

Grazing Management Annual Ryegrass



Case Study – Sam & Fleur Tonge

Sam and Fleur Tonge farm at Casino in far north NSW.

They milk an average of 250 cows during a typical winter and spring. Their main forage source during this time of the year is irrigated and fertilised annual ryegrass, supplemented with grain fed in the dairy twice-a-day and round bale silage as necessary.

In regards to grazing management of annual ryegrass, there are some key practices they use.

+ Monitor leaf appearance intervals and adjust rotation length accordingly:

- Tonges undertake a weekly pasture assessment to monitor leaf emergence per tiller;
- The rotation length is adjusted according to the speed of leaf emergence;
- Annual ryegrass is grazed at 2.5 to 3 leaves per tiller;
- Tonges will graze paddocks earlier if paddocks start to lodge.



Tonge's ATV-mounted Ellinbank pasture meter.

+ Pasture on offer is measured weekly and silage feeding rates are altered subject to pasture availability:

- Tonges feed a constant rate of grain-based supplement in the dairy. The concentrate to forage ratio is designed to deliver an average annual milk production of around 7,000 litres per lactation. They have a target forage intake of around 14 to 15kg dry matter pasture intake per cow per day during their ryegrass season.
- Every week, pasture available (above 5cm) of paddocks ready to graze within the next week is measured using a bike mounted Ellinbank pasture meter. Silage is fed when there is not enough pasture available.
- In peak season, paddocks are pulled out of the grazing rotation and conserved as silage.



+ Grazing behaviour is monitored:

- As seen to the right, a pasture residue height of 5cm is targeted, with cows grazing close to dung pads.

+ Electric fences are used to ensure that herds do not graze paddocks for more than 24 hours.

- Research shows that ryegrass plant mortality increases as cows graze pastures over multiple days.
- Tonges manage this using backfences.

▬ From this approach, Sam and Fleur achieve a seasonal rolling herd average of 23 litres, have consumed pasture yields of around 10 tonnes/ha, and conserve a further two tonnes per ha per year as silage. ■■