



BEEF HUNTER VALLEY, UPPER MANNING & CENTRAL COAST news

SPRING 2006

NSW Department of Primary Industries, www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/beefnews

A quarterly newsletter for beef producers of the Hunter Valley, Upper Manning and Central Coast areas of NSW.

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NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Drought Help

Ian Blackwood, Livestock Officer (Beef Products), Tocal, Paterson

Drought conditions in the mid and Upper Hunter districts are really starting to impact.

If you would like to talk your management and feeding options through then both Todd Andrews (the new Beef-o at Scone) and myself are available to do just that . . . by phone or farm visit.

You can also talk to our Drought Support Workers based at our Scone Office (Tania Chesworth & Caroline Long) who can help steer you to financial and emotional support services.

It is important that you talk to your bank manager and accountant if you are borrowing money to feed cattle. A cash flow budget will help you with decisions.

The Rural Financial Counsellor from Gloucester, Ron Lindsay, is now working in the Hunter Valley. Ron has a great reputation in this field and has helped many producers find their way through the minefield of cash budgeting and debt servicing. The Drought Support Workers will help arrange your interview with Ron.

We, as a NSW DPI team, will do all we can to help you through this drought, so contact us if you believe we can help in any way:

Ian Blackwood, Tocal	4939 8941
Todd Andrews, Scone	6545 1800
Neil Griffiths, Agronomist, Tocal	4939 8948
Jacinta Christie, Agronomist, Scone	6545 1800
Tania Chesworth, Drought Support Worker, Scone	6545 1800
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Urea Revisited

Neil Griffiths, District Agronomist, Paterson

Urea is now widely used to apply nitrogen to crops and pastures but with increasing costs some people will question its use. The first point is that nitrogen is essential for healthy plant growth (no nitrogen, no protein in the plant) if the nitrogen isn't available from the soil via legumes etc then it must be applied as fertiliser (remember all nutrients must be available for healthy plant growth but nitrogen is the nutrient most needed for pasture growth).

As part of some trials at Tocal in 2006 we have again measured the growth response from urea. The trial area was a kikuyu paddock oversown with ryegrass (direct drilled with Granulock 15 fertiliser). The paddock was low in nitrogen as indicated by pasture growth and obvious urine patches where not fertilised.

UREA TOPDRESS TRIAL YIELD KG DM/HA				
	1 st trial July	2 nd trial August	1 st trial retreated	1 st trial not retreated
Control (nil urea)	424	832	1040	360
100 kg/ha urea	1064 (+ 151%)	1648 (+ 98%)	1747 (+ 68%)	653 (+ 81%)
200 kg/ha urea	1384	1248	1573	1107

Urea also improved feed quality as shown in these results:

	Crude Protein	Metabolisable Energy	NDF
Nil urea	20.0	10.3	44
100kg/ha urea	26.4	10.6	45

These results reinforce previous information that urea is an effective fertiliser in winter. As temperatures increase it is more important to ensure that urea is washed into the soil by rain or irrigation to minimise losses and ensure maximum production from the applied nitrogen.



PRIMARY PRODUCER TAXATION

Looking for information on taxation? The Australian Taxation Officer (ATO) has a site providing farmer taxation information which Lloyd Davies, NSW DPI Farm Management Economist at Paterson says is current, concise and well written!

Visit this site at:
www.ato.gov.au/content/downloads/NAT1712-06.pdf

Higher Feed Quality Makes More Money

Neil Griffiths, District Agronomist, Paterson

There is often a debate concerning the most profitable compromise between quality and quantity when deciding when to harvest a crop or pasture.

To help make this decision the TopFodder silage team have developed a simple calculator which uses the growth rate of steers fed varying quality feeds to work out the potential returns from different combinations of yield and feed quality.

Yield results from a series of forage sorghum trials are used in the following example which assumes 10ha of forage sorghum is grown and fed to steers which are sold for 200 c/kg liveweight.

Farm Trials:

Growth stage	1m tall	2m tall	Heading
Days growth	30	55	91
Yield (tDM/ha)	2.94	8.72	22.99
ME (MJ/kg DM)	9.3	8.4	7.8
Total Yield in 91 days	8.82	14.42	22.99
Potential returns	\$13,920	\$13,188	\$10,932

This example highlights that when feeding animals it is usually more profitable to go for feed quality rather than bulk of low quality feed. However the answer always depends on the detail, exactly what yield and feed quality alternatives are available.

Scoring of Docility in Cattle

Adapted from "Scoring of Docility in Limousin Cattle" by Alex McDonald, General Manager, Australian Limousin Breeders Society

Docility in cattle is the way cattle behave when being handled by humans or put in an unusual environment such as being separated from the mob in a small yard. What we define as poor docility is a survival trait in the wild – fear of anything unusual and the desire to escape. In domesticated cattle it is exhibited as flightiness. This can be modified by a lot of handling. It is a highly heritable trait that can be improved genetically.

By scoring the docility of calves at weaning, or 4-6 weeks afterwards, the technique can be used as the first selection criteria for replacement heifers or to identify potential “problem” steers.

The advantage of scoring at weaning is that all calves should have had similar treatment so variation in handling prior to scoring should be minimised.

The Important Rules

- If animals have had different levels of handling prior to scoring they should be recorded as separate management groups when the scores are submitted.
- One person should do the actual scoring
- An individual calf is only ever compared with the other calves reared in the same group and scored by the same scorer.

Recommended Scoring Systems

The test can be carried out as a yard test or a crush test.

Crush Test

The calves are put up a race and individually held in the crush for about 30 seconds. The test can be done without catching the animal in the head bale. Observation of how the animal behaves while standing in the crush area is normally adequate. Their behaviour in the crush and on exit from the crush can be scored on the 1-5 scoring system below.

1. *Docile* – settled, somewhat dull, does not pull on headgate when in crush, exits crush calmly.
2. *Restless* – quieter than average but slightly restless, stubborn during handling, may try to back out of crush, pulls back on headgate, some flicking of tail, exits crush promptly.
3. *Nervous* – Typical temperament, manageable but nervous and impatient, a moderate amount of struggling, movement and tail flicking, repeated pushing and pulling on headgate, exits crush briskly.
4. *Flighty (wild)* – jumpy and out of control, quivers and struggles violently, may bellow and froth at mouth, continuous tail flicking, defecates and urinates during handling.
5. *Aggressive* – may be similar to Score 4 but with added aggressive behaviour, fearful, extreme agitation, continuous movement which may include jumping and bellowing while

in crush, exits crush frantically and may try to attack through the crush.

Yard Test

The yard scoring system is required when cattle have had considerable handling and do not exhibit variations in behaviour in the crush test. Experience in handling cattle is required for this test and for the safety of the handler.

The calves are individually put into a small square yard and the handler should attempt to hold the animal in one corner away from other cattle for about 30 seconds. The animal can be scored on the 1-5 scale listed below according to its behaviour in the test.

1. *Docile* – easily held in the corner and the handler can get close enough to put his stick on the animal.
2. *Restless* – can be held in the corner but exhibits some restlessness and flicking of the tail. The handler cannot get close enough to put his stick on the animal before it moves away.
3. *Nervous* – is not easily held in the corner even when the handler is some distance back from the animal. Continual movement and tail flicking.
4. *Flighty (wild)* – cannot be held in the corner, frantically runs the fenceline and may jump when penned individually, exhibits long flight distance.
5. *Aggressive* – similar behaviour to Score 4 but is also aggressive towards the handler, stares at the handler and threatens to charge or charges (handler is advised to exit the yard before the animal actually charges).

Notes on Scoring

While the scoring system is a five point scoring system intermediate scores of 1.5, 2.5, 3.5 and 4.5 are acceptable for animals which exhibit behaviour which is intermediate between the above scores. It is very important to use a range of scores of at least one whole point for the group. It is normal to get a range of at least two whole points in a group of ten or more.

Free Soil Tests

Jacinta Christie, District Agronomist, Scone

Do you know your soil phosphorus (P) and sulphur (S) levels? If no, then your soil P and S could be limiting your property's pasture production.

The Hunter-Central Rivers CMA, supported by DPI, has commenced *The Farm Sustainability Indicators Program* in the Upper Hunter. The objective of the program is to improve the skills and experience in the use and interpretation of indicators of farm sustainability and land capability.

One important indicator of farm sustainability is the health (physical and chemical) of Upper Hunter Soils. To evaluate soil chemical fertility across a range of Upper Hunter soils, funding is available to conduct two soil tests for participants interested in the Program.

Interested participants will be required to fill in a registration form and collect a soil corer from the Scone Office to collect their samples. Results and interpretation will be provided at a night workshop probably in December.

To register your interest in the Program (and free soil tests) [Click here for registration form](#) or go to page 8 of the newsletter. Alternatively, contact Jacinta Christie, DPI Agronomist, Scone on 65451800 (mobile 0401 710 062) or leave a message at the office with your contact details and fax number if available.

Funding is only available for 20 participants - Register Now

Investigation of Nervous Diseases in Cattle & Sheep

Sally Spence, Technical Specialist Farm Product Integrity, Orange

Across Australia veterinarians are investigating cases of nervous disease in cattle and sheep and are asking producers to contact them when they may have animals with symptoms that indicate nervous system problems.

In NSW the NSW Department of Primary Industries, Rural Land Protection Board District Veterinarians and private practitioners are working to demonstrate to our export markets that Australia is free of mad cow disease (BSE) in cattle and scrapie in sheep. Maintaining our beef and sheep meat markets relies on industry being able to show that nervous disease in our animals is not due to BSE or scrapie.

Incentives available

If any of your cattle are over 30 months of age and show chronic nervous symptoms that haven't responded to treatment they are eligible for sampling under the BSE surveillance program. If brain samples are collected and submitted from the affected animal you are eligible for a \$150 subsidy and there is no charge for the laboratory tests to determine the actual cause of the animal's illness. The veterinarian collecting the brain subsidy can also claim a rebate. No incentives or vet fees are available for animals that do not fit the selection criteria for BSE or scrapie sampling. Sheep have to be over 18 months of age to be included in the surveillance program and a subsidy of \$25 is paid for eligible sheep.

What are the symptoms you should be on the lookout for?

Cattle over 30 months of age and sheep over 18 months of age showing any of the following symptoms are ideal for sampling to prove our freedom from BSE or scrapie:

- increased nervousness
- paralysis or inability to rise
- staggering, or showing muscle weakness or an inability to walk properly
- knuckling of joints like fetlocks
- walking in circles
- blindness
- changes to consciousness
- pressing head against objects
- carrying head or ears abnormally
- tremors
- unusual or changed behaviour eg. excessive licking, frenzy
- changed temperament
- changed or unusual response to sound or touch
- falling

Who do you contact?

Contact your District Veterinarian:

Gloucester RLPB	–	Alan Glassop	6553 4233
Maitland RLPB	–	Digby Raywood	4932 8866
Hunter RLPB	–	Ross Kemp (<i>Singleton</i>)	6572 2944
	–	Jim Kerr (<i>Scone</i>)	6545 1311

or contact your private practitioners.

For further information contact Sally Spence, NSW Department of Primary Industries on 6391 3630.

(refer page 5 'Free Soil Tests')

Farm Sustainability Indicators Project
Registration of interest in obtaining
support from the CMA/DPI



Natural Heritage Trust

Helping Communities Helping Australia
A Commonwealth Government Initiative



To register your interest in receiving financial or technical support, please complete the form below and return by:

Post: DPI PO Box 168 SCONE
Fax: (02) 65452639
Email: jacinta.christie@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Contact details

Name(s) of applicant(s).....
Name of landowner (if different).....
Contact name.....
Postal address.....
Town..... Postcode
Phone A/H Phone B/H Mobile.....
Fax..... Email.....

Property details of proposed project site(s)

Property Address (including property name, if applicable)
.....
.....
Total size of proposed project (ha)
Local government area.....

Brief project description

FARM SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS PROJECT – FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR SOIL TESTING (SAMPLING, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION)
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