

# SURREY ANNUAL RYEGRASS

## “Grows high quality feed at Karridale”

### FARM PROFILE:

**Name:** Boathough WA

**Location:** Karridale

**Rainfall:** 1050mm

**Farm area:** 1645ha

**Enterprise:** beef –  
800 Angus breeders



□ Sean O'Reilly and Sam Taylor discussing the bulk and quality of the Surrey cut for hay

WITH precise monitoring of his ryegrass and clover pastures Sean O'Reilly aims to maximise potential from his feed on offer following the three leaf – three days principle.

Sean manages Boathough, a 1645ha property at Karridale which is owned by Lithgow Pty Ltd.

An efficient beef operation located 25km from Margaret River, Boathough runs between 720 and 800 Angus breeders.

The herd structure is self-replacing and Sean is working towards carrying 900 breeders over the next two years.

Steers are normally carried over the summer months but were sold earlier last season because of the early finish to the season.

Boathough's annual rainfall was down by 250mm last year.

Soil type varies but the farm has been categorised into high, medium and low potential country as well as wet swampy areas.

Pasture variety is matched to the type of country with the 300ha of high potential country earmarked for fodder conservation and sown to Surrey or Western Annual Ryegrass Mix, with perennial ryegrasses established in the wet swampy areas.

About 1,000ha of Boathough is improved pasture, with 10 percent of this area resown annually to 25kg/ha of ryegrass and 2kg/ha of each clover variety. More than two clover varieties are used.

A further third of the farm is oversown every year at 10kg/ha of ryegrass to boost pasture productivity.

Sean's approach to grazing involves a high degree of precision, with a heavy emphasis on producing quality in order to save on the feed quantity.

Pasture growth is monitored using a plate meter and a pasture ruler and during the growing season the Angus cattle are rotationally grazed.

Grazing is deferred at the break of the season until the ryegrass plants reach the three leaf stage.

The ryegrass-predominant pasture is then grazed for three days at the three leaf stage in order to utilise all of the green feed that is available, while preserving the plant's root structure.

Sean and his team calculate the available dry matter and carve up paddocks with a single tape of electric fencing depending on the mob size.

“We normally aim to get three to four grazings – each 2200 to 2500 Kg/Ha DM and then a cut of hay or silage of around 6000 to 6500 Kg/Ha DM in the Surrey and Western Annual Rye mix paddocks,” he says.

Sean makes 2900 rolls of silage and 400 rolls of hay.

The silage is tube wrapped by contractors and tested at 9.5 to 10.2MJ/kg metabolisable energy and 11.5 to 15.6 percent crude protein last year.

Sean's rationale for producing quality silage is backed by some straightforward figures that demonstrate the importance of maximising dry matter and metabolisable energy in each bale.

“If the ME of the silage is 9MJ/kg then a 600kg cow needs 7.7kg DM per day for maintenance,” he says.

“But if the ME is 10MJ/kg, then the quantity required is 6.8kg DM per day and over a herd of 750 cows and 120 days, this is a saving of 108 tonnes of dry matter.

“The key is getting the pasture as dry as possible in the shortest possible time to maximise the energy levels and we need to go early.”

Between 25 and 30 percent of the farm is limed annually in a long term program that will rectify pH.

All of the 40 paddocks on Boathough are soil tested every year and leaf analysis is carried out on hay and silage paddocks together with those paddocks that are not performing.

“The fertiliser application is tailored to the soil test results - we fertilise to the soil's potential,” Sean explains.

“We are building on our potassium levels and phosphorous rates are dependent on residual levels and the phosphate retention index.”

The high potential country is fertilised after grazing, but Sean points out that nitrogen is only used where there are levels of potassium and phosphorous to support the additional production.

Sean says new ryegrass varieties, coupled with grazing management and plant nutrition all enable him to fine tune production at the Karridale property.

### More information:

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