

Case Study - Ross & Lynnette Fraser, 'Tangalooma', Boyup Brook

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Summary

Name: Ross & Lynnette Fraser

Farm Name: 'Tangalooma'

Location: East of Boyup Brook

Perennial Species Sown: Salado Lucerne and Sceptre Lucerne (3 kg/ha each)

Reason for Species Selection: High productivity perennial pasture to use up ground water, grows well in a higher position in the landscape (on slopes), suitable to cut for good quality hay/silage and to finish weaner cattle on.

Soil Type: Gravelly sandy loam, some clay



Ross and Lynnette Fraser in their lucerne stand

History of Lucerne Plantings

Hay crops were sown in 2002 to clean up and get on top of weeds before lucerne was to be introduced. Approximately 2.5 t/ha lime was applied, the paddock was cultivated twice and weeds were sprayed. 120 kg/ha of Pasture Potash 3:1 was also applied before planting.

About 8 ha of lucerne was sown in June 2003 and it is now in its 6th growing year. The lucerne was sown with a spring tyne combine and rolled immediately afterwards. All seed was inoculated and lime pelleted.

In the first few years and just after sowing the Frasers had to be careful with insects, but the lucerne hasn't been sprayed now for 2 years. Talstar was used for post-sowing insect control. Red-legged earth mites and lucerne flea are the main pests experienced so far. The locusts came through a few years ago but they didn't seem to do as much damage as originally expected. Both varieties of lucerne (Sceptre and Salado) are very susceptible to powdery mildew at both ends of the season. This is managed through grazing and mowing (for hay/silage).

Grazing Management

During establishment, the lucerne was barely grazed at all but cut for hay instead. In a normal year the Frasers would graze it with cows and calves in winter and cut silage and/or hay off the lucerne stand. It would then be allowed to go to seed to keep up the density of the stand before putting the weaners (300 kg average) in during summer and autumn.

You have to be very careful grazing cattle on lucerne because of bloat. The Frasers wean their young stock in the yard and give them silage for a few weeks, so their gut gets used to the green feed again.

They are then introduced to the lucerne slowly and have plenty of hay on hand for roughage, which stops the lucerne going straight through them. So far the Frasers haven't had any trouble with bloat (touch wood!).

A few times over the years they've grazed the stand a bit heavily and thought they'd killed it off but it's a very hardy plant and appears to just keep growing back. It probably depends on the variety as some are more tolerant to heavy grazing than others.

Nutritional Management

The lucerne is normally top dressed once a year with Pasture Potash 3:1 at 120 kg/ha. It has been a very productive paddock for the Frasers and they realise that they may need to increase the fertiliser rates to allow for the production they are getting from the paddock. They are particularly aware of the phosphorus and potassium requirements and are soil testing to ensure they keep on top of these nutrients – as well as the pH.

Comments on Establishment

Sowing rates have been the biggest trial. There is an abundance of information on sowing and growing Lucerne, but not much (that the Frasers could find) on sowing rates. The first Lucerne paddock was sowed at 5 kg/ha. The next one at 6 kg/ha and the most recent (2007) crop at 7 kg/ha.

The Frasers have had some trouble with this year's planting resulting in a very patchy germination and growth. The jury is still out on the cause of the problem but the only thing they did differently was not to cultivate the paddock before seeding it down. Where there was good germination and plant growth

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was where they disturbed the ground when pushing up and burning off sticks during paddock clean up.

Soil pH is vitally important. Soil was tested and lime applied, but more lime will probably need to be put on soon to keep the pH well above 5.2.

The beauty of Lucerne is that in summer the Frasers have high quality, green feed to finish stock on when all the other paddocks on the place have browned off. It is quite amazing to see the patch of green which stands out in the landscape.

Either they've been really lucky, or it really isn't that difficult to manage. It fits very well into their operation so in terms of their farming practices they haven't really had to adapt too much. The Frasers particularly enjoy not having to replant a hay crop every year.



Fraser's lucerne stand in the landscape. The only slope that was still green on 22/11/07.

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Tall Wheat Grass - supply outlook

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Tall Wheat Grass – A tremendous perennial grass if you can get hold of it!!

Unfortunately many of you will not be planting it this season because of a lack of seed. Wholesalers have reported orders far exceeding their ability to supply.

Supply Outlook:

TWG seed supply has been severely affected by poor seasons in the Eastern States where seed production is concentrated. A good season and long spring will see supply replenished in 2009. One of the major suppliers believes they will have 200 ha of seed crops produced under irrigation for autumn 2009 harvesting, which should alleviate the supply issue and potentially put 300 tonne of seed into the marketplace.

WA Quarantine dictates the eligibility of seed for entry into WA, and if there are any concerns about purity of lines they are rejected. This again limits the potential amount of seed available in WA (which is also good because it means only

good quality seed is supplied).

Local production of TWG seed is likely to be increased in autumn 2009 as a consequence of recent supply issues. When purchasing locally produced seed, practice the same care as you would when buying proprietary seed and check for purity and germination information from the supplier before committing to your purchase.

Growers Options for 2008:

If you have been lucky enough to get seed to plant this season, be very careful with site preparation, weed and insect control and establishment technique to ensure the success of your investment.

Where seed is unavailable, use 2008 for site preparation and to gain good fallow weed control of planned sites for planting next autumn. Ideally, sites are prepared in the winter & spring of the year before planting to eliminate weed competition and ensure establishment success.

Consider harvesting existing stands in autumn 2009 to produce your own seed. It is not difficult. Yields of 150-200 kg/ha are common, with well managed stands producing up to 400 kg/ha. The DAFWA Farmnote #75/96 discusses seed production and harvesting of Tall Wheat Grass and Puccinellia.