

Native grasses

Technical Note F12

Management level	★
Yield	★★★★
Quality	★
Water use efficiency	★★★★★
Reliability	★
Versatility	★★

Where ★★★★★ is the highest rating.

On extensive properties native grasses provide reasonably nutritious forage for 3 to 4 months of the year. They are often valuable ground cover on hill sides and shelter belts of the farm and maintain biodiversity in landscapes.

Species

There are many native grasses, mostly C4, but including some C3 species. The most common and productive are spear grass (*Heteropogon contortus*), Queensland blue grass (*Dicanthium sericeum*), pitted blue grass (*Bothriochloa decipiens*) and Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*).

On dairy farms native grasses occupy poorer quality land types such as stony slopes and ridges or larger, undeveloped areas of the farm. They are often used as wet weather shelter for cows or extensive grazing for young stock. In recent years the preservation of these relatively small areas has become important to landholders and communities.

Establishment

Native grasses occupy undeveloped areas or have reclaimed improved pasture areas as fertility declines. In some environments natives can be successfully over sowed with legumes such as medics and clover.

The tall, tufted native grasses can be easily overgrazed that preferentially suits volunteer grasses that are short and stoloniferous as couch (*Cynodon* spp.).



Water use

Very well adapted to low and erratic rainfall, able to reach physiological maturity rapidly and set seed and die off above ground.

Soil fertility

Queensland blue grass considered higher quality than most and it prefers higher quality clay and clay-loam soils. Other grasses more tolerant of soil type, but do not grow on very poor shallow soils.

Growth and grazing

A short growing season, often from spring storms to December. Nutritional value equivalent to improved grasses in the 3 months after storms, then falls markedly to sub-maintenance levels (2 - 6%CP).

Further information

Contact the DAFF Customer Service Centre by
Phone 13 25 23, or
Email callweb@daff.qld.gov.au

More technical notes can be found at:
www.dairyinfo.biz

Tropical Grassland Society

Callow et al. (2013) Successful Dairy Production
in the Sub-Tropics

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