

Safeguard protects stud stock.

ARGT levels significantly reduced in the wheat belt.

Two years ago, Quairading farmer Greg Hastings lost 50 Shorthorn breeders and their calves to annual ryegrass toxicity.

The stock were the product of seven years breeding.

Greg says it was a horrific event and something he would not wish on anyone.

He runs 240 Shorthorn breeders and 400 Merino ewes, finishing the cattle in a feedlot.

The cropping program covers about 50pc of the farm, providing the grain for the feedlot.

ARGT is spread across his 1130 arable hectares and testing last year showed there were two paddocks of about 40ha with 'deadly' levels of ARGT.



In Greg's view, ryegrass is king and an essential part of the move to increasing wheat belt stock numbers, but ARGT remains the stumbling block.

For the past four years, he has spread Twist fungus and he concedes that it is good where there is moisture, but the dry years are a problem.

"Twist fungus has its place, as has Safeguard but one relies on wind and the other water for spread," he says.

"My strategy is to use both of them together."

In the past two seasons he has sowed 25ha to Safeguard, but he had initially thought that the flowering window for the ARGV resistant ryegrass was three weeks later than Wimmera.

"I was really pleased that the Safeguard did flower at the same time as Wimmera, reaching a height of 70cm," he says.

Greg says the Safeguard flowers are purple and easily recognisable in pasture paddocks.

"We have been able to watch the spread of Safeguard from the paddocks where it was sown to adjacent pasture paddocks on the farm," he said.

In July 2002, he sowed 10ha to a pasture mix of 4kg/ha Safeguard with sub clover and Serradella with some oats.

Greg used 100kg/ha Potash Super and 100kg/ha of Sulphate of Ammonia before he sowed the pasture.

He sowed a further area to Safeguard at 10kg/ha, with sub clover and Serradella in 2003, with the same fertilizer inputs as 2002.

"Initially we sowed Safeguard with some oats, but they tend to reduce Safeguard's pollination because of their height."

Greg holds off grazing Safeguard until after seed set as he is trying to maximize seed set and cross pollination.

Convinced of Safeguard's potential, Greg will sow 270ha on his farm to the ARGV resistant ryegrass this season with the Cultitrash, but some of it will be sown dry.

"I alter the seeding rate dependent on the level of Wimmera in a paddock," he says.

"Safeguard produces a lot of vegetative material and therefore has a huge carrying capacity.

I will be going in with 10kg/ha of new seed this year to increase the Safeguard plant density."

His aim is to convert all pasture and areas on the farm that are not cropped to Safeguard as quickly as possible, so he can forget about ryegrass toxicity.

Greg sits on the state's ARGV committee and is convinced that ARGV is changing its characteristics.

"We used to think there could be a likelihood of getting ARGV in a pasture paddock the first year it had come out of crop," he said.

"That is not always the case.

"Some of my paddocks have gone from gall counts of 600/kg - which is deadly - to more than 2000/kg, and then back to nothing.

"It is spreading but it is also sporadic."

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