

**Draft Media Release
For Immediate Release
20 March, 2008**

Grain & Graze trial results on show across the Border Rivers and Maranoa-Balonne

Mixed farmers will have an ‘on-ground’ chance to learn more about managing their farming systems for greater profitability and sustainability when five Grain & Graze field days unfold on properties in the Border Rivers and Maranoa-Balonne catchments later this month and into early April.

The first two field days will be held in New South Wales near Warialda and Moree, followed by three field days in Queensland at Toobeah, Nindigully and Roma.

With direct involvement of farmers and farming groups in local trials, the Grain & Graze regional projects have carried out research, development and extension investigating the benefits and constraints of the mixed farming system. There has been a particular focus on the environmental, financial and social sustainability of introducing a short or long term grazing phase in cropping systems.

Topics to be covered during the *Grain & Graze Roadshow* field days (each including a barbeque) include pasture selection, establishment and management, biodiversity, soils and landscapes, land capability and soil compaction from grazing livestock on cropping country, grazing cereal crops and stubbles, risk management in mixed farming systems, feedbase and livestock management, including the use of Meat & Livestock Australia’s (MLA) Feed Demand Calculator.

A key focus of the *Roadshow* is to provide farmers with the information to grow productive, persistent and profitable pastures that also provide considerable benefit to the environment (sequester carbon, improve groundcover, reduce water loss and erosion and restrict the movement of ground water).

In addition to meeting and hearing from experts in a range of fields, *Roadshow* visitors will see first-hand how other landholders manage mixed farming systems for profitability and sustainability.

The Grain & Graze Roadshow field days will be held on properties:

- March 31, “Maneroo,” Terry Hie Hie, NSW
- April 1, “Bullala,” Warialda, NSW
- April 2, “Kioma,” Toobeah, QLD
- April 3, “Dunkerry South,” Nindigully, QLD
- April 4, “Banoona,” Roma, QLD

For more information please contact Kathryn Taylor for QLD events on 07 4671 7900 or Carol Harris for NSW events on 02 6730 1900. In order to attend, RSVP to Kathryn or Carol by March 25.

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March 31: “Maneroo,” Terry Hie Hie, NSW

On March 31, Rob Anderson of “Maneroo,” Terry Hie Hie, 38 kilometres south east of Moree, will host a *Roadshow* field day on his property.

Across 2220 hectares the Andersons run Hereford cattle, Corriedale sheep for wool and lamb, and have a dry land farming operation - growing mostly cereals, sorghum, chick peas and linseed.

Over the years Mr Anderson has been involved in many grazing trials with an aim to having productive, persistent and profitable pastures.

Selecting the correct species of grasses and legumes and treating pastures more like a crop establishment has been part of Mr Anderson’s pasture improvement management.

“Over the years we have been involved in many grazing trials, mainly with legumes,” Mr Anderson says. “We have done a lot of pasture improvement with subtropical grasses, and lucerne.

“We did have a commercial stand of Sulla but found that it could not compete with Snail Medic growing from the seedbank already in the soil.

“At present, we have a small plot of Burgundy Bean which I feel could have a future here mixed with grasses,” he adds.

“Our main improved pasture is lucerne in rotational farming and then some 400 acres of improved, productive subtropical pasture.”

The Andersons have also been careful to keep quite a bit of native grass land and scrub land to encourage biodiversity.

On March 31 at Maneroo, field experts will talk about some of the trials conducted in the region over the years and will outline how mixed farming systems can be more profitable and sustainable.

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April 1: “Bullala,” Warialda, NSW

On April 1, dry land farmers and cattle traders Tom and Belinda Ledingham will host a *Roadshow* field day on their property “Bullala,” Warialda, 85 kilometres north east of Moree.

The Ledinghams are using management tools and making decisions to sustain production and promote diversity on-farm.

With areas fenced off and stock excluded from farming country, Mr Ledingham says management of pasture selection and establishment is a priority in his operation.

“I graze fodder crops, like oats, but as a rule I don’t graze our stubble (crop residues on dedicated farming country),” he explains.

To improve productivity and profitability, the Ledinghams are constantly looking at new approaches and have implemented many changes over the years.

“People are becoming more aware of the amazing benefits of tropical pastures and I have sown them here in an effort to move away from growing forage oats (an annual crop) to putting in the more sustainable perennial pastures,” Mr Ledingham says.

“While hopefully the change to perennials will prove to be just as profitable, essentially in the long term it will be more sustainable.”

Running a steer trading operation as well as dry land cropping, the Ledinghams also have some off-farm investments and run a contract farming business.

“While we’re not sure where we’ll be with cropping in the next five to 10 years, at the moment we’re planting the crops that bring the best return and aim to become more sustainable,” Mr Ledingham says.

“And by increasing our off-farm investments and contract farming work, we’re better managing the on-farm risk.”

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April 2: “Kioma,” Toobeah, Qld

Manager of mixed farming enterprise, “Kioma,” for JH Fairfax and Son - Steve Wilkins - is hosting one of the *Roadshow* field days on property near Toobeah, on April 2.

Biodiversity is one of the core topics to be covered at the field day - something Mr Wilkins can provide plenty of insight into, as a collaborating farmer in the national Biodiversity in Grain & Graze (BiGG) project.

Mr Wilkins says taking part in the BiGG project has helped significantly with long term sustainability.

With more than 1500 Merino sheep, a cattle breeding herd of 500 head and 2500 hectares of wheat, Kioma was one of the largest properties to take part in the BiGG project.

“Before taking part in the project we implemented a straight down the line approach, but now, after working with the BiGG project we realise the importance of balancing farm profitability with biodiversity needs,” Mr Wilkins says.

“I adopted a number of sustainable farming practices with an aim to improve biodiversity and to develop a more sustainable business for the long term.

“Moving to a rotational grazing system for cattle and sheep has retained good ground cover and enabled diverse pasture species to re-establish, survive and thrive,” he explains.

“This in turn encourages the build-up of biodiversity.”

He says the increased levels of soil organic matter will lead to an increase in the amount of rain stored in the profile and no-till and minimum-till cropping techniques have increased the amount of ground cover and organic matter.

“BiGG surveys on Kioma found the farm supports a wide range of living creatures,” he adds.

“We had noticed heavy dung beetle activity in cow pats and knew that was a good sign.

“It was encouraging to find we have rich biodiversity on the property and are now determined to preserve it.”

While improving the ecosystem health on Kioma isn't without challenges, Mr Wilkins believes the long term benefits are probably not measurable in the short term.

“Increasing reserved areas can cause an increase in native or feral animal populations like kangaroos, wallabies and pigs - but it's just a matter of better managing the pest problem,” he says.

“Similarly, improving the numbers of different bird species, beneficial insects, plants and animals has implications for future policies in chemical use.”

Essentially, the Kioma farming system demonstrates that to encourage and increase biodiversity, farm profitability doesn't need to be sacrificed. It highlights that mixed farming systems have the potential to conserve biodiversity at all levels from landscapes to individual species and the benefits of encouraging biodiversity are myriad.

Mr Wilkins says by determining the needs and interaction of farm ecosystems, productivity can be increased and long-term sustainability achieved.

“Biodiversity is an investment in the future.”

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April 3: “Dunkerry South,” Nindigully, Qld

On April 3, David and Liz Hill will host a *Roadshow* field day on their 2924 hectare mixed cropping and beef property, “Dunkerry South,” near Nindigully. Among the presenters,

CSIRO farming systems' scientist Dr Lindsay Bell will focus on pastures in cropping systems, their benefits and the associated issues.

“Many soils in the region are declining in soil fertility and organic matter and pastures are an effective way of restoring these characteristics,” Dr Bell says.

“Pastures have a number of carry over benefits for grain production such as improved nitrogen availability, increased infiltration and reducing weed, pest and disease populations.”

He says pastures can also provide environmental benefits by reducing soil erosion, deep drainage and maintaining biodiversity in the landscape.

“A number of pasture and forage rotations can be used in our farming systems but it is important to understand that they differ in the type of benefits they provide.

“We are using crop and pasture simulation to look at issues about coming back to crop such as rewetting the soil profile and looking at the associated risk for grain yields for following crops. We're also looking at the right time to graze a cereal crop,” he adds.

Dr Bell will outline some analyses that have investigated the situations when grazing a grain crop could be more profitable and some of the potential impacts this might have on following crops.

“We'll also outline some of the trade offs for grazing re-growth from sorghum stubble and the critical grain yields for wheat crops below which it might be more profitable to graze the crop than continue to harvest.”

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April 4: “Banoona,” Roma, Qld

The April 4 *Roadshow* field day will be held on Charles Nason's 10,000 hectare mixed farm, “Banoona,” 60 kilometres south east of Roma. One of the key note speakers at the field day will be Brian Johnson, a principal experimentalist with the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. His presentation will focus on the crop pasture inter-phase and grazing management with the aim of maximising productivity. Mr Johnson will deliver the same presentation at the two other field day locations in Queensland.

“In this region farmers need to enter the pasture phase as quickly as possible and during the establishment phase it's important to treat pasture more like a crop,” Mr Johnson says.

“It's a matter of preparing a seed bed, storing water and planning ahead to control the outcome.”

“If we don't plan ahead we will have weed problems, we may not be able to access seed, moisture may be limited and poor establishment will result in an unproductive pasture.”

During the *Roadshow*, Mr Johnson will speak mainly about selecting and sowing the right species to match the region and soil types.

“While a shotgun mix approach can be an easy option, it is really important to choose the seed species and cultivars carefully,” he adds.

“Farmers need to use good quality seed, sown at the right time of the year and it shouldn’t be sown too deeply.

“The key is getting it right the first time. This will avoid the expense of sitting with idle paddocks, waiting for them to improve.”

Mr Johnson will also talk about pasture utilisation and grazing management and feed budget management of both growing pasture and carry-over feed.

He says it is important during grazing not to utilise more than 40 percent of the dry matter available, to maintain at least 1000kg/ha of dry matter on the pasture after the grazing period and to strive for 70 percent ground cover.

Ends

The Border Rivers and Maranoa-Balonne Grain & Graze projects have been a partnership between the national Grain & Graze partners, the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee, the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA, the Queensland and New South Wales Departments of Primary Industries, CSIRO, the University of New England and the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Water.

The national Grain & Graze partners include Land & Water Australia (LWA), Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC).

For further information about the Grain & Graze Program, contact National Coordinator, Richard Price, on 02 6295 6300, mobile 0409 624 297; Gillian Stewart on 02 6263 6042; Merryn West on 02 6263 6013 or visit www.grainandgraze.com.au.

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