

FARMER CASE STUDY

Stocking rate up 600% with Evergreen Mix!

Farmer:
Rob West

Location:
Esperance

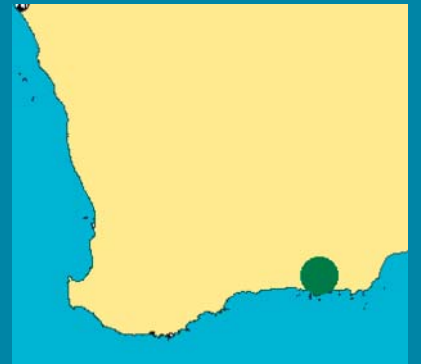
Property Size:
6000 ha

Soil Type:
Fertile loams to deep sands

Annual Rainfall:
500mm

Main Money Earner:
Sheep and cropping

Pastures:
Rhodes, Kikuyu,
Panic, Setaria, Lucerne, Chicory, Subclover,
Serradella and Annual Ryegrass



Rob West of Esperance has been able to increase the carrying capacity on his worst performing paddocks from 1 DSE/ha to over 6 DSE/ha in the space of just 3 years thanks to the Evergreen Mix of sub-tropical perennial grasses. And his constant worry about wind erosion on this very fragile sand plain country is now a thing of the past.

Rob manages the “The Oaks”, a 6000 ha mixed farm with sheep and cropping on a range of soil types from fertile loams along the Dalyup River to the deep sands.

One thousand acres

Over 1000 acres of deep sands have now been planted to sub-tropical perennial grasses.

So bad was the pasture on these deep sands that it did not warrant an annual fertiliser application. It now receives the same as the rest of the farm. Rob suspects the production is still improving as more fertiliser is added and organic matter levels increase due to the year round ground cover.

This country is now producing equal to any other paddock on the farm, including the fertile country along the Dalyup River. And the bonus is that it responds to out of season rain unlike the annual pastures on the better country.

Rob typically grazes weaners and young sheep on the perennial pasture paddocks. The quality green pick over summer keeps them healthy and growing. The sheep are rotationally grazed through a number of perennial paddocks, with a 3 to 4 week spell between each grazing common.



Setaria growing well in a wetter area

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Subclover germinating under Chicory

Establishment

The sub-tropicals are established in Spring when soil temperature is rising. Rob has sown all of his paddocks in September but is considering a move to earlier sowing to avoid a failure in dry years. The 2004 spring drought highlighted the risks of late sowing with a disappointing establishment.

A combine fitted with knife points and press wheels is used when sowing perennial pastures. Rob makes sure the points are only just scratching the soil surface to achieve very shallow seed placement. In essence the press wheels are just pushing the seed into the ground.

A double knock of Glyphosate followed by Spray. Seed is used for weed control. The Glyphosate is often applied early (in winter) to achieve a better kill. Robust chemical rates are used.

Complimentary species

Rob broadcasts Cadiz serradella seed at 15 to 20 kg/ha onto the Evergreen Mix paddocks every second autumn. This has increased winter and spring feed supply and fixed nitrogen that is vital for the on-going production of the perennial grasses.

He adds Kikuyu to the Evergreen Mix and is pleased with the contribution it is making. Kikuyu and Rhodes Grass fill in the gaps between the bunch

grasses such as Gatton Panic and Setaria. And because Kikuyu spreads by above and below ground runners, as well as seed, it appears to be increasing in density within the perennial mix. However, that's no bad thing, as Kikuyu is such a proven performer in the Esperance area.

Tall Wheat Grass was added to the mix in an area that gets waterlogged in winter. Rob has not seen any and suspects Wingless Grasshoppers took it out at the seedling stage.

Chicory

On a heavier soil type Rob planted Chicory which has persisted exceptionally well over a number of years. It provides very high quality feed (superior to lucerne) suitable for finishing lambs. The paddock also supports an excellent stand of sub-clover which Rob encourages by removing the annual grass component with a grass selective herbicide every few years.

The chicory and sub-clover compliment each other with the sub-clover providing quality winter and spring feed while fixing valuable nitrogen which the chicory taps into when actively growing in spring, summer and autumn.

Rob has only lightly grazed the chicory in an attempt to maintain the density and feels this is why its year round stocking rate is under the farm average. The upside is that it's a great paddock for lambs with quality feed and no grass seeds.



An impressive Chicory paddock