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GOOD RESULTS WITH RED CLOVER AT DENMARK RESEARCH STATION

By F. E. RYAN, Agrostologist



Stems of Red Clover at different stages of bloom.

MOST dairyfarmers are familiar with red clover under the name of Giant Colonial cow-grass, but only a few know that many strains of this valuable pasture and hay legume occur. One of the most promising of these strains is Montgomery red clover which is recognised as a grazing strain in England and New Zealand.

Very little red clover is grown at present in the dairying areas but much more of it was grown in the earlier days of settlement, particularly in the more southerly portions of the South-West. One reason for the decline in popularity has been the ease with which subterranean clover can be grown. Another reason is that red clover is susceptible to lucerne flea and red-legged earth mite, and, in the past, failures due to these pests have discouraged its use.

Now that suitable control of both mite and flea are available, the possibilities of red clover becoming more popular must be considered.

TRIALS AT DENMARK

The two strains, Montgomery red clover and Giant Colonial cow-grass, were sown at Denmark Research Station during the winter of 1954. Each was sown at the rate of 8lb. per acre. The paddock is a summer-moist one with sandy loam soil and pre-

viously carried a crop of maize. When the maize was removed the land was cultivated and the two clovers sown in duplicated strips. Seed was sown in June 1954.

These strips were then cross-stripped with several ryegrasses, including perennial ryegrass, short rotation ryegrass and Wimmera ryegrass.

Germination was good and clover plants grew well, even in the wet winter period. As the ground warmed up in the spring both clovers made very vigorous growth. Montgomery red clover was the more successful of the two varieties and a very thick stand of plants was obtained. By November, both varieties had produced an excellent bulk of fodder and were grazed at this time. During this spring period, they completely overshadowed the ryegrasses and these failed to persist after the first summer. This is probably related to the time of sowing the ryegrasses in winter when they were unable to make vigorous growth.

Following the grazing in November, dry conditions were experienced during January and February and further growth of the red clovers ceased during this period. After February rains, however, they again made very vigorous growth and were grazed off in March. Excellent recovery from this grazing was recorded so that the area was ready for grazing again in April. At each grazing Montgomery red clover was superior in the bulk of its production to Giant Colonial cow-grass.

Excellent results were again obtained on these plots during the 1955-56 summer season. An early spring grazing was obtained and excellent recovery was recorded by October 1955. The strips were grazed at that time and again in November and in January. January and February were extremely dry, and recovery from rain which fell in March was somewhat slow, but both clovers are still persisting and will be subjected to further grazing during 1956.

Throughout the course of this trial Montgomery red clover proved more satisfactory than Giant Colonial cow-grass. It provided a more vigorous growth and a thicker and more uniform stand on both strips. The cow-grass thinned out in patches and to some extent was replaced with subterranean clover. The yield of

the two varieties was measured just prior to each grazing with the exception of one grazing taken in the early spring of 1955.

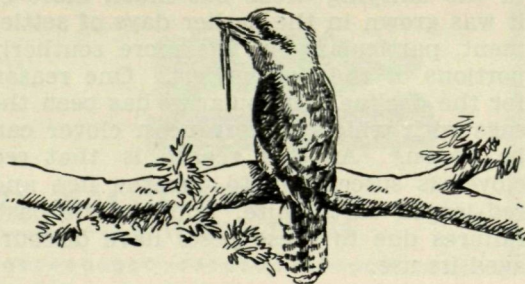
From June 1954 to January 1956, a period of 19 months, over 5 tons of air-dry forage per acre was obtained from the Montgomery red clover strips as compared with 4 tons 5 cwt. obtained from the Giant Colonial cow-grass strips. This trial has shown very clearly that red clover is capable of growing on moist or semi moist areas in the Denmark area and producing high yields under a grazing programme. Of the two varieties tested, Montgomery red clover proved superior.

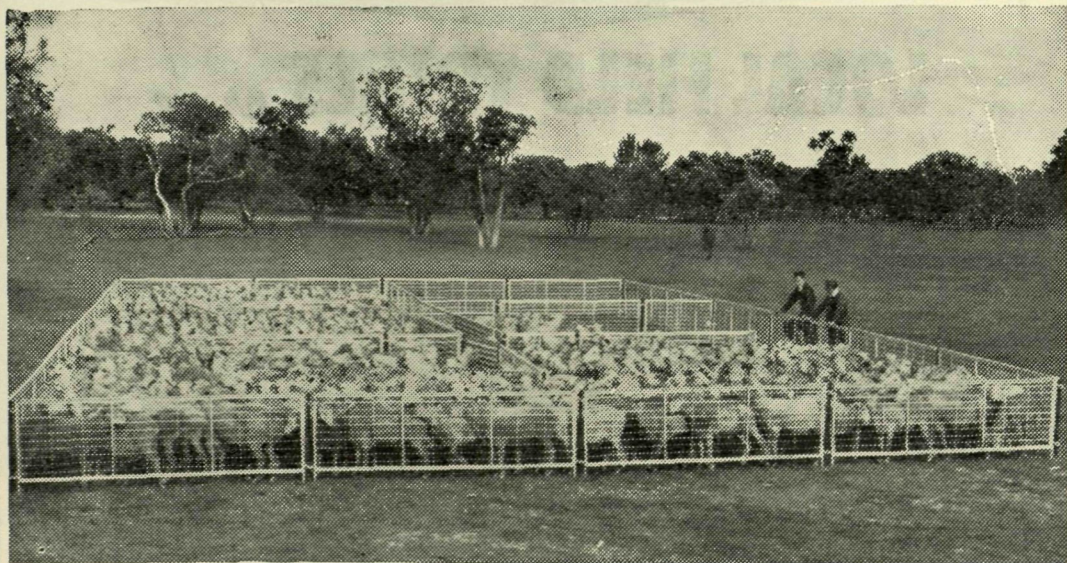
Red clover is normally sown either in the early autumn or in the spring. In this trial it was planted in June following a maize crop with very successful results. This shows that red clover is an excellent crop to follow maize on summer moist areas. It can thus fit very readily into a rotation on dairy farms where maize is commonly grown for summer fodder production but usually following the maize crop, very little attempt is made to use the land during the next winter and spring.

From this trial it is clear that the red clovers can be expected to produce heavily for at least two years following a maize crop and in seasons which are not so dry as that experienced in 1955-56, they would be expected to continue growth for a longer period. There is some evidence that it may be held for considerably longer periods. As the red clover thins out, the paddock can be again cultivated and sown back to a pasture species or may return to a crop of maize.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The field work for this trial was carried out by the Manager of the Denmark Research Station, Mr. V. Weston and his assistant, Mr. A. James and their services in this regard are acknowledged.





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