

23 January, 2008

Wet season spelling the secret to healthy pastures

Jeff Edgar, a grazier on the Fitzroy River, has been amazed by the positive impact fencing to land type and wet season spelling has had on the condition of his pasture.

In 2006 Mr Edgar received help from the Fitzroy Basin Association Inc (FBA) and Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc. (FRCC) to fence the hills from the lower creek flats on his Morinish property "*Mountain Hut*".

Following soaking rains in the last wet season, Mr Edgar used the new fence to move his herd into the hills to give the pasture along the creek flats a rest for three months' of the growing season.

"The difference along the creek flats is amazing after only one wet season's spelling. We've already seen a big improvement in ground cover and general pasture condition." Mr Edgar said.

FRCC Field Officer Darcy Murray said Mr Edgar's story was a timely example of the benefits of wet season spelling of pastures.

"Following the recent soaking rain across CQ graziers will be tempted to take advantage of fresh feed by restocking. However it's critical to give grasses time to fully recover from the dry conditions," Mr Murray said.

"Grazing grass early in the wet season when it is starting to grow from its reserves will weaken it and can lead to the loss of productive grass species from the pasture system.

"Wet season spelling is the secret to allowing drought affected pastures to recover for long term beef production.

"Spelling or resting pastures for the first 6 to 8 weeks of active growth allows productive pasture plants to replenish reserves, set seed and allow seedling recruitment.

"The results speak for themselves; wet season spelling is the cheapest and most effective pasture renovation option available."

Ground cover monitoring being conducted by FRCC had recorded an improvement in pasture cover of up to 27% in Mr Edgar's 9-Mile Creek paddock.

"If we can do this (spelling) for a few years in a row, that'll really cover up the bare patches. We are aiming at 75% cover over the whole area which will make a huge difference production wise," Mr Edgar said.

"During the recent rain it was great to see the improved grass coverage helping to retain topsoil and nutrients and the dams filling so well. You've got to keep that water and soil on the land and not washing down into the creeks," he said.

Mr Edgar's success in improving ground cover is now the subject of a case study brochure by the FBA, which is available online at www.fba.org.au, or by phoning 07 49992800.

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