

Mix Met with Great Response

Two tonne of the Evergreen Mix has been mixed and supplied to customers throughout the State, from Esperance to Geraldton.

The mix, trialed by Evergreen Farming and the Department of Agriculture, and processed and distributed by Irwin Hunter & Co, has been met with enthusiastic support from retail companies servicing the communities and Evergreen members.

Business Development Officer for Irwin Hunter, Ray Candy said, "the response has been tremendous. There has been a lot of positive comments from farmers about the opportunity to try new pasture species that could offer them extended pasture grazing options over and above annual regenerating legumes".

"As the Evergreen Mix has been packed as individual varieties, it offers farmers the opportunity to trial the varieties either individually or mixed, which can then be evaluated on a farm by farm basis. This should provide valuable information for the future use of sub tropical species".

The Evergreen Mix included six sub tropical species: Callide Rhodes grass, Katambora Rhodes grass, Bambatsi Panic grass, Gatton Panic grass, Signal grass and Splenda Setaria, all of which were packed as individual varieties in 20kg bags.

One hundred bags of the Evergreen Mix have been sold since its release in early August.

"The Evergreen Mix program has been very successful given the relatively small quantities of sub tropical pasture previously sown. It reflects the success of these varieties in the various sites that had been planted earlier with various Evergreen members", Ray Candy said.



Rhodes Grass sown September last year in Gingin

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www.evergreen.asn.au

**Evergreen
Administration
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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Evergreen Committee. Disclaimer: Mention of trade names does not imply endorsement or preference of any company's product by Evergreen, and any omission of trade names is unintentional. Farmer experiences may not work for all.

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Call Evergreen Admin
for help on **9475 0753**

From the President

DAVID MONKS, BADGINGARRA

What a shocker of a year it has been. The coastal fringe is experiencing a bumper season to date, while 100km away it is desperate. Perennials in the drier areas have proved their worth providing green feed while annuals struggle due to a lack of rain.

Evergreen is involved with three funding submissions. They are the AWI concept proposal, an NHT expression of interest and as a joint application in the Northern Agricultural Region Grain & Graze proposal (NARG&G) to be funded by MLA.

After lodging our initial funding application with AWI in Feb 2002, we are a little closer to an answer after some positive feedback to John Duff who has phoned, faxed and sent letters on our behalf. John and I also drove to Dongara to meet with David Webster, AWI farmer adviser (on behalf of Col Dorber CEO AWI) early last month.

The key points we have been trying to make is that Evergreen has the runs on the board, has self funding responsibility and that farmers have ownership of the ideas and therefore adopt and adapt them for their own farm situations. I contrast this to a \$20m project to a Canberra based R&D corporation which although may come up with some excellent research applicable to farmers, still has to jump the ownership and adoption hurdles. Government Departments tell us that adoption of ideas is the major hurdle to increasing sustainability and productivity AWI also recognises these hurdles as they recently advertised for a technology transfer manager.

The NARG&G proposal has received positive feedback from MLA resulting in a meeting in Perth on 26/8/2002 where all participants thrashed out a clearer program to resubmit to MLA. It appears funding is limited but we have a chance of starting the ball rolling on collecting vital data to establish effective benchmarks.

At the grass roots level, our next challenge in my opinion is to work out how to provide the nitrogen to the perennials cost effectively.

Grasses in the Central Midlands this autumn and winter have been starved of nitrogen when soil moisture and temperatures have been able to support greater production.

A well-established sub clover pasture should provide sufficient N, but without subs the options are daunting. The easy short-term fix is liquid nitrogen, which may still be the cheapest long term and allow the greatest flexibility in a farm system. I am expecting some good data from trial work that Erin Cahill of CSBP futurefarm is doing at the Bibby Springs trial site to answer a lot of these questions.

If we look at biological nitrogen input, we must eliminate all annual broadleaf and grass weeds (e.g. melons, mintweed, ryegrass and silvergrass) prior to sowing subtropical legumes. Once established, these would provide the nitrogen for the grasses to be sown the next year. If we were unable to do this, our herbicide options of controlling these weeds in legumes are unknown at this stage. Planning perennial pastures must start 1-2 years in advance to ensure the optimal result is achieved.

On my farm, we have experienced a massive silvergrass problem this year, which was tackled by a simazine spray in early July. An interesting observation since then was that the Rhodes grass was unaffected but the Panic has been affected by 330g(effective)/ha and appears to be thinning or dying from the centre.

Hence more research is required to integrate perennials into our farming systems, which brings us back to the funding applications and how important they are to all our futures. Please ensure that your producer levy vote gives you the greatest return possible.

Best wishes for a wet spring and successful spring perennial sowing.



Photo courtesy of Farm Weekly

New Trials and Demonstrations for 2002

TIM WILEY, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, JURIEEN

The number of Department trials and farmer demonstrations has expanded considerably again this year.

Species plot trials

With financial assistance from the state committee of SGS small plot trials have been sown this spring from Northampton to Esperance. These trials include 6 perennial legumes, 14 perennial grass and 2 herbs. Plot trials have been sown by Department Researchers, local Development Officers, Landcare groups and producer groups. Seed was also supplied to some farmers to sow their own species trials.

Phil Barrett-Lennard has organised '100 starter kits' containing a range of species to go out to Evergreen farmers. These farmer trials will also expand our understanding of which perennials can grow where.

Geoff Moore, Ag Department WA, is conducting a sowing trial at Dandaragan, which includes a range of perennial species. CSBP have set up a fertiliser trial on Rhodes grass at Bibby Springs. Brian Leach and

CSBP will be sowing 1 ha paddocks of perennials at Woodaniling that can be used for grazing trials.

Alternative perennial pastures are being included in some SGS sites that are being set up on salt land. Gary Peacock at Bibby Springs will be trying to establish perennials on salt land using raised bed technology. Brad Tonkin at Coomberdale will try sowing perennial grass and salt bush seed using a technique of spreading the seed on to roughly ploughed salt scald country. Brad has had some success with this technique in the past. The Department has also sown 6 species trials on salt land east of Perenjori.

The Department of Agriculture has started a series of paddock scale grazing trials on perennials in the Northern Ag Region. These will be intensively measured to determine the animal, pasture, soil and economic benefits of perennials. Data from these sites will be used to model the role of perennials in farming systems.

For more information please contact Tim Wiley: **9652 2225** or email twiley@agric.wa.gov.au

Starter Kits

Those of you who ordered a Starter Kit can now all commence your on farm species evaluation trial as the starter kits have all been packed and sent out.

There are several left if anyone may be interested.

\$22 per kit for members

\$132 for non-members (which includes kit and one year's membership).

To place an order please contact: Phil Barrett-Lennard on 9575 4013 or pbl@iinet.net.au.

A reminder to all that Evergreen requests feedback on the performance of the kits and this information will be featured in following newsletters.

The Evergreen Mix

**PERENNIAL
sub tropical grasses**

'All Year Round'

AVAILABLE NOW

From major seed resellers

Consists of:

- Callide Rhodes grass
- Katambora Rhodes grass
- Bambatsi Panic grass
- Gatton Panic grass
- Signal Grass
- Splenda Setaria

Packed in individual varieties as 20kg bags.

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Tim Pannel's Perennials at Yuna

TIM WILEY, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, JURIEEN

Tim Pannel has successfully established a range of perennial pastures in the far North Eastern wheatbelt at Yuna. He chose a small paddock of yellow sandplain to experiment with last spring. Tim set the paddock up with a double knock spraying to kill all weeds. He sprayed with 2 l/ha Roundup on the 18th June and came back with 2.4 l/Sprayseed on the 8th August. The paddock was sown with areas of lucerne, mixed perennial grass and a lucerne / grass mix on the 9th August. The seed was sown with a min till machine with knife points and press wheels. Tim suspects he may have sown the grass seed a little too deep but still got an adequate germination.

Tim sowed strips of L90 and L55 lucerne across the paddock. Both varieties have established and persisted well. The grass mix included Rhodes grass, Setaria, Bambatsi panic, green panic and Digit grass. The panics, and Setaria are the most abundant, but all species have grown well. There is only about 10% Rhodes grass in the mix.

The same mix of seed was sown at Mingenew (last year), but ended up with a very different mix of spe-

cies. At this site the mix is now about 90% Rhodes grass and only a few bunch grasses. The reason for just a big difference in species mix between the two sites is unclear. It maybe due to a difference in seeding date as the Mingenew site was sown a month later. The very early sowing at Tim Pannel's would have favoured those species that can germinate at slightly lower temperatures.

There were a few reasonable rains up until the end of October but after that it was a very dry summer. The first grazing of the 30 ha paddock was on the 25th October, 2001 for 134 days with 600 lambs. Since then the paddock has been split in to 4 cells so that it can be rotationally grazed. Since then Tim has grazed the paddock in February, July and August of this year.

Dave Rogers from the Department of Agriculture, Geraldton will be helping Tim to measure animal and pasture production at this site. The Department is working with farmer groups to determine how productive and profitable perennials will be on a range of soils and environments across the Northern Agriculture region.



Inspecting Tim Pannel's perennials at Yuna

ELEPHANT GRASS MAKES A COMEBACK

KEN ANGELL, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

In recent times there has been renewed interest in growing elephant grass as a green supplement for horses, and more commonly as an edible windbreak for browsing animals such as alpaca.

Elephant grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) was introduced into Western Australia in 1916. It is a coarse grass when mature, and is characterised by extremely rapid growth under moist and warm conditions. It grows in clumps, which stool prolifically, and is thus usually planted in rows with approximately one metre between plants.

Mature leaves, which attain a length of 80cms, are coarse. However, when the plant is grazed or cut, (until the plant reaches a height of about one metre), the young shoots are soft, succulent and relished by stock.

There appears to have been several distinct strains evolved, differing in such characters as hairiness of leaf and stem, height at maturity, etc. The finer-leaved variety is preferred.

Elephant grass is extremely drought tolerant, but being a heat loving plant thrives best during summer months.

The grass prefers a deep, well-drained sandy, loam soil, with plenty of moisture, but has shown itself capable of growing on poorer sandy soils, under dry conditions.

Where irrigation is possible, excellent results have been obtained on deep coastal sands.

Establishment is by cuttings taken from the hard portions of the stem and has tree joints. Those taken from the softer upper portions of the stem often rot in the ground. Cuttings are best planted in spring.

Elephant grass has high value as a fodder plant. Where ample moisture is present, Elephant grass has rapid growth and stooling characteristics. It can be cut four to six times a year and will produce up to 150 tonnes of green matter per hectare. It is highly palatable, but becomes coarse if allowed to grow too high. It should be cut or grazed when approximately one metre high. The plant is best isolated from grazing during the winter months in favour of annual legume-based winter pastures.



Elephant Grass Source: www.fao.org

**Summertime Blues!
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The feed of WA's future - (*Pennisetum purpureum*) - similar in appearance to sugarcane

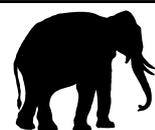
- Simple management r Cut costs
- Grown by root or cutting, planted in Spring
- Approx. 1,000 plants per acre
- Spreads only by propagation
- Needs minimal fertilizer r High or low pH
- Spring, Summer, Autumn and late Autumn feed r Will grow to 5m
- Suitable for cattle, horses, sheep ,pigs, goats, chickens etc.
- Suitable for grazing, strip grazing, silage or fodder
- Drought, fire, flood and frost tolerant
- Can produce 50 tonne per acre/per season under irrigation
- Highly suitable for windbreaks
- Good to interspace with tree plantings
- Economical and sustainable

"Elephant grass is a hardy palatable and nutritious herbage. As a perennial it remains in permanent stands and is very capable of heavy yields. Even in poor sandy soil it makes rapid growth of up to 1.5m in five weeks," Asst. Superintendent of Dairying, HG Elliot. And endorsed by Dr LC Snook, Tagataste researcher, and animal nutritional officer, WA.

Useful in reducing salinity, wind, water erosion and nutrient run-off. Tests show it's more salt tolerant than lucerne, with **25% more protein**, and surviving when most

Fast growing perennial grass, High Protein and amazing yields, Drought resistant and used extensively throughout the world. Easy to manage, and grows on most soils

Under Government Tests conducted by the Animal Health Laboratory, Nedlands, WA: "Yields of 29 tonnes per hectare and measured over a growing period of only one month, even in an unusually cold May".



INTERESTED? Phone Elephant Grass Supplies WA

Contact Reuben Mounsey
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Sub Tropical Perennial Grasses in the North

DAVID ROGERS, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, GERALDTON

Sub tropical perennial grasses are being adopted quite widely throughout the Northern Agricultural Region. However, many landholders are concerned about the possibility of escapes of perennial pastures and their weed potential to neighbouring paddocks, particularly in cropping dominated areas. This concern is currently deterring the adoption of perennial pastures by some landholders.

Consequently a trial was established to look at this issue and evaluate the use and effectiveness of a range of herbicides on sub tropical perennial grasses. The trial was set up on a Mixed grass sward on David Brindles property in Mingenew. The sward was mostly dominated by Rhodes Grass but also had a scattering of clump grasses including Solander Setaria and Bambatsi Panic.

There were 20 herbicide treatment assessed by three replications in randomised blocks. These treatment also included sub plots of plus or minus application of Sprayseed® 2 weeks after initial spraying of treatment. The site was sprayed on the 21st of May 2002 with the follow up application of Sprayseed® across part of the treatments sprayed 2 weeks later.

It is important to note that these are only preliminary results as the trial will not be concluded until after spring when full details will be published. It is also important to keep in mind that this is only this years results and so seasonal issues, time of spraying, management of the sward and how that impacts on the effectiveness of herbicides on these grasses, is not well understood. So while general principles may be taken

from the trial I still feel that further work is needed to determine issues with chemical treatments on these grasses.

In results so far the only chemical to offer good control in this trial was Glyphosate at 2 & 4L/ha. A couple of plants so far survived the 2L application. The 4L application has given 100% control. The other treatments gave a range of results from no impact at all to high initial damage but in most cases plants are now regenerating from the crowns. One treatment did almost no damage to the plants but it did delay and reduce the flowering of Rhodes grass and may have some potential in manipulating the stand for grazing and nutritional benefits. Other chemicals that had very little effect on the grasses may also have potential for selective weed control in the grass sward. In general the clump type grasses were less effected by the herbicides than Rhodes grass was.

The Herbicides used in this trial included Glyphosate, Sprayseed®, Glean®, Monsa®, Atrazine + Diuron, Spinnaker®, Fusilade®, Select®, Verdict®, Hoe-grass® and Wildcat®

Details of the trial will be published upon completion later in the year.

For further information please contact:
David Rogers
Development Officer
Ph: 99568515

Members of the Mingenew Irwin group inspect Dave Rogers trial site on Dave Brindles property north of Mingenew. The plants at the front of the photo are Green Panic but majority of the site is Rhodes Grass.



SGS Field Walks

Sustainable Grazing Systems will be holding a number of Field Walks across WA this Spring. The aim is to "create awareness of different grazing systems that can be implemented profitably while sustaining the natural environment".

Dates are as follows:

GinGin:

Tuesday 17th September
(visit includes Phil Barrett-Lennard's property)

Donnybrook:

Wednesday 18th September

Kojonup:

Thursday 19th September

Vasse:

Friday 20th September

Wellstead:

Wednesday 25th September

Esperance:

Thursday 26th September.

Evergreen members will be in attendance at the Field Walks.

For more information log on to the evergreen website through the community zero link or check the latest edition of Farm Weekly for the schedule.



To join fill in and fax or post to:

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- \$330.00 Corporate Membership
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