

Utilisation of African lovegrass

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African lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*) has invaded large areas of the Tenterfield district. In grazing areas it grows prolifically from spring to autumn but is poorly utilised unless carefully managed. Stock selectively avoid grazing African lovegrass which quickly produces seedheads and matures. While this mature material provides a large quantity of dry feed, its low protein content and low digestibility limits its use. In the last few drought years, the available dry feed was welcome and completely utilised.

The Tenterfield LandCare Group formed to look at ways of managing and utilising African lovegrass. Different approaches involved grazing management, supplementary feeding the mature pasture plus conserving and using excessive growth.

Methods

The following systems were assessed in using mature lovegrass:

- Baling material for later use. Large round bales of silage were made and the bales treated with urea and molasses to increase utilisation. The material was fed to steers as (a) treated silage only, (b) treated silage plus protein supplement.
- Supplementing carry-over paddock feed with a protein source during winter.

Results

1. Steers fed lovegrass silage *ad lib* lost an average of 0.213 kg/hd/day while steers fed *ad lib* silage plus 1kg/head/day of by-pass protein nuts gained an average of 0.688 kg/hd/day.

2. Steers carried through the drought winter-spring of 1994 maintained liveweight with initially 1 kg/hd/day of cottonseed meal and then 3.84 kg/hd/day of a molasses and coprameal mix. The only roughage source was carryover lovegrass (digestibility 36 to 44%) which they eventually consumed.

There appears to be a role for summer growing species that produce a large bulk of summer feed for use as carry-over winter roughage. Animal performance on correctly managed summer growth is excellent and carry-over roughage if supplemented can give good animal performance. Where these species invade, survive droughts, give good ground cover and provide useful animal performance, they may give better options than hard to establish, drought susceptible temperate pasture species.

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