

**Irwin Hunter & Co.**

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## Missile annual ryegrass, quality pasture to produce quality milk.

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"Good milk fat and protein levels increase the amount the milk companies pay per litre, and I think that in the future there will be even bigger price gaps between high quality milk and lower quality milk," Mr May said.

To achieve the increase in milk quality that he is aiming for, Mr May relies heavily on pasture quality.

His choice of pasture is a mixture of Missile annual ryegrass, the tetraploid ryegrass V34N, Surrey annual ryegrass and Balansa clover.



The quality of haylage that Mr May is getting from the mix is reducing the amount of grain that he needs to buy in and therefore reducing costs.

The quality of the haylage is also helping to improve his milk composition.

"I've seen the results of the mix from last year. The milk fat and protein levels are higher."

Mr May attributes the high quality of the haylage he cut from the pasture mix to the timing of the cutting of the haylage.

“Ryegrass hits a peak in quality and then spirals downwards very quickly. It makes a big difference if you can cut the grass when it is at its peak.”

The May family's Brantina Farm is 200 ha of mostly heavy clay loam with a high water holding capacity.

They plant 99 per cent of the land to pasture and cut about 90 ha of the pasture for hay and haylage.

Last year they cut 950 haylage rolls and 220 rolls of hay from the 90 ha.

“I was quite happy with the amount we cut. It was not as much as we cut the year before but it was better quality because we cut it earlier.”

While the Mays are working on milk quality they are not neglecting to work on increasing milk quantity.

They currently milk 180 cows and increase their herd by 10 to 20 per cent each year.

The Missile, V34N, Surrey and Balansa mix is sown with a Duncan drill to which Mr May has attached chains for packing the soil down following the seeding.

Last year he sowed the pasture mix on April 14 and by May the 18 the cows were on the pasture for their first graze of fresh grass for the year.

The Mays run a three week rotation and shut up the pasture that is intended for haylage on September 14. The hay and haylage was cut between October 19 and 25.

Like most WA dairy farmers, Rodney May has seen a remarkable efficiency in agricultural production in the past decades and better pastures are the backbone of many of the increases in production.

“We are getting so much better at pasture. The seed is better, our fertilising and spraying is better.”

He said the old Wimmera ryegrasses were literally dead in comparison to the new ryegrasses. “When the Wimmera grass is finished for the season, these new pastures are still growing and providing feed.”

"The new pastures really hang on."

Mr May sprays his whole farm early in the season to get rid of red legged earth mite and also sprays for Cape weed. He fertilises with 250 kg/ha of a three in one mix and 300kg/ha of Hay Burst.

He said the photo which was taken in early October did not capture the pasture at its best.

"We had 20 ml of rain after the photo was taken and the pasture grew another third and really finished off well. It looked beautiful."

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