

Irwin Hunter & Co.

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Western Annual Ryegrass Mix: Overcoming the problem of deep sand over clay.

A quarter of Brian Coffey's 280 ha property at Serpentine, South of Perth, consists of deep sand over clay and although he has been experimenting with various grasses and clovers for many years, it has only been this year that he thinks he has found the answer.

Brian was born on this property 73 years ago, on what was a small 50ha dairy unit farmed by his parents. Six years later, after the untimely death of Brian's father the family continued farming the dairy unit when Brian took it over in 1950 at the age of 21.

Brian continued dairying in partnership with his wife Betty until 1975 when they changed the property to a beef unit producing Angus breeders mated to Charolais bulls.

With an average rainfall of 900 mm / per annum and difficult soils to contend with, Brian had a challenge in front of him to improve the pastures. "On the lower 75 per cent of the farm the sand is much shallower on top of the clay. In fact, in some places the clay comes to the surface, Brian said."



In a continual pasture improvement program Brian has concentrated on improving these pastures by re-seeding about 40 ha each year. When he started this program he was carrying about 100 breeders, but by topdressing and using high quality pasture species he is now carrying 180 breeders.

"The main annual ryegrasses responsible for this increase have been, Western Annual ryegrass mix, Progrow and Tetraploid annual ryegrass. Our management for improving these paddocks has been

first to lightly cultivate and then seed with annual ryegrass @ 10 kg / ha and clovers totaling 4 kg / ha. Finally we top dress with a 3:1 fertiliser. On top of this, I have a practice of applying 2.5 tonnes / ha of lime on different paddocks every five years," he said.

Originally Brian used Albino (Yarloop), sub clover later followed by Trikkala, but latterly on the lower country he has replaced it with a mix of clovers including Riverina sub clover and Paradana Balansa clover. These paddocks were sown as close to the break as possible and grazed until late winter when they were shut up for hay.

"This was the first year I'd used this clover mixture. The sub clovers have dominated the pastures, however in the wetter patches the Balansa clover was dominating when we cut for hay.

"The balance of clover and ryegrass in the hay we produced, not only produced a marked increase in the amount cut, it would have improved the quality. The breeders did particularly well grazing these pastures during the winter months," Brian said.

On the higher country where the sand is deep, Brian has experimented with various grasses and clovers to improve the production. After a fire had accidentally gone through 10 ha of virgin bush last June, Brian sowed a mixture of Hykon Rose, Santorini and Avilla Serradella, along with Dalkeith sub clover and Wimmera ryegrass purchased from his local supplier.

"The response has been excellent for this type of country. We grazed it during the winter and shut up the block in late spring to allow the Serradella and Hykon Rose to seed down. It is expected that as a result of this seeding, the production from this block will vastly improve," Brian concluded.

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