



MOWANJUM STATION MANAGER - MICK'S TIPS

Having overseen the management of the irrigation operations at Mowanjum Station over the past 18 months, Mick Courtney provides some useful insight about the finer details of 'Stand and Graze'.

There are various advantages and disadvantages of incorporating an irrigated fodder system into a pastoral enterprise. These include:

ADVANTAGES



- Ability to produce protein and energy on demand to cover seasonal gaps in feed base.
- Confidence to implement early weaning programs or accumulate cattle for sale.
- Confidence in finishing animals to market specification.
- Reduced mortality in breeders through early weaning or turning them into a saleable animal.

DISADVANTAGES



- Wet season management of the system (pasture sward) is crucial to maintain production in the subsequent dry season.
- Changes in management processes and decision making cycles are necessary. For example, increased stocking density adds a dimension to animal health such as increased risk of disease or infection.
- It is not a simple 'bolt on addition' to a station's operations. Knowledge of, and the ability to integrate, farming and irrigation is critical to operational and financial success.



TIPS:

- Get the site design right, have fit for purpose infrastructure and layout.
- The irrigation operation needs to be integrated into the pastoral operations - not operated as a standalone system.
- Sward management is everything in driving production;
 - If management decisions are 48 hours too late it can take a month to recover production.
 - More animals eating less is better for pasture management as there is less selective grazing. Less animals eating more, results in increased follow up maintenance of the sward structure.
 - Slash residue (stalk) to 'zero' or baseline sward for the next growth phase. Excess residue can impact growth so, if possible, mulch or rake and remove.
 - Look one cell ahead and be flexible in your rotations, don't lock yourself into a rigid process
- Understand fertiliser toxicity risk and potential for stock exposure.
- Four sectors works better than eight under one pivot and gives flexibility for hay and silage production.
- Specific farming skills are required. Don't underestimate the nuances of irrigation and cattle management on irrigated pasture, recovery can be a time consuming process.
- Access to hay/silage baling equipment is essential. Even baling poor quality hay is a better strategy to maintaining sward structure than the cost of mustering more mouths to consume the feed. Remember it is costing money to produce, so it needs to be maintained and utilised.
- Education on ruminant nutrition and physiological traits is critical.
- The Mowanjum 38 hectare pivot requires a 0.75 Full Time Employee (FTE) to manage. If the system is not managed correctly and it gets out of control, the FTE effort will increase to 1.0 - 1.5 FTE to recover.
- Feedback on weight gains informs and reaffirms management decisions.



Contact:

Michael Courtney
Pardoo Beef Station
michael.courtney@pardoo.com

