

Irwin Hunter & Co.

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Crusader, successful for early germination at Dromana Holsteins.

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Danny Harris and his wife Pam together with son Peter and daughter-in-law Debbie, chose to trial 30ha of Crusader Italian Ryegrass for the first time last year as the first pasture variety they would grow on their new irrigation system.

They have been deeply impressed with the results.

The ability to water on demand during summer meant that the Harris' were able to sow their choice of pasture early instead of having to wait until the break of the season.

The Crusader biannual ryegrass was drilled in at the start of March and then watered in mid-March for early germination.

According to Mr Harris, one of the most compelling reasons to irrigate was the early germination.

"It's been outstanding – we didn't have to wait for emergence."

The Harris' used a cross-drill method to sow the Crusader Italian Ryegrass. They first sowed from east to west and then re-sowed the same ground from north to south to increase the number of plants per hectare.

The pasture got away to a good start and by the time it came to be cut for silage, the pasture was outstanding.

The 370 milking cows are on a 15 day rotation of 30 hectares.

After cutting for silage, the Harris' continued to water the pasture and were grazing it again within just two weeks of cutting. "The regrowth was excellent," Mr Harris said.

The Harris' decided to re-drill the paddock with the Irwin Hunter & Co irrigation mixture after the regrowth had been grazed. Once again they used the 'cross-drill' method and planted 12.5kg of seed per hectare each way. The grasses and clovers have grown up underneath the Crusader and have become the summer pasture for the Harris'. Careful management meant that the young emerging plants were not overshadowed by the larger Crusader.

"That paddock has been grazed twice already," Mr Harris said in December. The family team talked about spraying the Crusader out before seeding the perennial ryegrasses but decided instead to graze the Crusader biannual pasture and then direct drill. The strategy has paid off.

The Harris' fertilised the Crusader heavily. They put 300kg/ha of fertiliser on the area under irrigation: 200kg of DAP, 75kg of potash and 25kg of magnesium.

The extra nutrition yielded excellent results.

"Judging on how our cows are grazing I think we are getting 80 to 90kgs of dry matter per day from each hectare," Mr Harris said.

The Harris' are milking 370 cows and selling 9,000 litres of milk each day. "I believe the Crusader is providing them with 5kgs of dry matter per cow per day plus silage and grain."

The Dardanup farmers are so impressed with the Pivot irrigation system they installed last season that they are now planning to sink another bore by March to increase their watered pasture from 30 hectares to 80ha.

The plan is to repeat the success they had with Crusader this season and will be planting the extra 50 ha of land under irrigation to perennial ryegrasses and clovers, but this time in autumn.

Under this strategy the Harris' will be able to stop cutting silage and will be able to increase the number of cows they are milking to 400 cows by grazing cows on their all-year-round pasture with just grain supplement.

The Harris' also chose to plant Crusader mixed with some winter ryegrass varieties on part of the 85ha of non-irrigated land they used for grazing and silage.

Mr Harris said the non-irrigated Crusader matched the growth of any annual ryegrass during the winter months and was able to outgrow anything while there was warmth. "It matched the annual varieties even in the colder months and certainly matched it in spring."

He was also impressed that the Crusader got away to an early start in the season. "The opportunity for early germination, even without irrigation, is excellent."

He said the results with the Crusader were just as impressive at the other end of the season." Crusader also has a good root base and it hung on for a long time so that we could graze for longer than usual. May be our fertiliser system helped with that."

"My own visual estimate was that the Crusader held on for an extra couple of weeks."

The Harris' cut 1700 tonnes of silage from their non-irrigated pasture.

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