

Prime Pasture Project

Michael Keys

Agronomist (Prime Pasture Program)
NSW Agriculture,
QUEANBEYAN NSW 2620

The Prime Pasture Program is a unique association between NSW Agriculture, agribusiness and graziers which aims to help farmers and graziers more successfully establish perennial pastures. Improved pasture establishment is the ultimate aim of the program.

In southern and central NSW this project is funded by the National Soil Conservation Program (NSCP). It involves on-farm demonstrations in conjunction with local district agronomists and rural community groups such as Landcare.

The support and backing of four commercial companies interested in promoting technology and information exchange to their clients has enabled the project's messages to be marketed throughout the entire higher rainfall zone of NSW. These companies: Incitec Ltd; Monsanto Australia; Wright Stephenson and Co; and Primary Sales (Aust) have combined to offer unique support to the project by offering a cash-back incentive on various proprietary products. In this way their vast dealer network is actively promoting and supporting the Department's recommendations and good farming practices, complementing the Department's district agronomists.

To participate, farmers purchase membership of the Prime Pasture Program at a cost of \$20 for which they receive the Prime Pasture Check-list and Field Guide. As members, they are then encouraged to seek the advice of a qualified agronomist from participating companies, dealers or NSW Agriculture. They then work through the check-list and plan their pasture sowing.

The Field Guide contains concise, practical information to amplify the points covered in the Pasture Checklist. These include topics such as boomspray calibration, economics of pasture establishment and machinery for pasture sowings.

The cash-back is available to genuine farmers who:

1. consult with an agronomist to obtain a recommendation;
2. sow a perennial pasture according to the Prime Pasture Program guidelines; and,
3. sow a minimum 4 ha.

The project is supervised and conducted by Mr Michael Keys, seconded full time from his position as District Agronomist, Queanbeyan; with Dr Peter Orchard, Special Agronomist (Pastures) at Wagga; and a full time Technical Officer, Mr John O'Connor.

NSW Agriculture benefits because its recommendations are followed. The companies benefit from sales of products and our combined clients, the farming community, have the opportunity to successfully establish productive and profitable pastures for their livestock and improve the sustainable, productive capacity of their farms for generations to come. This is an excellent example of co-operative effort by NSW Agriculture, Agribusiness and the end user.

The checklist used in the program is key element and emphasises in particular the need for weed and pest control, adequate soil moisture and accurate seed placement as indicated in Table 1

Table 1 : Checklist for Prime Pasture Programme.

Prime Pasture Check. The way ahead for pasture sowing success.

This information is to remind you of management options at eight key stages in the establishment of productive perennial pastures. Times will vary for spring and autumn sowings and with regions. For details, read the Field Guide or seek the advice of an agronomist.



BE CERTAIN EACH STEP IS COMPLETED BEFORE GOING TO THE NEXT STEP.

VITAL STEPS - THE 3A PLAN ENSURES SUCCESS		<h3>1. ASSESS, SELECT AND PLAN EARLY</h3> <p>Key Check: Assess existing pasture, weeds and soil fertility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select the paddock, question reason for sowing, potential use, correct species. • Budget check - assess costs & returns. • Sowing method - check availability/suitability of equipment. 	CHECK
		<h3>2. YEAR BEFORE WEED/PEST CONTROL</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calibrate boomspray. • Broadleaf weeds - spray or spray-graze, autumn and/or spring. <p>Key Check: "Graze well" through winter and spring. Target: Keep pasture 12.5mm tall for sheep; Cattle 25mm.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual grass weeds - either pasture-top + miticide or spring fodder crop. 	CHECK
		<h3>3. PRE-SOWING GRAZING OR CULTIVATION</h3> <p>Key Check: "Graze well" over summer - utilize feed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventional sowings - summer fallow/weed control. • Direct drill sowings - "graze well" up to and after the autumn break. 	CHECK
	A	<h3>4. ABSOLUTE WEED AND PEST CONTROL</h3> <p>Key Check: Allow full weed germination after the autumn break. "Graze well" to keep weeds small.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess weed & pest levels including wet areas for slugs. • Spray or spray-graze problem weeds first (sorrel, thistles). • EITHER use appropriate herbicides/insecticides & rates OR cultivate to achieve a firm, fine weed-free seedbed. 	CHECK
	A	<h3>5. ADEQUATE SOIL MOISTURE</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't sow on the first rain in autumn. <p>Key Check: 50-100mm total rain after the autumn break. Target: Moisture to 200mm; moist surface.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use nitrogen fortified fertilizers for direct drill sowings. 	CHECK
	A	<h3>6. ACCURATE SEED PLACEMENT</h3> <p>Key Check: 5% of seed/fertilizer still visible. Target: Tillth over the seed no more than 5mm. Use inverted 'T' sowing points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct drill - average furrow depth 25mm but furrow open. - use no harrows or roller. 	CHECK
		<h3>7. MONITOR WEEDS AND PESTS</h3> <p>Key Check: Look for pests & weed seedlings at 10-14 days. Re-examine weekly. Treat early!</p>	CHECK
		<h3>8. GRAZING</h3> <p>Key Check: Plants 100mm tall, well anchored and soil moist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graze heavily but quickly down to 25mm. THEN SPELL. • Allow grasses to seed in the first summer. 	CHECK

Ensure successful establishment of perennial pastures. Reduce the risk of failure: Adopt the "3A" plan.