

**Irwin Hunter & Co.**

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## Missile Ryegrass bred for WA.

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MISSILE annual ryegrass was bred by Dr Alan Stewart, research leader of Pyne Gould Guinness Seeds in New Zealand, and was developed to produce early autumn and winter feed.

Dr Stewart visited WA in the early '90s to see first hand the conditions and gain a better perception of the type of annual ryegrass that would suit the state's climate. Missile is the result.

Missile was selected for rapid establishment, early flowering behavior and high yields. The variety was trialed successfully in 2001 in Victoria and commercialised in 2002.

In Victorian trials, Missile showed high yields with very good ME figures. In WA, Missile hay showed 10pc higher ME figures than a crop of mixed varieties of annual ryegrasses sown in the same paddock.



The Agriculture seed distribution group, whose members are Irwin Hunter & Co, Stephen's Pasture Seeds in Victoria and Auswest Seeds in New South Wales, has recognised the excellent capabilities of missile annual ryegrass. Stephen's Pasture Seeds hosted a seminar day and introduced grazier/farmer Simon Greene to this new variety.

"Dr Glen Judson from PGG Seeds was talking about bite rates at the seminar," Simon said.

"So I got out the video camera when the bulls were first let in on the new Missile ryegrass pasture. Their bite rates were really high

and the graze period was short. The bulls spent a lot of time chewing (their cud) and rolling round in the grass.

"We have always been very pro-pastures and regularly sought advice from Stephen's Pasture Seeds.

"Now we are starting to want to get a bit more technical. With the bulls, we want to put on more growth and grow more grass."

Pastures have always been important on the Greene's property at Elmhurst. When the family traded in some of their wool sheep for Friesian bulls five years ago, their grass growing operation had to crank up another few gears.

The bulls were first introduced to the traditional wool-growing property five years ago with the purchase of 100 calves.

The operation has been so successful that bull numbers have steadily increased to the 400 now fattened annually for the dairy-bull beef market.

Pure pastures of Missile annual ryegrass are sown at 20 kg/ha with 70 kg/ha of DAP.

Clover is not used because of the bloat risk and because "the ryegrass growth would shade it out." After each grazing 75 kg/ha of urea is spread using a Jensen fertiliser spreader towed behind an ATV motorbike.

A 20 ha paddock sown to Missile in April 2002 was first grazed 12 weeks after sowing with 400 pregnant ewes. After a two-week spell, 50 bulls were introduced for 2 rotations around the 4 blocks (40 days).

"Then the paddock started to get away, so I stuck another 50 bulls on behind," says Simon. When the exceptional pasture growth still refused to be contained, a further 80 prime lambs were added to the second lot of bulls.

But Simon was prepared. "I've grown this ryegrass before and was impressed by its ability to grow rapidly," he says. "My main aim was to conquer the spring growth. You need an efficient grazing system to achieve this, especially when using urea. I think we achieved it!"

By Christmas, the 20 ha paddock had finished 100 bulls with a minimum kill weight of 580 kg each. In addition, 80 lambs were turned off, making it a very productive pasture.

This autumn the paddock will go back into Missile annual ryegrass. "I would go a bit higher with the sowing rate this time," says Simon. "Maybe up to 24 kg/ha to achieve maximum plant density."

Nestled between the Pyrenees ranges and Mt Cole in what Simon describes as a "fortunate valley," the property is normally blessed with a fair bit of rain. However the drier conditions this year tested the feed production system.

"Without the Missile ryegrass pasture we definitely wouldn't have finished the first 50 bulls – they would have had to go to the feedlot. And even the second lot would have struggled," says Simon. "We achieved a weight gain of around 3 kg/head/day."

This editorial is based on Victorian conditions. It is important to note that due to the significantly different climatic conditions in performance of many pasture species will be different to other states. For Example, growth rated over winter in WA will be considerably better than in Victoria because of our milder winter temperatures. However, late spring production is very dependent on the timing of spring rains.