

Advance Party Conference 2016

These notes are based on discussions at the conference. Additional research has been done to make the notes more comprehensive. The author takes no responsibility for decisions made based on the information in these notes.

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Early Spring Growth

Take home messages

- Feed budget and plan
- Identify the issues and limiting factors on your farm
- Use crops, short-term pastures and permanent pastures that suit local climate
- Priorities stock feed, have feed available when animals will use it for growth
- Capitalise on best growing period in the region = cheapest feed.
- Utilise different stock classes to maintain pasture quality and trade stock to match pasture growth
- Many different forage and grass options as well as crops to ease pressure in late winter and allow pastures to slowly get ahead for early spring.

Group discussions and advice on early spring growth

Early spring can be a pinch time on many farms when multiple classes of stock require increased amounts of high quality feed. Winter crops are running out or stock are getting tired of them. This is a time for high potential production in weaners and velveting stags and getting the earliest start to the potential spring growth rates will help achieve earlier kill dates or heavier carcass weights. Earlier kill dates are especially important when there is a risk of summer dry or when lambs take priority over the summer. In fact, maximising the potential growth rate of weaner deer and getting them away as early as possible opens the opportunity to utilise summer pastures for other classes of stock, harvest grass seed, put more paddocks into pasture renewal programmes or other management options.

There are many options available and these vary depending on the location of the farm and environmental conditions including rainfall, soil types, altitude and also local council environmental concerns such as aesthetics and nutrient management. The following list of options and discussion points should be seen as a starting point and individuals need to work with their local farmers and seed reps to come up with the options that best suit them. It might take a few years to get the system right.

Issues faced by farmers

Summer dry
Cold winter, late spring
Bolting in late spring
Poor pasture quality in the summer
Ragwort
Limited subdivision on hill country
Limited cropping and pasture renewal on hill country
Early and dry summers, fires
Dry winter
Getting stock off crop and onto grass - managing the transition
Cold, wet September
Wet, mud, wet winter, heavy soils
Soil fertility, soil structure
Planning for seasonal variation

Chicory

Stalky - cattle gone in drought so control difficult to control
Good in the dry. Only thing still going at times, even compared to lucerne and plantain.
AP going down chicory track but also want growth in winter as well so added Shogun, clover, lucerne, and plantain.

Strategic use of Nitrogen on grass paddocks

- If soil temperatures right and growth starting
- Autumn applications for spring growth
- Soil moisture
- If too much N in spring and too late can crease feed quality issues
- Target best bang for buck - younger paddocks and access
- Possible to get hill country going earlier.

ProGibb

Pro Gibb's active ingredient is gibberellic acid. This is a hormone that promotes cell elongation and growth in plants when applied at low concentrations. It is able to effect plant growth at relatively low temperatures and relies on adequate soil fertility and moisture to be effective. Hence it is useful during the spring and autumn.

Genetics versus feeding

- Deer that "switch on" earlier to take advantage of early spring in some areas
- Or does earlier feeding kick them into gear earlier? E.g. feed maize grain in late July. Is there a feed and time that can influence the on/off switch?
- Do weaners that have been drenched take off earlier in spring or not?
- Is the size of the check important
- AP ideas and data to look into this idea further

Strategic feed - bought in

- If running short of feed at end of winter, buy some in.
- E.g. barley, PKE, baleage, Inc Advantage Feeders
- When too wet to feed on ground, Advantage feeder is a saviour
- Buy quality. cents per ME and also awareness of protein in available feed
- Feeding grain on fodder beet. Lots of carbs, low protein.

Self-feed silage

- e.g. 400hinds in 2ha for 100 days frees up farm for growth for early spring time
- Shelter is key - happy hinds
- Dry helpful
- Less than 250 animals per mob ideally
- Consider run-off

Use of winter crops

Frees up paddocks for high quality spring pasture growth

Fodder beet, high yield, and greatest concentration of stock onto smaller area over winter

Can be lifted and fed out onto feed pad, gully, run off paddock.

Kale for hinds during winter same as fodder beet but might be better fit under certain conditions

Fodder beet good when risk of dry.

Specialist spring crops

- Late sown rape, kale
- Rye corn
- Late sown oats (Milton) varieties that maintain quality later into the season
- Breaking in tussock land utilising crops that provide spring feed.

Specialist pastures

There is a wide variety of pastures that may be better suited to producing feed at the right time of the year depending on the conditions. Before making the decisions to use alternative grass, herb and clover types, soil fertility should be adequate and your local forage expert consulted to ensure the best return on investment. Palatability also needs to be considered, especially for young, growing animals. In some cases grasses may be able to be used as for crops, to keep lower priority stock off pasture to allow high quality feed to grow for weaners in early spring.

Trials have shown that deer have grazing preferences for legumes, particularly red clover, and herbs over grasses and have a low preference for perennial ryegrass.

Italian ryegrass

- Good winter and spring production and excellent animal performance
- Annual grasses tend to lose quality and production after one year and not so good in the summer
- Require good fertility and moisture
- Beware of nitrates and grass grub

Hybrid ryegrass

- Short to long rotation (1-4 years), high winter production with or without endophyte.
- Different cultivars and can be sown with clovers and herbs or with perennials.
- Shorter lifespan with more Italian genes tends to favour winter and early spring growth.

Tall Fescue

- Although more a grass for summer and autumn growth and quality, it can start earlier than regresses in the spring. Grows best in hotter climates and tolerates low soil moisture.
- E.g. Grasslands Easton with MaxP endophyte.

Cocksfoot

- Persistent perennial grass that tolerates low moisture. Traditionally unpalatable.
 - E.g. Grasslands Tekapo is early flowering, fine leaved variety
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Prairie grass

- Short term grass (2-4 years) with good winter and early spring production and also drought tolerance.

Pasture brome

- Similar to prairie grass

- Plantain
- Chicory
- Clovers

Cheapest long term option is to get system built around options that fit.

Feed budgeting

Prioritise different classes of stock so that animals that want to grow in spring have the feed available
Feed budgeting will never be 100% accurate but gives you a heads up and can be altered to suit the weather patterns

Target the lowest pasture cover residuals and time of the year. E.g. Lowest pasture covers should be when growth exceeds demand. (September?)

Spring is the cheapest feed to grow. Need to maximise and utilise.

- Quick rotation of weaner mob once growing - even daily shift
- Need to know the nutritional requirements (kgDM, ME and protein) of different classes of stock at different times of the year.

Fencing

Increased subdivision for pasture control and taking paddocks out of rotation

Increased deer fenced area for greater integration of different stock classes onto the deer block

Irrigation

While irrigation does not affect the early spring production in most areas, it can be useful for maintaining pasture quality and growth during the summer, ensuring that the pasture species are the right type for good production all year round. In very dry areas, without irrigation, some pastures would not compete and survive through to the spring when their dry matter production potential is highest.

Integration of deer with other species

- E.g. holding cattle off deer areas.
- Killing stock earlier if they can be killed earlier.
 - E.g hinds killed in Autumn to utilise summer growth and reduce stock rate over winter
 - E.g. cattle killed in winter.

Managing transition

The gut organisms will take a period of time to adapt to all changes in diet. Generally this is more important when transitioning from pasture to crop or grain based supplements.

Introduce the new feed while still on the old feed (e.g. run off paddock, keep feeding supplements when going onto spring grass paddocks)

Always ensure animals have a full stomach when going onto new feeds

If the feed is very high in carbohydrates or potentially high in nitrates, consider break feeding to start with.

Plan around the % of farm that will be used for winter crops and feeding areas and the % that will be left to provide the first spring feed. Think about how these paddocks are located near to each other but will have to work within the restraints of the farm layout and contour.