

Media Release



FUTURE FARM
INDUSTRIES CRC

PROFITABLE PERENNIALS™ FOR AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPES

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Summer rain shows the perennial pasture advantage for eastern Australia

High rainfall across most of southern Australia during the summer and autumn months has shown the benefits of having perennial-based pastures.

Promoted as a way for farmers to have green feed for the drier months of the year and during periods of extended drought, however given enough water, perennial pastures can flourish to produce extra biomass to provide out of season feed.

The ability of perennial plants to take advantage of what water is available in the landscape has been made clear at Future Farm Industries CRC (FFI CRC) research sites throughout south-eastern Australia.

FFI CRC Researcher, Dr Sean Murphy (NSW Industry & Investment), witnessed a phenomenal growth spurt at a perennial tropical grasses trial near Tamworth where for some species the pre-grazing herbage mass increased more than seven fold between November 2009 and January 2010 when the area received about 200mm of rain.

“Summer active perennials tend to take up whatever water is available and use it to grow herbage mass,” Dr Murphy explained.

“That’s why we are targeting the tropical species – they have a tremendous ability to use summer rainfall and deliver more feed.”

After 10 years of dry summers, some farmers located further south in NSW have enjoyed the benefits of investing in lucerne. In some cases, the abundance of feed could not be fully utilised due to lack of grazing power.

NSW Industry and Investment researcher Richard Hayes said farmers in southern NSW who didn’t have lucerne found themselves battling an influx of weeds such as witch grass and black grass last summer.

“Where there were good strains of lucerne, we didn’t see weed seed invasions,” Richard said.

In Victoria, the abundance of rainfall had made it difficult for the CRC to determine which perennial grasses variety had the greatest persistence over summer and autumn.

FFI CRC researcher Steve Clark (Vic DPI) said the summer rain demonstrated the value of perennials in all of our experiments, as they were able to grow feed over the summer months.

“That’s what we are after but the existing cultivars get stressed under the normal summer conditions and with a couple of dry summers you start losing the plants,” Steve explained.

“The downside from all this summer rainfall is that it has made it difficult for us to differentiate the performance of the more water efficient varieties we are testing – I expected the newer cultivars to do better.”

For the full story of how the CRC’s perennial pastures trials fared over the wet 2009-10 summer and autumn, read the forthcoming June 2010 edition of *Focus on Perennials* available from www.futurefarmonline.com.au.

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Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre aims to transform Australian agriculture and rural landscapes by developing and applying Profitable Perennials™ technologies to innovative farming systems and new regional industries.