96/N07

Producer Research Support

Making profitable use of low-grade Poa tussocks on the NSW Monaro

Monaro/ Bega Valley BIA

Grazing Poa tussock pastures on the NSW Monaro and providing stock with supplements reduced the need for substitution feeding and could save typical farms in the region $2000 a year, this Producer Research Support project has discovered.

Key points

- Poa tussock pastures on the Monaro can be used more effectively as a source of feed.
- Feeding protein or by-pass protein supplements improves performance and enables cattle to make more efficient use of available Poa tussock pastures.
- Cattle in better condition at the end of winter are more likely to conceive earlier and produce a healthier calf than those in very low condition.
- Utilising available dry matter also saves feeding high energy feeds such as grain or hay. This saves money.
- Effective supplementary feeding required the regular monitoring of pastures and objective assessment of stock weights and condition.
- Supplementary feeding costs can be reduced 30% or around $7 a head, saving the typical Monaro farm $2000 per farm every year.

Contact details

Rebecca Arnott
NSW Agriculture
PO Box 798, Bega NSW 2550
Tel (02) 6452 3411
Fax (02) 64+52 4872

The project

Grazing Poa tussock pastures on the NSW Monaro and providing stock with supplements reduced the need for substitution feeding and could save typical farms in the region $2000 a year, this Producer Research Support project has discovered.

If done effectively, the cost of supplementary feeding over the winter months could be reduced. Low-grade Poa tussock pastures on the NSW Monaro can be a more valuable resource when cattle receive protein supplements, reducing the need for substitution feeding.

More than 100,000 hectares of the Monaro plains is predominantly native Poa tussock type pastures.

These are of very poor quality, have limited grazing potential, except during drought, and are a problem for pasture improvement. But Poa tussocks are a major feed resource that can be better utilised by livestock producers.

Stock will eat Poa tussocks when they have access to protein supplements. These include feeds containing true proteins such as lupins, while urea provides protein to rumen micro-organisms and helps the rumen function efficiently to break down roughage such as Poa tussocks.

Other undegradable by-pass proteins include cottonseed meals that pass through the rumen to the small intestine to produce amino acids necessary for growth and production. Bypass proteins also provide some true or rumen degradable protein.

Objectives

1. Compare a range of protein and bypass supplements to determine the most effective and economical means to achieve production and target weights in breeders and heifers, including the effect on pregnancy rates, milk production and weaning weight; and
2. Use by-pass supplements to effectively utilise Poa tussock pastures, to control their spread and prepare paddocks for pasture improvement.

96/N07

Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to $15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

These activities include:

- Producer Initiated Research and Development
- More Beef from Pastures demonstration trials
- Prime Time Wean More Lambs demonstration trials
- Sustainable and productive grazing grants.

Contact Stephen Feighan - MLA Project Manager, Producer Delivery and Adoption.
Tel (02) 9463 9245 or
sfeighan@mla.com.au

MLA also recommends
PROGRAZE

PROGRAZE, a joint initiative of Meat & Livestock Australia and the State Departments of Agriculture is now delivered as part of the EDGEnetwork suite of workshops.

Meat and Livestock Australia
Level 1, 165 Walker Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
Tel (02) 9463 9333
Fax (02) 9463 9393
Free Phone 1800 023 100 (Australia only)
www.mla.com.au

What was done

The performance of cows and calves and heifers under different feeding regimes was measured. The by-pass and protein supplements included Bypass S, copra meal, the urea-based 'McCosker Brew', urea-molasses mix and lupins.

All supplements were found to be effective, however responses varied between different classes of stock, supplements, soil type and pasture quality and quantity. Different classes of stock require different feeding strategies.

Unlike cows, heifers need to both grow and put on condition. Young stock may need both true and bypass protein when pasture is lacking.

Stock run on different soil types may need different supplements. Basalt country can be deficient in sulphur, while granite country can be phosphorus deficient.

The strategy can also reduce the cost of supplementary feeding over winter.

The average annual cost of fodder per farm on the Monaro is estimated at $7,200. It is anticipated that these costs could be reduced 30% or around $2,000 per farm every year. This is equivalent to a saving of $7 a head.

Cattle were run at around 7 dse/ha, and the feed cost per head per day ranged from 5 cents for urea to 23 cents for lupins.

Discussion

Stock improved their condition during the feeding trials.
A discussion evening was held with 35 people attending, some participants said they had made management changes and were realising the benefits from more effective use of supplements.
The project participants concluded that to ensure effective supplementary feeding it was important to:

- understand basic rumen function and what was trying to be achieved;
- set achievable targets;
- regularly monitor pastures for quality, quantity, digestibility of the species present - PROGRAZE would teach these skills;
- monitor livestock performance, weight and condition score;
- conduct soil tests to identify any deficiencies;
- draft stock and feed those with potential to reach target market weights and condition;
- use controlled grazing with small paddocks; and
- start supplementary feeding if season is dry. Identify "trigger points" to know when to start feeding.