

## Making Profit from Pasture

### Meat and Livestock Australia



Kate and John Scott run a cattle backgrounding operation on their property 'Allandale', near Roma, Queensland. The soils on 'Allandale' are red and black Brigalow Belah soils with some lighter box country.

"We are pasture farmers who specialise in beef cattle weight gain," says John Scott who, along with wife Kate, brings an intense focus on quality to every stage of their pasture improvement program – which they now see as the lynchpin in bringing productivity gains to their enterprise.

When the Scotts purchased the property three years ago, the majority of pastures were significantly rundown, and dingoes, pigs and kangaroos were rife. The first thing they did was to erect exclusion fencing. "If we wanted to develop improved pastures, we had to give it the best chance by fencing vermin out," John says.

### Cattle selection and supplementation

Their quality philosophy starts with cattle selection. They choose only crossbred with 50% Brahman content or less, and temperament plays a big role, preferring cattle that have been properly weaned and handled.

"Depending on the season we run 400 cattle in each mob, and we rotationally graze them," Kate said.

They supplement with Bentobite in the green season, which works on protozoa levels in the rumen to improve protein uptake, and sulphur and mineral licks year round for rumen health and buffalo fly.

### Pasture diversity

Their improved pasture grasses consist of buffel, creeping bluegrass, Progardes™ desmanthus, Premier digit, Reclaimer Rhodes and Bambatsi. John said it was important to choose pastures that gave them a head start. "We wanted pastures that come away earlier than everything else. The Premier digit and creeping bluegrass is green a month and a half earlier than other species," John said.

"When our buffel is frosted and dormant, our improved pastures are up and away, and two months is a lot of time for weight gain.

They introduced desmanthus three years ago after considering a number of legume options, including lucerne and leucaena. They attended a number of leucaena courses, but each time felt the management requirements were going to be too onerous. "Desmanthus is key to our strategy of avoiding pasture rundown. We like the fact that it is a high protein cattle feed and a fabulous soil improver for our country," Kate said.

Their choice of pasture species is determined by the species' suitability for their land type and conditions, which can range from -5° to 45°C.

"I think we've got a good mix now, and it's working well," John said. "We've also learned to buy seed on germination quality rather than price."

The Scotts use FutureBeef's Stocktake Plus app (which is supported by MLA) to measure and manage their grass. It has allowed them to work out exactly the stocking rate and how many kilograms of pasture and protein is available in each paddock.

They have experimented with a range of paddock preparations, including deep ripping, cutter bar and offsetting. They are currently using offsets but John is open to other methods.

Their next project is to make winters more productive. They are experimenting with nitrogen fertiliser in the form of urea on 400ha, to allow them to spell a lot of their country in the growing season. They are also considering feeding grain in the paddock as a low-cost alternative to feedlotting.

Their medium-term plans are to get the home farm fully productive, which they hope to achieve in three years, before looking to expand again.

"Instead of getting more land and going into more debt, we want to improve the land we've got and make it productive. Our running costs are absolutely minimal," Kate said.

"We think the productivity in this country is only just starting."

Information:

John and Kate Scott E: [jr\\_scott@bigpond.com](mailto:jr_scott@bigpond.com)



Disclaimer: CFI disclaimer: This publication has been carefully prepared, but it has been written in general terms and should be viewed as broad guidance only. It does not purport to be comprehensive or to render advice. No one should rely on the information contained in this publication without first obtaining professional advice relevant to their own specific situation.