguard genes and the effect they have on reducing nematode and bacterial gall levels," he says.



□ Jennifer Bateman and Geoff Eaton discussing the plant population in the recently grazed Safeguard annual ryegrass pasture at Beverley

□ INSET: Safeguard showing the significantly increased tiller density compared to Wimmera



Encouraged by the positive results with Safeguard, Jennifer admits that sowing ryegrass - the enemy of croppers - was a difficult thing to do.

"But we couldn't control the Wimmera with herbicides or grazing," she says.

"We had to run the cattle without those three paddocks last year, which was pretty tight."

Jen says with the cool and wet 2005, the Safeguard got off to a slow start.

She put a mob of 300 Merino hoggets in to graze for 12 weeks before they were sold in the spring.

"By October there were good levels of feed and

we closed the paddock up for seed set," Jen says.

"From the time that the Safeguard flowered onwards, the feed was incredible."

A mob of 100 'tox-tester' ewes also grazed the paddock late last year for six weeks with no stock losses.

Jen says in the future she will be sowing a further 100 to 200ha at Jeneastbury to Safeguard to help combat ARGT.

More information:

Irwin Hunter & Co

Ph: 9383 4708 Fax: 9384 8029

www.irwinhunter.com