

# Producer Update

## Tamar Pasture Improvement Demonstration Project *Supporting Tamar Valley Producers*

A three year producer demonstration site (PDS) project funded by MLA with in-kind support by Landcare and farmer groups.

### Project goal

To demonstrate on 136 ha of land at three Tamar Valley properties that pasture and associated grazing management practices can increase the profitability of the red meat supply chain by at least 10%.

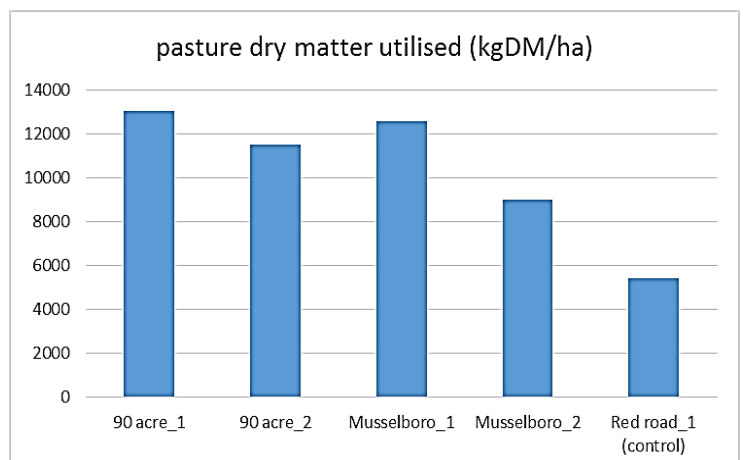
### Project objectives

- To present regionally relevant information on sustainable pasture management and animal nutrition/production to encourage practice change on-farm.
- To present via demonstration, that new pasture species/cultivars and associated grazing management practices will increase the profitability of the red meat supply chain by at least 10%.
- To present options of better adapted, persistent and productive pastures that are able to cope with changing environmental conditions.

### Mid year project update (August, 2018)

Demonstrating the change to better pasture management is a priority for the MLA funded Tamar Valley PDS. The project's technical working group comprised of local farmers and industry experts have that grazing management skills are needed and landholders need to be aware that upgrading pastures needs an equal amount of pasture utilisation. They consider that there are some gains to be made with cultivar choice, but there is a much greater potential for gain from improved pasture utilisation.

*Impressive pasture productivity results being achieved at "Elverton" Farm, Blessington.*





### **Pasture Demonstration at "Elverton", Blessington:**

"Elverton" Pastoral Proprietary Limited is an enterprise in northern Tasmania Elverton of 2,700 ha (1,200ha grazing) comprising 860 cows and calves; 310 heifers; 25 yearlings; 20 bulls; 3,000 prime lamb ewes, and 4,800 lambs.

Four paddocks and a control paddock totalling 116.2 has been made available for this PDS project. (Paddock: 90 acre\_1 (23ha); Paddock: 90 acre\_2 (24.6ha); Paddock: Musselboro\_1 (23ha); Paddock: Musselboro\_2 (24.6ha); Control paddock: Red Road\_1 (21ha).

Soil types of the producer demonstration sites are sandy clay loam and fine sandy clay loam, with the complete paddock descriptions included in the March 2018 update available on the Tamar NRM website under [reports](#).

"Elverton" was the location of a field day held on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018 attended by 48 landholders.

#### **Pasture composition**

Overall the demonstration paddocks have come through the summer very well. The major changes in composition were seen in the two 2017 sown pastures 90 acre\_2 and Musselboro\_2. Coming into their second year the sown species have replaced the annual weeds that were present in year one.

#### Pasture composition - Paddock: 90 acre\_2

Date Species	13 <sup>th</sup> September 2017 Estimated % of dry matter	20 <sup>th</sup> April 2018 Estimated % of dry matter
Perennial ryegrass	46	42
White clover	33	36
Red clover	9	10
Strawberry clover	5	3
Sub clover	0	1
Naturalized legumes	1	0
Chicory	6	8
Plantain	0	0
Grass weeds	1 (Yorkshire fog)	0
Other weeds	0	0

#### Pasture composition - Paddock: Musselboro\_2

Date Species	13 <sup>th</sup> September 2017 Estimated % of dry matter	20 <sup>th</sup> April 2018 Estimated % of dry matter
Perennial ryegrass	28	20
Cocksfoot	5	14
Tall fescue	1	7
White clover	11	7
Red clover	0	0
Strawberry clover	0	0
Sub clover	38	17
Naturalized legumes	3	3
Chicory	0	6
Plantain	0	0
Grass weeds	13 (vulpia, Yorkshire fog, browntop)	9 (vulpia, Yorkshire fog, browntop)
Other weeds	2 (cats ear)	23 (sorrel, cats ear)

The control paddock suffered from an attack of Corbie grubs (*Oncopera intricata*) in late spring 2017, this has opened up the sward allowing flat weeds to colonise the bare patches. However, the perennial grass component has survived well, with cocksfoot increasing its contribution to the overall pasture composition.

All four demonstration paddocks have an excellent blend of perennial ryegrass and white, red clover and chicory.



### Soil tests

Soil tests were taken on all paddocks in February 2018. The results confirmed the need for regular soil monitoring.

The pH levels, particularly in Musselboro 1 and 2 had dropped significantly since they were last tested, with Musselboro 1 dropping from 5.8 down to 5.2. The pH levels were low for all paddocks. This is being rectified with the first applications of lime spread in April 2018. Potassium levels were low in Musselboro\_1 and 2. The phosphorous level was low in the control paddock.

### Feed tests

Feed tests were taken in autumn on three paddocks, 90 acre\_1, Musselboro\_2 and the control paddock Red road\_1 with metabolisable energy (ME) levels of 12.1, 11.6 and 10.7 MJ/kgDM respectively. These results show that the ME levels of the pastures sown with the latest cultivars; 90 acre\_1 and Musselboro\_2 had 13% and 8% higher feed value (MJ/kgDM) respectively than the control.



### Paddock outputs

90 acre\_1, 90 acre\_2 and Musselboro\_1 have produced 13,049, 11,495 and 12,573 kgDM/ha utilized respectively. These paddocks produced more than double the dry matter of the control paddock Red road\_1 which produced 5417 kgDM/ha utilised.

90 acre\_1 and 2 have clearly been the most economically productive paddocks so far, returning an estimated \$3,176/ha and \$3,048/ha respectively over the period between October 2017 and May 2018, this is an increased return of 154 and 144% respectively over the control paddock which

returned an estimated \$1250 per hectare over the same period. Musselboro\_1 and 2 returned \$1,561/ha and \$1,926/ha respectively. This is still an improvement of 25% and 54% respectively over the control.

The reason for the large difference in estimated returns between the two 90 acre paddocks relative to the two Musselboro paddocks will be further investigated. Soil fertility is being suspected as one of the major issues.

The conversion of pasture dry matter to live weight gain is also an issue in Musselboro\_1 and will be further monitored.

### **Decision making needs reliable information**

Tamar NRM's consultant to the project Eric Hall knows the three producer demonstration sites, well and understands the pasture compositions and just what soil and pasture management steps are needed. To keep you informed all results and analysis of MLA PDS paddocks are posted on the Tamar NRM website under the ["Reports"](#) tab. We intend continuing to connect with landholders by holding more field days and information sessions.

### **Landholder Surveys**

Core and observer producers undertook a PDS entrance survey in 2017 and early 2018. The survey results have been finalised with twenty-nine producers participating. Additionally twenty-three respondents provided feedback at the Blessington Field Day, or gave their feedback online.

The information has provided valuable insights into what the farming community wants to hear about. Practical demonstration remains important, and remain a key element of future discussions and presenter/site selection for field days.

We are promoting a 10 minute survey by Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA). Your input will help define the future of Tasmania's agrifood research, development and extension, and also contribute to informing policy and industry priorities. We will also be keen to read the outcomes of this Tassie wide study and what it offers to our project work in the north. (Survey concludes on 31<sup>st</sup> August)

<http://sgiz.mobi/s3/TasAgFuture-Survey-TIA>

### **Analysis of surveys**

The survey will be revisited in three years to determine the effectiveness of the Tamar Valley producer demonstration site in improving producers' understanding of pastures and their management.

Most landholders surveyed had a grazing strategy and were open to new practices, even if it cost more. Their understanding of soil condition was good, with the majority having soil tested every two or three years.

The entrance survey showed varying levels of confidence and understanding when it came to pasture species identification and calculating dry sheep equivalent (DSE) values.



### Survey results in identifying pasture grasses:

- Twelve out of the 29 respondents could identify 50% or more of the species listed in the survey.
- Similar competence level was shown with their own pasture identification skills as 11 of 29 of the respondents said were able to identify >50% of the pasture species they have on their properties.
- Most showed some difficulty in calculating DSE values for different classes of livestock at different live weights (e.g. calculating the value for a 300kg steer growing at 1kg/day). It's important to know DSE values, so landholders can manage feed budgets.
- Twelve out of 29 landholders do pasture budgets and calculate feed on offer.

### Future information provision

Sharing the successes and the challenges with a broader group of Tasmanian famers is to be a continual project focus. We are aware that farmers attend field days and then go back home and often have limited follow-up or support.

Showing the benefits of improved pasture paddocks such as those at Blessington with over twice the productive output of the control paddock will remain important as will more information on species identification, calculating DSE values and production cost benefit analysis.

### Next Farm Field Day

**What:** Pastures in Spring - A discussion on managing pastures and see first-hand one of the Tamar NRM/MLA Producer Demonstration Sites at Beaconsfield.

**Date:** Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2018

**Time:** 10.00 am - 3.00 pm

**Where:** 'Springmere', 342 Holwell Road, south of Beaconsfield, Tasmania

Ben and Louisa Hooper's farm runs 2,100 ewes and lambs on 460ha with a focus on fertility and growth for production of highly productive composite females. Productive pasture that can cope with adverse seasonal conditions is something they keep front of mind.

Their pastures are predominantly annual ryegrass and clovers on low-fertility hydrosol and podzol soil types that can suffer waterlogging.

That's why they're participating in the MLA-funded producer demonstration site.

"Our biggest challenge is that pasture growth slows right down during winter because of the cold and excessively wet conditions," Ben said.

"It can get as low as 5–10kg of dry matter (DM)/day, compared to about 30–40kg DM/day in spring, and we need to really carefully feed budget during the winter months when we experience this feed gap."

The pastures were sown in mid-February 2018, on just over 27ha of land plus control paddocks and so far, the crop is looking good. You can follow the progress by attending Tamar NRM's Pastures in Spring Field Day on Thursday 1 November 2018.



## **"Springmere" demonstration paddocks**

### **Nana's meadow**

Area: 7.4ha

Soil type: fine sandy clay loam

#### **Sown species recommendation:**

- Reward Endo5 tetraploid perennial ryegrass at 14kg/ha
- Megatas cocksfoot at 2kg/ha
- Rubitas red clover at 3kg/ha
- Tonic plantain at 1kg/ha

### **South spring hill**

Area: 10.5ha

Soil type: fine sandy clay loam

**Sown species recommendation:**

- Avalon AR1 diploid perennial ryegrass at 10kg/ha
- Megatas cocksfoot at 3kg/ha
- Rubitas red clover at 2kg/ha
- Nomad white clover at 1kg/ha
- Tonic plantain at 1kg/ha

**Paddock S2**

Size: 9.46ha

Soil type: fine sandy clay loam

**Sown species recommendation:**

- Avalon AR1 diploid perennial ryegrass at 6kg/ha
- Finesse Tall fescue at 10kg/ha
- Palestine strawberry clover at 2kg/ha
- Hytas Alsike clover at 3kg/ha

A case study on 'Springmere' can be found [here](#).

## *Your invitation to attend the next Field Day*

at Springmere', 342 Holwell Road, south of Beaconsfield.

**Thursday 1st November, 2018**

- Pasture utilisation – A key to success
- Tour of "Springmere" – Pasture species planted and sustainable management
- Growing better pastures – some of the factors that can make or break pasture production and persistence
- Pasture measurement
- MLA Producer Demonstration Project – the story so far
- Join the discussion on the challenges and successes the site has posed

**LINK TO POSTER**



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