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Addressing pasture rundown

Tailored support makes legume trials possible

Brett and Renee Christie have been involved in the grazing industry their whole lives. Prior to purchasing Wedgewood, a 1000 hectare property located 50 kilometres north of Blackwater, Brett managed the cattle enterprise on the Cooroorah Aggregation, which included Wedgewood.

The Christies produce organically certified beef, and want to use sustainable and environmentally friendly practices while ensuring their enterprise is financially viable. They are committed to keeping abreast of industry improvements and Brett attended a Pasture Rundown workshop hosted by Capricornia Catchments in October 2014 before completing Grazing Best Management Practices (Grazing BMP) in September 2015.

Tailored support for trials

Brett and Renee completed an action plan as part of Grazing BMP, and then received tailored support and soil testing from Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA), Capricornia Catchments and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) through funding from the Queensland Government. With the technical advice from Stuart Buck, a DAF Pasture Agronomist, the Christies are trialling two techniques to address their pasture rundown issues and incorporate legumes into their pasture species. Both techniques aim to improve the nitrogen content of their soils, which will help improve their pasture and production.

The first technique they are trialling is to use slashing and mulching, but not plant legumes. The second technique is to plant legume species that are already present on Wedgewood. Although grass production in their trial paddock is good, it is beginning to show pasture rundown symptoms and both Brett and Renee felt there was the potential for nitrogen rundown to impact their future production.

Because Wedgewood is organically certified, they were keen to investigate ways to use legume species that are already established on their property, such as bauhinia and butterfly pea. Brett said he had some ideas for promoting legume species and wanted to try them. "Being organic limits what we can try. However, it is very important for our long-term viability to have healthy soils," said Brett.

Legume planting successful

The initial results have been promising, with the planted legumes growing exceptionally well and proving that this treatment will help address their pasture rundown issues. "We were very fortunate to have had one of the best wet seasons ever to help the germination and the continual growth of the butterfly pea. We will plant more later this year," Brett said.

Further soil testing is needed to assess the effectiveness of the slash and mulch treatment, although the Christies and Capricornia Catchments Project Officer Marina Wall are hopeful it will also prove useful.

Brett's assessment of the workshops, tailored support and field trials is positive. "Get in touch with your FBA representative and you may be surprised at the support that is on offer. It's really a win-win situation!"



[above] Planting legumes such as butterfly pea has been particularly successful for the Christies, who have seen them grow exceptionally well since the trial started.



[left] Trialling new techniques and assessing their effectiveness through monitoring plots, such as the one pictured here, will help the Christies address pasture rundown into the future.