



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3

Volume 4
Number 5 September-October, 1955

Article 16

9-1955

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N. Davenport

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Recommended Citation

Davenport, N. (1955) "Getting more from our pastures," *Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3*: Vol. 4: No. 5, Article 16.

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GETTING MORE FROM OUR PASTURES

By N. DAVENPORT, Senior Adviser, Meat Production

DURING the last twenty years or so, the productivity of our pastures in the sheep-grazing areas has been increased enormously by the establishment of subterranean clover, together with the liberal use of superphosphate. This blessing has brought new problems in its train, as blessings usually do, and one of these problems is how to manage the improved pastures to the best advantage.

I should like to discuss one aspect of the management of these improved pastures, and that is their use as dry paddock feed over the summer period.

The pattern of growth of our pastures is typical of the winter rainfall and dry summer type of climate. The volume of herbage gradually increases until the spring period, when the growth is at a very rapid rate indeed, and is far greater than stock can cope with. It is this excess spring growth which provides most of the paddock feed over the summer months. Apart from the little that is cut as pasture hay, this excess growth is left to mature and dry off naturally.

As pasture passes from hay to the mature dry state there is a considerable reduction in quality, or in other words it has a lower carrying capacity per acre.

The question which naturally arises then, is whether anything can be done to reduce this loss of feeding value from those pastures which are allowed to mature and dry off naturally, and so use them to better advantage?

The obvious solution, is to cut it all and conserve it as hay, which is, of course, impracticable. However some benefit can be gained by mowing the pasture and letting it lie where cut, or by going to the slightly greater expense of raking it into windrows. In this way, more food per acre is available to the stock than by letting it mature and dry off naturally. Some farmers are doing this.

In order to get some idea of the benefit to be obtained from such a practice, a trial was conducted at the Avondale Re-

search Station. A block of 20 acres of pasture was selected and divided into two areas of 10 acres each of equal feeding value.

The pasture consisted of Wimmera ryegrass and subterranean clover with a small proportion of the usual species, such as capeweed, barley grass and wild geranium. It contained less than 50 per cent. subterranean clover and was a good average pasture.

One 10-acre portion was mown at the hay stage and raked into windrows and the other 10 acres were left to mature naturally. The mown area yielded at the rate of 24 cwt. of pasture hay per acre.

Each area was stocked with 40 dry full-mouthed cross-bred ewes commencing on 2nd December. They remained there until the 21st May, i.e. for 24 weeks. This was therefore a carrying capacity of 4 sheep per acre over the summer and autumn period.

These dry ewes were weighed at the commencement and then every fortnight. They were fat to start with, averaging 170 lb.

The results were very informative. The ewes in the mown area increased several pounds in the first six weeks, and then fell very gradually, ending up after 24 weeks, in good condition and 9 lb. lighter. After 18 weeks, i.e. a little over four months, they still weighed the same as when they started.

On the other hand, the group in the unmown area held their weight for a fortnight and then fell steadily, ending up 28 lb. lighter and in good store order.

After the trial, both lots were joined and from then until shearing had the same feed conditions. The wool from the group on the mown area averaged slightly over half a pound per sheep more than the other group.

Another benefit to be seen from cutting the pasture was the even cleaning up of the mown area, whereas on the other grazing was uneven, with patches of long grass left which was of very poor feed value.

This trial has been carried out for one summer only but the results show that a greater feeding value per acre is obtainable from mowing as is indicated by the heavier weights of the sheep and the greater wool return. This can be interpreted I think as indicating that the small expense involved in cutting and raking could result in a payable return through increased carrying capacity.

This trial at the Avondale Research Station will be repeated during the coming summer.

ARGENTINE ANTS

The chairman of the Argentine Ant Control Committee (Mr. G. K. Baron Hay), stated that the current season's Argentine ant campaign had now commenced.

The local authorities involved would include Mosman Park Road Board, Cottesloe Council, Claremont Council, Nedlands Road Board, Subiaco City Council, Perth City Council, Perth Road Board, Bayswater Road Board, Bassendean Road Board and Albany Council.

In conformity with last year's scheme, it was planned to treat outlying and isolated infestations first and then to work on a face into the more densely infested areas.

Regulations have been gazetted under the Argentine Ant Act placing certain responsibilities on householders to assist in the general campaign. Householders are required to notify the

Department of Agriculture if they suspect that their premises are infested with Argentine ants, as such action will help in obtaining accurate information on the complete distribution of the ant.

The spread of the ant on such commodities as pot plants, firewood and stable manure is prohibited under the Regulations, and a permit must be obtained from the Department of Agriculture before such materials can be removed from an area known to be infested with Argentine ants.

Mr. Baron Hay stated that much of the success achieved in treating over 7,000 acres of ant infested country last year was due to the ready co-operation of local authorities and the general public. He was confident that, with similar co-operation this season, an even larger area could be treated during the coming summer.

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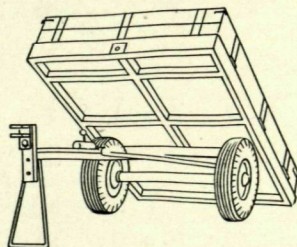
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