

Ryegrass management

There is no doubt that home grown fodder is ultimately labelled as “relatively cheap” feed. So establishing pasture is vital to improving profitability on farm.

There are 2 simple guidelines to managing perennial ryegrass. These principles will maximise growth and nutritive value of ryegrass pasture;

i. When to graze ?

Graze between 2nd and 3rd leaf stage (Fig 1) or at canopy closure whichever comes first.

Canopy closure is when you cannot visually see the ground below the pasture base. If you were to open up the pasture sward you will notice yellowing (decaying material) at the bottom and stem elongation occurs.

Alternatively, perform the “pluck test”- checking to see if the plant breaks off rather than been pulled out by the roots when grasped between thumb and forefinger and plucked, essentially mimicking a cow grazing.

ii. What to leave ?

Hold a post grazing residual of 4-6 cm height between clumps (Fig 2). Anything longer than 6 cm has a faster regrowth but results in aerial tillering and more wastage as pasture thins out.

Aerial tillering is when tillers originates from elongated stems that are not attached to the base of the plant. These tend to be sensitive to water stress and exposed to trampling as the roots don't begin at the ground level.

There is some debate as to whether mechanical topping is required to reset residual. The old rule of thumb is if 20-30% of the paddock has clumps- it will need to be topped. No doubt, in spring topping will be done more often. Any longer clumps left behind will deteriorate in quality and the amount of pasture offered within the area to cows will be reduced. We then fall into a vicious cycle of increased chances of not reaching the post grazing residual height which will have flow on effects.

There is abundant information on Dairy Australia around grazing management. If this interests you, follow the link below for more information on Feed for pasture for profit workshops. The program is worthwhile and provides farmers with skills and tools to achieve the profitable balance between home grown feed and supplement use.

<https://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/farm/feedbase-and-animal-nutrition/pasture/feeding-pastures-for-profit>

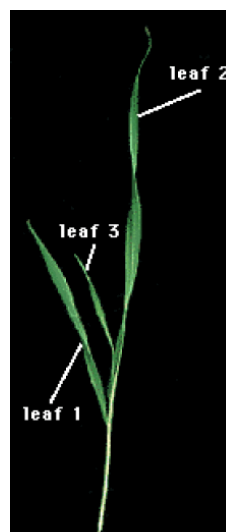


Fig 1: Dairy Australia



Fig 2: Dairy Australia

