

Irwin Hunter & Co.

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Suite 11/88 Forrest Street, Cottesloe

PO Box 232, Cottesloe WA 6011

Ph: 9383 4708 Fax 9384 8029

www.irwinhunter.com.au

New Tetila, supporting cheese operation at Keysbrook.

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Robert Guira has been dairy farming for 12 years and for as many years productivity per cow has been the key consideration. Deregulation has had little impact on the family milking operation in Keysbrook, because the Mucca Dairy Company's milk goes to the family cheese factory in Armadale, Rose Valley Cheeses. Unusually, the family was involved in Italian cheese production 14 years before they contemplated milk production.

Currently Mr Guira milks 180 cows in his rotary dairy, the long term aim being to increase numbers to 220. The focus is on maximising production from the 800 acres west of the South West Highway. "That involves a balance between litres and butterfat," he explains. It is red gum and paper bark country that is mostly sand with some loam and grows a good winter pasture.



Pasture improvement and renovation has been on the agenda for the past 12 years with a mix of clovers and ryegrass direct drilled in autumn and sorghum and maize grown as summer crops. Mr Guira works on a five year rotation, applying 5 tonne per / ha of lime and disc ploughing one paddock per year. The overall area for reseeding is about 120 ha and ultimately he would like to reseed the entire property, rather than rely on any regeneration.

Last year he sowed New Tetila Annual Ryegrass and Persian clover. In the past he had sowed a blend of ryegrasses but New Tetila worked well, it produced biomass, had good palatability and

matured later", he said. The Persian clover also produced excellent feed.

Mr Guira has in the past cut hay from his pasture but in 2002 he made 1,000 tonnes of silage for the first time that tested at 9 percent protein with the metabolisable energy 9.5 MJ. Keysbrook had good rains for the year and Mr Guira cut the New Tetila for silage when it was four feet high in mid September. Following an application of Sulphate of Ammonia and Potash, he made hay from the same 15ha paddock in November. "Admittedly our hay yield was down to 2.5 tonne but for a second cut the yield was impressive all the same," he says.

The summer cropping program involves cutting maize for silage and grazing the sorghum. While Mr Guira has grown Jumbo sorghum in the past, he opted for the more palatable Sweet Jumbo and Brown Mid Rib sorghum last season.

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Western Australia 6011. Phone 9383 4708