

New ground cover guide for land managers

Landholders seeking productive paddocks and good land condition need to start from the ground up.

That's the message from Gina Mace, Grazing Land Management Officer with the Fitzroy Basin Association Inc (FBA).

"The cornerstone of good land management is good ground cover. If you don't have pasture plants, litter or other material covering the soil surface, you are unable to retain moisture in the soil to see you through dry periods, you lose top soil and nutrients, and you can't grow as much grass to fatten cattle," Mrs Mace said.

"Aiming for a level of 50% ground cover is the number one place to start for graziers with an interest in maintaining both the short and long-term profitability and sustainability of their businesses," she said.

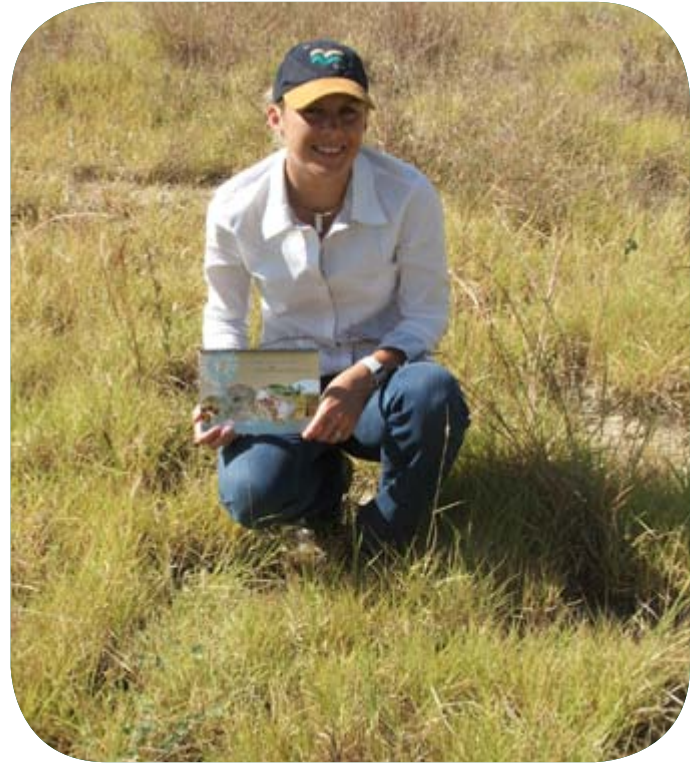
"High levels of ground cover also reduce runoff and erosion, which improves water quality by ensuring that less sediment and other contaminants enter local waterways and eventually reach the Great Barrier Reef."

Mrs Mace said graziers could learn more about the benefits of ground cover and how to assess their paddocks by grabbing a free copy of a new guide booklet produced by FBA.

"The 'Ground Cover Standards for Central Queensland Grazing Lands' booklet is designed for use in the paddock to help graziers assess their land condition and will fit easily into your glove box," she said.

"It includes valuable information on maintaining ground cover and the factors influencing ground cover levels, as well as a series of photos to give graziers a visual reference point for measuring ground cover levels."

Mrs Mace said the paddock guide was the ideal addition to the glove box of every grazier in Central Queensland.



FROM THE GROUND UP: FBA Grazing Land Management Officer Gina Mace (above) holds a copy of a new ground cover paddock guide.

VISIT US AT BEEF 09!

Grab your FREE copy of the 'Ground Cover Standards for Central Queensland Grazing Lands' paddock guide.

Visit FBA's display at the Beef Central (Walter Pearce) Pavilion, from 8:30am to 5pm each day between May 4-8.

You can access a wealth of information on sustainable land management, protecting natural assets and biodiversity on your property, and how to get involved in on-ground projects to improve catchment health.

Have a chat to our field and technical staff, and learn more about incentive funding and mapping products available from FBA.

New ideas on show in Blackwater

More than 35 people attended an information sharing day in Blackwater in March to discover new approaches to farming.

Emerging practices and projects were showcased on Thursday 19 March, including compost tea, natural sequence farming, biodynamics, a Parthenium competition trial and more.

The Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association (DCCA) organised the event at the Blackwater International Coal Centre, with funding from the Fitzroy Basin Association Inc's Innovation Fund.

DCCA Coordinator Kellie Nilsson said participants learnt a lot from the great line-up of presenters from across the Fitzroy Basin region.

"The day generated a lot of questions and will no doubt help spread new and useful ideas throughout our region," Ms Nilsson said.



ABOVE: L-R - Megan Star and John Grimes from DPI&F chat with presenter Mark Moller. BELOW: Jo Collins and Katherin Jackson from the Australian Agricultural College enjoyed the day.



E- INBRIEF: EVENTS, FUNDING, & NEWS

Woolworths Agricultural Scholarships available - applications close May 15. Open to anyone aged 20 to 30 years either employed in the ag industry or studying an ag related course. Offers the chance to attend a 12 day course to fast-track your ag career. For more info visit www.wowcareers.com.au.

State Landcare Conference 2009 will be held in Longreach this year from October 15-17. The theme is 'Legends, Larrikins and Landcare'. Find out more by visiting the Desert Channels Queensland website at www.iceaustralia.com/qldlandcare09/

Got Rabbits? A new rabbit monitoring project called RabbitScan starts in May. The national Rabbit Management Advisory Group has initiated the project to encourage landholders, landcarers, regional bodies, councils and the community to take part and help map the

distribution and abundance of rabbits Australia -Wide. More information and a complete guide to how to get involved is available online at www.rabbitscan.net.au.

The Regional Natural Resource Management Groups Collective (RGC) is holding a 'Five years of NRM showcase and celebration' in Townsville on 20 & 21 May. Regional groups will present on flagship projects and reflect on what was achieved and learnt during the NHT2 funding period. For more information or to obtain a registration form, visit www.rgc.org.au/news.

Discover the bird and plant life supported by the St Lawrence wetlands at a family day on Saturday 9 May. Organised by the Isaac Regional Council, the day is supported by FBA. The day will include tours of the wetlands and expert guest speakers including Allan Briggs from Birds Australia Capricornia.

Cropping at the cutting-edge in Wowan

Combining technology and cropping to achieve the greatest gains in productivity and sustainability was the focus of a field day in Wowan-Dululu in February.

Around 50 people attended the day, which included demos of precision agriculture technology, guest speakers and farm visits.

The day was a collaborative effort between the Wowan-Dululu Landcare Group, Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association (DCCA), consulting firm CTF Solutions, and the Fitzroy Basin Association Inc (FBA).

Farm visits included trips to Joe and Rhonda Reddy's property based at Dixalea, Jo and Richard Prior's Rosedale property, and Neal and Amanda Johansen's Alma Park.

Neal Johansen said adopting precision agriculture resulted in less chemical use and had both environmental and economic benefits.

"We've minimized the use of atrazine through band spraying and shielded spraying, based on guidance technology," Mr Johansen said.

"Combined with zero tillage, Controlled Traffic Farming (CTF) systems and well planned layouts, the environmental benefits are significant," he said.

"But there are additional benefits to the technology – we are now implementing precision spraying, yield mapping and so forth. All these things combined make us more profitable and sustainable."

The enterprises visited were three of eight farms involved in a topographic mapping and community base station project, managed by consulting firm CTF Solutions with around \$60 000 in funding from FBA.



ABOVE: Josh Walter, Tim Neale from CTF Solutions, FBA's Mike Bent and landholder Neal Johansen at the field day. BELOW: CTF in action.



Tim Neale of CTF Solutions said the project established a community GPS base station to obtain topographic mapping information to assist local farms to uptake CTF, and farmers were also helped to develop new farm layouts.

"The base station was one of the first community base station systems established in Queensland and can service a radius of 10km. Involved farmers are now making 10 – 20% savings in diesel, fertilizer, chemical input, and time," Mr Neale said.

"The growers have demonstrated farming systems change through GPS guidance technology and CTF systems and we have been able to measure the change through satellite imagery," he said.

Hunter tour takes in the natural approach

More than 20 people from Central Queensland visited the Hunter Valley recently to gain insight from natural sequence farming (NSF) guru Peter Andrews.

In a follow-up to NSF field days held across CQ in late 2007, the Fitzroy Basin Association Inc (FBA) funded a group of interested locals to learn more about the system by visiting Mr Andrew's Tarwyn Park property at Bylong in New South Wales.

Landholders John and Nancy Kunze, who run cattle on just over 300 acres west of Gladstone, said participating in the trip had confirmed the value of NSF principles in their minds.

"On the trip to Peter's property we were able to gain valuable insight into his understanding and methods of this system and how his ideas might be applied to our own set of circumstances," Mr Kunze said.

Mr Kunze said they could clearly see the benefits in terms of erosion control, pasture fertility with the use of weeds not chemicals, and on-property water retention enabling better drought-proofing.

"We are looking at putting some of these principles into practice such as improved vegetation along creeks and surrounding landscapes, and the use of weeds to aid pasture management," he said.

"It's about reversing the effect of land degradation, returning fertility to areas that have lost it and increasing productivity in the long-term – it may take months or years."

Many of the NSF principles may be transferred to the Fitzroy, but some techniques may not be applicable nor allowable under Queensland law.

FBA has hired a consultant to examine legislative constraints to the use of NSF techniques in Queensland. Her report later this year will guide interested CQ landholders in their modification and implementation of NSF principles.

Those attending the NSF tour committed to continue networking by sharing ideas and travelling to examine on-ground works.



NATURAL CAUSE: Peter Andrews (far left in blue shirt) addresses participants of an FBA tour to his property in the Hunter Valley to witness NSF principles in action.

New Grazing Officer in Biloela

New FBA Grazing Land Management Officer Joe O'Reagain is based in Biloela at the DPI Research Station.

Joe recently completed a Bachelor of Agricultural Science, majoring in animal studies. Having grown up in Charters Towers, he possesses a strong interest in landscape management, particularly with regards to grazing animal production.

Past experience includes working with the Department of Natural Resources and Water, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, and work on pastoral properties.

"I'm really looking forward to getting out there and getting to know the people and the country of Central Queensland."

