

Irwin Hunter & Co.

Western Australia's Leading Seed Distributor

Suite 11/88 Forrest Street, Cottesloe

PO Box 232, Cottesloe WA 6011

Ph: 9383 4708 Fax 9384 8029

www.irwinhunter.com.au

High producing pasture more economic.

At Dromana Holstein they used to feed the milking herd with a high level of grain concentrates. But recently they have realized that they can manipulate their production costs by focusing on high quality pasture.

The Harris family's overall farm focus has been to obtain high producing pastures to help them to be more efficient in their feed use and costings.

On this property near Bunbury, they milk 300 registered Holstein cows the year round. These cows graze 240 ha of pasture growing on flat sandy loam soil where the rainfall averages 1,100 mm, falling mainly between May and September.

All of the 750 Holstein females at Dromana are fully registered, the stud being started in 1975 when there was an export order from Kuwait which required registered Holstein heifers.

Peter studied at an agricultural college in the late 1980's and came home with the ambition of improving the herd with the intensive use of AI. Shortly after that they introduced new blood lines and has improved the herd to the extent that in 1998, they achieved Reserve Champion cow at International Dairy Week at Shepparton. Two years later in 2000, the same cow came second in the Mature In Milk Class.

"The production of our herd rates in the top 20 in Western Australia and this has mainly been achieved from our high producing pastures.

"For some years we tried each new variety of ryegrass and clover as it became available, but last year we used a mixture of Dargo, Progrow, Surrey annual ryegrasses and V34N Tetraploid annual ryegrass at 20 kg/ha plus Gosse Sub Clover.

"Last year was a well balanced year as far as climate is concerned and this gave our pastures the ability to express themselves, with the help of a well managed fertiliser program. As a result we could have milked another 50 cows because there was so much grass in front of them," Peter said.

This Super Mix of pasture seed is sown over the whole of the 240 ha grazed by the dairy herd. In the autumn it is topdressed with 250 kg/ha of a fertiliser mixture designed for their soil type. Then, they apply 100 kg/ha of urea in late winter. In spring they follow up with another dressing of fertiliser.

"We cut 100 ha of good quality silage each year and this contributes strongly towards our summer feeding program," Peter concluded.

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Western Australia 6011. Phone 9383 4708