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# HOW VALUABLE IS BARLEY GRASS?

By J. A. C. SMITH, B.Sc. (Agric.) Agricultural Adviser, Merredin

FARMERS often assert that barley grass is so good a pasture for sheep that there is little or no point in trying to establish a legume with it to make it better.

This argument is heard by advisers in the field and there is very little published evidence to refute it.

No one will dispute the ability of barley grass to provide a rapid early bite following opening rains at the break of the season. Its all year round performance, however, leaves much to be desired, and, according to a measurement taken at the Merredin Research Station last year barley grass cannot compete in value with the pasture legume Cyprus barrel medic.

At Merredin the value of barley grass and Cyprus barrel medic was estimated by grazing with wether weaners and measuring their rate of live weight change and wool production.

## The Measurement

Four six-acre heavy land paddocks were selected for the trial. The first paddock contained a pure stand of barley grass. The second also was pure barley grass but which was mown and left during the spring. The third contained a mixed barley grass barrel medic pasture which can be referred to as a poor medic stand.

The fourth paddock contained pure barrel medic and could be called a good medic stand.

Nine wether weaners (six spring drop and three autumn drop) born in 1963 were placed in each paddock on June 11, 1964. They were removed from the paddocks at the end of February 1965, eight and a half months later. Shearing took place on October 12, 1964 and again on April 9, 1965, so that six months wool growth was measured. After the weaners were removed in February, they were run as one mob until shearing in April. They were prematurely removed in February because some of the animals on the pure barley grass would have died if they had been allowed to remain there. No supplements were given.

## Conclusion

Although measurements were taken for only part of one year, they serve sufficiently well to illustrate the wrong thinking of not trying to improve barley grass pastures.

Sheep body weight and wool production on barley grass and barrel medic at Merredin Research Station

Treatment	Stocking Rate	Liveweight (lb. per head)		Greasy Wool Weight (six months growth) (lb. per head)
		11/6/64	25/2/65	
Barley grass ....	1½ sheep per acre ....	61.7	68.0	3.9
Barley grass mown and left ....	1½ sheep per acre ....	61.4	76.9	4.8
Poor barrel medic ....	1½ sheep per acre ....	60.6	87.7	5.4
Good barrel medic ....	1½ sheep per acre ....	60.9	106.7	6.7



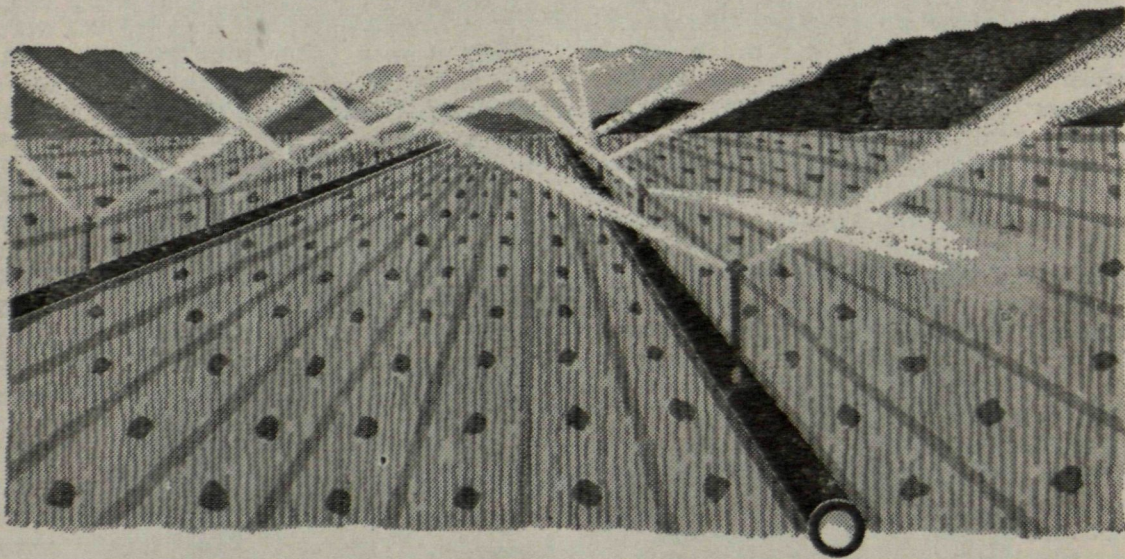
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