

Irwin Hunter & Co.

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Reducing the use of concentrates...

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"At the moment grain prices are astronomical and we are looking to improve our pasture production to the extent where our reliance on concentrates will be reduced. Being an all pasture property is possibly some years away, but I'm hoping that the production from the newer pasture species now available can be increased still further."

Malcolm Houden, who with his father Des, is milking 300 Friesian cows near Redmond, north west of Albany, expressed this view.



Des purchased this 600 ha mainly flat country in 1996 when it was milking 200 cows. Since then they have re-fenced the whole property and they are installing a new watering system, providing water to 500 litre troughs which they are manufacturing with their own moulds.

The soil here is a grey brown sandy loam over a sub-soil of clay ironstone and it has a pH of 4.6 to 5.0. In the last two years, in an effort to increase their herd numbers they have been concentrating on improving the soil fertility.

"We take soil tests every year, mainly to find out the elements which are deficient. Then we receive recommendations on the fertiliser mixture needed to supply these nutrients in two main application of fertiliser, firstly in autumn and again in spring.

"Our aim is to provide a balanced fertile soil capable of growing high producing pasture so that we can comfortably milk 400 cows and hopefully run all our replacement heifers as well. "Also we are aiming to keep all our bull calves and sell them in prime condition as 2 year olds," Malcolm said.

With the help of Tony Murdoch, agronomist Wesfarmers Landmark in Albany, Malcolm is trialing new pasture species to see which suit his conditions. So far he has found that annual ryegrasses produce the most, and after trying a few they have found that Dargo and Progrow have responded best.

"We sow them at rates between 12 and 20kg / ha with 5 kg / ha of subterranean clover in late autumn before the break. We have found that they provide ample feed for our dairy herd during the winter and then we shut them up for silage in late August.

"They provide good quality pit silage which is fed to the milking cows during the dry summer months. We do feed some concentrates in the bail, but we are looking to provide silage that has the nutrition to enable us to reduce still further the amount of grain fed," he said.

This good quality silage enable Malcolm and Des to milk on a contract throughout the year mainly for domestic supply. In the last 12 months they have sent away 2.3 million litres of milk and they are aiming to increase this to 3.5 million litres over the next 12 months.

"We have found that Dargo annual ryegrass is very palatable and it recovers quickly from hard grazing. It regenerates quickly after being cut for silage so we always have the option of grazing the regrowth.

"Our perennial ryegrasses are sown at a slightly lower rate than we sow our annual ryegrasses and we find that they produce further into the summer months on our moist flats. Roper is one of our favorites as it has a root system that extends up to one metre into the ground seeking moisture." Malcolm concluded.