

Right pasture takes paddocks from zero to hero



Happy grazing days at Glenormiston in an established paddock of Hummer last October.

Finding the right pasture variety for difficult black soils was a breakthrough for Chris Blackberry at Glenormiston, north of Terang.

The productivity of the 220 hectare dairy farm had been hampered by 80 hectares of heavy black soils, susceptible to waterlogging in winter and cracking in summer.

That was until Mr Blackberry tried a new soft leaf fescue called Hummer, starting with just a third of a paddock four years ago.

He was among a handful of farmers who grew trial quantities of Stephen Pasture Seeds' new summer active tall fescue prior to its release this season, to test its value in a range of environments.

Unlike many fescue varieties, Hummer has fine, soft, palatable leaves, making it suitable for dairy pastures as well as beef and sheep operations.

Mr Blackberry now has 30 hectares converted to the pasture, sown with white clover, and intends to continue the program across all of his problem soils, generally on low lying areas of the farm.

"It has completely changed the farm," he said.

"The land where the Hummer pastures are growing used to provide two to three months of grazing a year at best.

"I couldn't keep ryegrass growing over summer because the ground would crack and crickets and bugs would kill it.

"In winter, it would be waterlogged, so the cows wouldn't get on until October anyway. Then it would need to be resown."

In contrast, the perennial fescue pastures haven't yet needed to be resown and have even held up super spreaders through June.

“I wouldn’t have dreamed of spreading super on those paddocks in winter before,” he said.

Hummer tall fescue tolerates waterlogging well, due to its deep roots, its ability to form a thatch and the MaxP® endophyte.

MaxP® is a novel tall fescue endophyte that improves the ability of tall fescue pastures to handle pest attack and moisture stress.

According to Mr Blackberry, turning those problem areas around has improved the overall productivity of the farm, which now boasts a healthy stocking rate of around two cows per hectare.

“It has really got the land working better,” he said.

“Being able to use those paddocks productively has improved feed stability year round and has helped to increase cow numbers from around 350 cows to 465.”

He recommended dairy farmers struggling with black soils, or discounting them as non-productive back blocks, consider growing Hummer.

“The cows graze on it well and the milk is the same,” he said.

“The mix with white clover works, because Hummer doesn’t smother it out in the first year and they both establish well. After three months, you’ve got a real mass of feed.”

Mr Blackberry tops the pasture regularly to keep it shorter and fresher after grazing.

“Anyone driving around the farm now would probably assume those paddock were irrigated,” he said.

“After the rain in January, the Hummer paddocks are now vibrant green compared with the ryegrass.”

Along with the summer active lucerne, the Hummer paddocks are his main grazing areas for this time of year.

“It’s come full circle from one of the toughest areas of the farm to manage to one of the easiest,” he said.

Available from Stephen Pasture Seeds from this season, Hummer is a high yielding, soft leaf, tall fescue, ideal for providing summer growth.

For more information, on Hummer tall fescue contact your local seed distributor.