

Grazing Matcher

Program Legacy 2017-2023

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Introduction

Future-proofing farming is a key priority for South West NRM through its work to deliver landscape-scale solutions for healthy and productive ecosystems.

We aim to drive innovation in the farming sector through widespread adoption of economically viable, sustainable technology and practices.

With this in mind, we embarked on a new collaboration back in 2017 with Western Beef Association's Jeisane Accioly and livestock consultants Dan Parnell and Martin Staines to develop and deliver a program that could help livestock producers:

1. Improve grazing management practices;
2. Produce better hay and silage;
3. Allocate feed to most effectively meet animal production targets.

The result was the Grazing Matcher™ program. Five years down the track and the program has supported 13 groups and almost 100 livestock enterprises.

*"It's made a massive impact. And we've only just touched on it this year."
- Rosa Glen sheep producer Kylie Silverthorne*

Additional funding was provided through Meat and Livestock Australia's Profitable Grazing Systems program and later, contributions were also received to run more groups via the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's Healthy Estuaries program with support from Geocatch, Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee, Oyster Harbour Catchment Group and Peel-Harvey Catchment Council.

The program consists of groups of approximately eight enterprises who meet with advisors eight times over a twelve-month period on each other's farms.

Groups stay in touch between meetings using WhatsApp and upon completion, join an ongoing alumni discussion group.

This document features 14 articles that were written between 2018 and 2022 about technical aspects of the program and its outcomes. Articles are in chronological order and provide an understanding of the principles that were covered during the 32 hours of face-to-face contact that advisors had with each group of farmers. The articles are complemented with [six videos](#) that have a total running time of approximately 20 minutes.

We hope you enjoy the insights provided by this collective resource.

Rotational grazing plan for beef farmers

Profitability for most livestock enterprises is strongly linked to pasture growth and utilisation. Yet one of the key tools for maximizing growth is under-utilised in Western Australia.

While pasture growth is heavily influenced by nutrient availability, farm consultant Dr Martin Staines says grazing management is just as important. And one way to significantly improve pasture growth is to implement a basic **rotational grazing plan**.



Dr Staines discussed grazing management with two small farmer groups formed under the Grazing Matcher™ program with support from South West NRM's Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator program, Meat and Livestock Australia's Profitable Grazing Systems initiative and Western Beef Association Inc.

His emphasis on rotational grazing is based on a sound understanding of how pastures grow, how they recover from grazing and when quality is highest.

"Ryegrass, which is our dominant pasture [in the South West of WA], only carries three live leaves per tiller, so if you don't graze when your plants reach this stage you will lose biomass. And the quality of ryegrass peaks at the three-leaf stage," Dr Staines said.

While grazing shouldn't be left too late, grazing too early – when plants have fewer than two new leaves – is likely to stunt growth.

"After grazing, ryegrass will use its sugar reserves in the stem to develop its first two new leaves. When those leaves have developed, its sugar store will be replenished. So it's best to delay grazing until at least two leaves have developed, otherwise plants won't have a 'full sugar tank' to recover from grazing and growth will be slower."

For paddocks with a clover component, grazing when ryegrass has two to three leaves will also suit clover growth. Other grasses vary in the number of live leaves, with fescue having two and kikuyu four to five.

The time required by ryegrass to grow three leaves varies from approximately 24 days in spring to 54 days in winter. Ideally, farmers should vary the time taken to rotate through their paddocks as growth rates change, but this complicates management and can reduce uptake of rotational grazing.

So Dr Staines has come up with a basic formula for farmers who want a simpler process.

"If farmers graze a paddock every 35 days or five weeks throughout the year, they will be grazing at the two to three and a half leaf stage. That's not a bad compromise," he said.

Stock should be shifted at least twice a week to avoid plants getting grazed twice in the one rotation. So to achieve a five-week rotation with two shifts per week, farmers will need 11 paddocks. The number of grazing days can vary depending on paddock size.

Dr Staines believes the closer farmers can get to this model, the better pasture growth and utilisation will be.

Besides rotational grazing, another key consideration for pasture management is to ensure that it is grazed to four to six centimetres in height.

Leaving too much height or residue can result in low utilisation, feed quality and pasture density. Leaving less than four centimetres risks delayed plant recovery, reduced feed intake and weed invasion.

But the height of pasture residue can't determine the rotation speed. If that is allowed to happen, it's likely that paddocks will be grazed at the wrong leaf stage.

"You have to stick to your rotation plan. If there's not enough pasture in a paddock and the next paddock isn't ready, feed hay or silage to cover the gap. This can be done in a holding paddock if need be," Dr Staines said.

"If on the other hand, the next paddock is ready too early, before you are ready to move stock into it, drop that paddock out for hay or silage and move to the next paddock instead.

"So the key to good grazing management is to implement a basic rotational grazing plan, leave the correct residue after grazing, and fill feed gaps when required."

Calving innovation creates a profitable grazing system

Collie cattle breeder David Rees is always looking for ways to improve his system.

"You improve most when things are hard because you've got to look at your inputs," David told fellow farmers at a meeting of Grazing Matcher™ participants.

"I look for one percent improvements in each part of the business."

Two groups visited David to see his application of rotational grazing and hear how he calves in winter instead of the more common practice of between February and May.

David's approach means he weans in March–April and has the flexibility to sell weaners when there aren't many on the market, or carry some through if there's an early break.

"We start selling into the store market in April–June. Selling calves in April, year in year out we are getting a premium price. We are selling cull cows at a different time when the main flush is mostly over," he said.

It was big change from calving in autumn when he had to book abattoirs up to a month or two in advance and try to meet tighter specifications. And there were other penalties to consider.

"We used to calve earlier years ago, around April, but when we put pressure on the stocking rate the cows went backwards. It was hard to get enough



condition to mate, whereas now we mate on the spring flush when cows are on a rising plain of nutrition,” David said.

With April calving David weaned at about 300 kg per calf. Now the bulk are around 260–270 kg, but his stocking rate has gone up with the change to winter calving. In 2018 he ran roughly a breeder to the hectare. The kilos produced per hectare might not be much different, but his cost of production is now a lot lower.

Perhaps his biggest cost-reduction came after he calculated he was better off buying hay compared to making it himself. David now buys hay at about half a roll per cow-calf unit. The strategy means he can increase the chance of buying better supplement at a better price.

“If you pre-book your hay and buy from the same supplier, year in year out, it’s not too bad. If the hay price gets too high (usually when the break is late), we soak lupins and put them on top of straw in a feeder,” he said.

“I can get away with it because we have weaned, and the cow is in-calf, so nutritional demands are lower because they aren’t lactating. If I had a calf on her I would have to do something else.”

David yard-weans in lock-down paddocks with oaten hay and locks the rest of the farm off. The system provides more flexibility to defer grazing early in the season, as breeding herd demand is still not too high, allowing pastures to establish and not get ripped out.

Once they have grown 2–2.5 leaves per ryegrass tiller, he starts rotational grazing, making sure paddocks have had enough time to restore energy reserves before the next graze so they can maintain good growth rates relative to the season.



"We always rotate into paddocks with 2–2.5 leaves. The moment we get below two leaves I know we're running out of tucker.

"You've got to do something, sell something, feed some hay, do something to get back to two leaves. I tend to just slow it down. If you rotationally graze you know exactly when you're in trouble. You've got early warning signs (leaf emergence rates in spelled paddocks for example)."

While David tries to limit grazing in one paddock to the recommended maximum of four days to avoid sapping plant energy reserves, he does sometimes exceed that in larger paddocks. But he thinks that an adequate rest period, where plants are able to grow at least two new leaves and restore energy reserves is the more critical aspect of the system.

Good grazing management has even helped with weed and erosion control.

"With rotational grazing you don't get such big capeweed patches which erode in summer/autumn rains. I can leave pasture residuals on the hills over summer to avoid that happening," he said.

One of the risks with rotational grazing cow-calf units is the chance that calves will be separated from cows during moves, particularly when the weather is bad. It's a risk that David has had to adapt to.

"When you change paddocks, cows tend to rush through, leave a heap of calves behind and then try to come back. It can get messy," he said.

"The easiest way to avoid mis-mothering is to open the gate and leave it open overnight. The next day, the bulk of the calves and cows will be on the new tucker, and those that aren't will have paired up again and you can sneak them back through the gate.

If a cow has just calved, I will leave them behind and pick them up in a day or two."

David separates 130 first-calf heifers from the main herd of 270 in mid-June for calving.

"You've got to look after these heifers to get them pregnant a second time. After that they are hardier."

The main mob start calving in the last week of July with the bulk coming down in August. This is the worst month for high birthweights, so David needs to monitor and manage cow condition to ensure they don't get too fat and experience calving difficulties.

After calving, David monitors calf weights with one of his favourite accessories.

"I bought a calf-catcher for the side of the (4-wheel) motorbike which is the best thing I've ever bought. We go around tailing and tagging and birthweight at the same time," he said.

David artificially inseminates the first-calf heifers and two-year-olds, starting in the middle of September for two to four weeks.

One problem he is yet to fully overcome is scouring.

“Scouring can be a problem with winter calving. We give a bit of Scourban™ if it’s bad. Electrolytes are probably the best thing. But we haven’t found a complete solution yet,” he said.

David’s system is based on the adage that you can’t control your price, but you can control your costs. It’s a lean system that is still productive.

He doesn’t need much milk for calves because they’ve got a lot of feed. He doesn’t spend money on seed, which is a more viable option because he doesn’t produce hay. The clover – ryegrass balance is manipulated with grazing intensity, and David believes that grazing at 2–2.5 leaves provides adequate control of red-legged earth mites.

He retains good cover on hilltops to minimise capeweed outbreaks that erode over summer/autumn and only uses herbicide on firebreaks. And he likes to get the best bang for buck out of fertilisers.

“I look at fertiliser inputs if the price is low. I don’t spring apply in all years, only if we get a bad break, a late season. Because I don’t cut hay, I don’t use much nitrogen. I just use a bit of potash in spring. I don’t like the nitrogen in the low country because it ends up in the river. I don’t get a good response to it.”

Research suggests that the winter calving system is potentially most effective in breeding enterprises compared to finishing systems. Assuming calves are sold as weaners, it aligns feed supply and herd requirements better than autumn calving, thus requiring less supplementation and allowing higher stocking rates.

If weaners are to be finished in the same property other factors need to be considered.

David Rees is certainly a great example of how it can work in breeding operations, and how it can be combined with other strategies such as rotational grazing and a close analysis of costs and benefits throughout the enterprise to create a lean and profitable system.

Livestock producers meet their match – 2018 Outcomes

The year-long Grazing Matcher program supported by South West NRM helped 12 livestock entities in 2018 to implement changes to increase pasture production, improve fodder conservation and make cost-effective supplementary feed purchases.

The Grazing Matcher™ Program, facilitated by agricultural advisors Jeisane Accioly-McIllree, Dan Parnell and Martin Staines, facilitates a basic form of rotational grazing using plant cues.

Key principles of the program include grazing ryegrass at the 2–3 leaf stage, and moving stock when pasture has been grazed to 4–6 cm. Applying these principles has helped producers grow more pasture with more capacity to recover quickly.

Retaining 4–6 cm of pasture residual post-grazing was the most significant change implemented by Upper Capel producer Paul Fry.

“I had previously been of the view that hard grazing was needed to control weeds such as wild oats and capeweed. We would graze to 2–3 cm to make sure all the weeds were ‘cleaned up’ by cows before moving to the next paddock,” Paul said.

“However, this program has shown me the extra production you can get from pastures that recover better when grazed to 5 cm. Now we get much better recovery in pasture after grazing and much better response to fertiliser because the plant is able to take it up.”

The program also helped producers understand the cost of fodder production, how to avoid wasting fodder and how fodder quality can be

improved. Several producers improved their fodder quality by fine-tuning when the pasture is cut, reducing the time for drying and baling, and adopting feed testing to monitor the quality of fodder produced or purchased.



Grazing residual pot-demonstration. Pots were cut at different heights, 5 cm (left) and 2 cm (right), in late April and late May. Image taken in early June.

Ken MacLeay, who runs a beef stud in Vasse, said the program renewed his enthusiasm for silage.

“(In 2018) We cut it early, sacrificed volume to get quality and got this tremendous regrowth, so I haven’t lost dry matter,” Ken said.

“It came back phenomenally.”

Participants who analysed fodder produced in 2018 reported significant improvements in protein and energy content compared to 2017. For example, Ken’s 2018 silage had higher metabolisable energy (10.6 compared to 9.5 MJ/kg DM in 2017) and higher crude protein (16.7% compared to 9.1%).

“Quality is really important. We probably lost a bit of focus on that. You’ve got to make the best and not think that ordinary hay is going to do it, which we tend to convince ourselves that it will,” he said.

Another key learning from the program was understanding the amount and balance of energy and protein required by different stock classes to either maintain or build condition. This can be particularly important to maintain or increase pregnancy rates.

Richard Walker from Wilga said that the program helped him refine his feed input during the worst season he’d ever experienced.

“We hand-fed from February to August,” Richard said. “I think we’ve benefited from the right feed input with better pregnancy rates.”

“We centred our feed program on pellets and a bit of hay for extra fibre. I think while it was very costly we’ve also had more returns, so it was worth doing. It was good through this program to be able to put numbers to what we were doing and refine it a bit.”

David and Linda Brumby from Ferguson Valley also saw real benefits by getting a better feed balance.

“Our agent said our calves were some of the best he’d seen,” Linda said. “I think it’s because we’ve understood the necessity to supplement when they are eating dry hay. They consumed more hay and that’s because of what we did to the rumen (by supplementing with higher quality feed). We hadn’t done that before.”

Matt Camarri, who farms in Cundinup and Busselton and has rotated cattle through paddocks for 20 years suggested that rotational grazing can also improve pregnancy rates.

“I think guys that have been set stocked for a long time will see massive improvements from rotating. When we started we noticed that the condition

of cows picked up early in the season and pregnancy rates were better earlier in the cycle.”

The complexity of implementing changes recommended by advisors was helped by providing time for field walks and networking between producers, who met eight times over 12 months at participating properties and also visited two “case study” farms.

This network was particularly valuable to those without extensive networks, such as Linda and David Brumby who manage 80 hectares in the Ferguson Valley.

“We knew no-one and had no farming background in the area before we started,” Linda said. “Going around and seeing other people’s farms gave us confidence that we weren’t going wrong. We felt comfortable asking people, whereas we had nobody to ask before. The fact that it was such a small group allowed that sort of discussion.”



Program agriculture advisory Jeisane Accioly, left, demonstrating how to condition-score cattle.

Producers highlight the value of autumn deferral

Interviews with livestock producers as part of the Grazing Matcher™ program have highlighted the importance placed on deferred grazing in autumn.

The aim of autumn deferral is to concentrate stock into one or more 'sacrificial' paddocks and providing them with supplementary feed so pasture in the remaining paddocks can properly establish before being grazed. In the case of ryegrass, that means withholding grazing until plants have grown 2–3 leaves per tiller, because grazing at less than two leaves can stunt growth.

Boyanup farmer Rob Bell emphasised the value of deferred grazing when he hosted a group of producers at his property during the program.

"Chewing paddocks as soon as you see a bit of green feed is probably the worst thing you can do. You set yourself back so far. **Those leaves are the solar panels to grow more pasture.** Take the solar panel away and it's got no power to grow," he said.

And the knock-on effects from a poor deferment strategy were huge, especially with a cold winter.

"WA has a unique climate where it just doesn't grow in winter. So if you don't grow grass in autumn, you're going into spring chasing your tail. It affects fodder production because you're two weeks late locking up the hay paddock and your yields are down," Rob said.

"You set yourself up for a bad start to the following year. Deferred grazing is probably key to getting started the right way."

Brodie Allen from Boallia near Busselton also sees value in deferment.

“If you defer, you get more growth throughout the season which means you can cut more (fodder), which means you can run more stock. Between that system and set stocking, you might double your stocking rate,” he said.

Mark Scott from Nannup has used deferral since 1997.



Mark Scott, right, discussing deferral with a Grazing Matcher group at his Nannup property in June 2018.

“Traditionally we have cows on the ground on May 15. Because of the dry start in 2018 I went to six weeks deferred grazing, out to June 15.

“By far and away it produces more grass, but you need something to feed. We went well over-budget on hay and pellets in 2018,” Mark said.

“Realistically we should push it out to the 1st of June, an extra two weeks of deferral.”

Mark's experience highlights the importance of being well prepared for deferral with good spring fodder production and/or strategic purchase of supplementary feed that gets maximum energy content for every dollar spent.

Livestock producers can learn about implementing deferment strategies and much more by signing up for the twelve-month Grazing Matcher™ program.

Measuring profitability of livestock enterprises

Livestock producers make a lot of decisions that affect the profitability of their business. Stocking rates, feed purchases and fertiliser decisions are just a few. But when they decide to change these variables, how can they judge the effect on their bottom line?

Measuring profitability or business performance was the first topic up for discussion at the initial meeting of the 2019 Grazing Matcher™ group near Harvey.

The group consisted of eight grazing enterprises from the South West that met regularly with two advisors over a 12-month period to improve grazing management, business decisions and profitability. This followed successful completion of the program by two groups the previous year 2018.

But before discussing potential changes to management, local agronomist Dan Parnell outlined how participants could measure the impact of change on their business.

"I think it's vital to incorporate some measures into everything we do," Dan said.

"It puts a bit of critical thinking into the decisions we make and helps to continually measure performance over time. Otherwise we are just sailing in the dark."



Agronomist Dan Parnell presenting to a new Grazing Matcher group near Harvey.

There are several options to measure business performance, but one of the commonly used indicators is Cost of Production (CoP), which has a good relationship with profitability. **Various benchmarking studies carried out in Australia have demonstrated that profitability relates to CoP more than market price.**

CoP is the total operating cost of producing one kilogram of beef, and businesses that can maintain a lower cost of production over time are likely to have higher than average profitability.

“Cost of production doesn’t necessarily mean cutting costs,” Dan explained.

“It means being more efficient. It can be lowered by either reducing unnecessary costs, increasing production to dilute fixed costs, or a combination of both. It’s about getting efficiencies with each cost.”

Profitability is also linked to overall production levels, but the relationship is not as strong as with CoP.

“Cost of production decreases as production increases to a point, especially if you are understocked and can change to a more optimal stocking rate without too much extra cost,” he said.

“But at some point, increasing production will start to increase the cost of production because of increases in things like expensive feed sources. This is associated with the theory of diminishing marginal returns.”

So, if producers are thinking of running more stock, it is important to consider how this affects the cost of production. What are they going to eat to achieve the required animal condition score, and can this be done without grazing too hard and stunting pasture growth, or causing erosion and excess pugging?

One question that CoP can help to answer is whether extra investment in pasture-based costs like fertiliser, or an investment in better grazing management, can either support more production or profitably offset a reduction in supplementary feed costs.

Together, these “feed-base” costs represent one of the largest costs to grazing enterprises. Finding the most efficient feed-base system provides a significant opportunity to reduce CoP.

“Analysis by agricultural consultancy Holmes Sackett shows the top 20 percent of farm businesses generally spend less per kilogram of production by achieving better utilisation of what feed is grown.”

Holmes Sackett found that better cost efficiency can be achieved by:

- Optimising calving date to best match feed demand with availability,
- Optimising livestock numbers,
- Minimising reliance on out-of-season production,
- Monitoring soil fertility and fertilising on a ‘needs be’ basis,
- Pasture manipulation, and
- Grazing strategy.

“The inherent thread of the Grazing Matcher program is to get more out of the pasture base, which is your cheapest feed source (compared to

purchased feed). We need to build skills and confidence to grow quality feed cheaply and meet feed demand at the lowest cost.”

Meat and Livestock Australia have an online [CoP calculator](#) that allows producers to benchmark against industry averages.

Producers were encouraged to start using the CoP calculator even if they had to initially estimate some costs. But be consistent so comparisons can be made from one year to the next.

Given that some producers can spend three times more than others to produce one kilogram of beef, the CoP calculator is a great way to start measuring profitability and thinking critically, allowing better use of resources.

Three ways tissue-testing can help pasture growth

As hay sheds empty over autumn and winter, the growth of spring pasture becomes critical. One factor in achieving good growth is good nutrient management.

Nutrient or fertiliser management in pastures is typically based on soil tests conducted every few years. While soil testing is valuable for some measures, it is far from a perfect science and doesn't accurately predict requirements for all essential nutrients, especially trace elements or micronutrients.

A key agronomic tool that can improve nutrient management is plant-tissue testing. **Typically under-utilised compared to soil testing, tissue testing can assess the status of more than a dozen essential nutrients.** It can identify threats to growth before they become a problem and is a good first step in diagnosing unexplained problems.

Agronomist Dan Parnell explains three ways that tissue testing can help farmers, and how samples can be collected.

1. Prognosis

Tissue testing can be a prognostic tool to predict a nutrient issue in the future, even though the pasture or crop may currently be growing ok.

"In this situation you are looking for a representative sample of the major production zones within the paddock and taking transects out of that area. I try to do a zig zag pattern across this paddock in case the spreader had a bit



of overlap or there is something unusual on a straight line through the paddock. We don't want to just follow that line."

2. Diagnosis

"If you've got a problem with pasture growth in a particular area, tissue tests can be used to see if it's being caused by a nutrient deficiency. As a diagnostic tool, it's good to take a sample from the problem area and a comparative sample from an area that's growing a little bit better," he said.

"That might help isolate the problem. And if it is a nutrient deficiency, it's usually isolated to a particular soil type, so that's another clue that a deficiency is present."

3. Calibration

"After you've soil tested and fertilised based on the recommendations, it's good to know if the amount applied was appropriate. Plant testing is a good tool to test that. Soil tests are good but it's not perfect, and plant testing is a good support tool to help refine your fertiliser program if needed. So that's where it's really important."

Tips for sampling plant tissue

"Rural merchandise stores and some of the fertiliser companies will supply plant testing kits.

An important part of collecting samples is to avoid contamination. Kits come with gloves and I recommend using them because the lab tests are very sensitive and can be affected by chemicals on your hands.

It's very important to pick the particular species that you are going to tissue test. The critical values below which nutrients are a problem vary for different species. If you've got a mixed sward such as clover and ryegrass, it's ideal to pick one or the other. If you get a mixture you might not get much indication of what's going on. Species can be difficult to separate but you should do your best.

With pastures we are generally sampling leaves and petioles. We take a pasture sample just like a cow would eat pasture, and keep doing that at random spots through the sample area, avoiding urine patches, camps or feed areas where nutrient levels may be unrepresentative.

You need a good handful in your bag, and it's always better to have more than not enough.

It's easy to get samples mixed up so be really careful about your labelling and the sketches you might draw.

Do the job early in the week so samples aren't sitting in the post over the weekend. We want to get them to the lab as soon as possible."

So next time you're in your rural store, pick up a plant-tissue test kit and sample a few areas of interest. You never know what you might find!

Getting smarter with hay and silage production

Whether growing or buying fodder, it's a big investment that needs to be made efficiently if farms are to remain profitable and resilient amid increasing climate-induced risk.

To help farmers better prepare for hay and silage season, the Grazing Matcher program invited farm and fodder consultant Dario Nandapi to talk to participants at its August meeting in 2019.

The key messages from Dario were to:

- Aim for a high-quality product;
- Measure quality by having samples analysed by feed testing laboratories and;
- Reduce storage and feed-out wastage.

"Quality is best measured with feed tests, which tell you a lot about its quality such as its energy content," Dario said.

"If you're making silage, you want metabolizable energy (ME) above 10 megajoules, while hay should be above nine megajoules. This is especially important for dairy cows, but even for certain classes of beef animals such as late pregnancy, lactating cows and young growing animals."

Producing a high-quality product starts with a high-quality forage, and this depends a lot on when the forage is cut.

"The time of cutting is the most important factor influencing the amount of energy in hay and silage," Dario said.



“ME will be higher the earlier you cut. As the crop matures and sets seed, they produce lignin to hold seed-heads up, which increases fibre content and drops quality and digestibility.”

At flowering and seeding, pasture can be 45–60 percent fibre, which goes up to 80 percent for dry standing feed. Too much fibre leads to less intake because it slows digestion and livestock can’t eat as much, resulting in more wastage and less liveweight gain.

Some farmers are concerned that cutting early will result in less yield. While that can happen with crops, Dario said the concern was usually unfounded when it came to pastures.

“With pastures, you usually don’t lose yield because the pasture regrows. And the regrowth is usually pretty good quality. Some of the best silage I’ve tested is when it’s been cut a second time,” he said.

For maximum bulk without losing quality, Dario recommended cutting when 10 percent of the pasture had “ear emergence”, a sign that the crop was about to enter the reproductive phase.

Once the pasture has been cut, the next requirement is to conserve it as quickly as possible before it’s broken down and loses quality.

"If the crop's been sitting on the ground too long and wilts slowly, true protein will be broken down by micro-organisms into non-protein nitrogen, making ammonium which is less desirable," he said.

"On the other hand, if you've done a quick fermentation, feed tests will show that ammonium is less than 10 percent of total protein."

However, the obstacle to fast fodder conservation is that hay and silage must meet a minimum dry matter content before being baled in order to maintain quality and reduce the risk of hay-fires (at least 30 percent dry matter for pit silage, 50 percent for baled silage and 85 percent for hay).

Dario had some good tips to fast-track the wilting process.

"If we cut at about 7 cm, the forage will be held off the ground by the stubble so air can get beneath to dry it. That height will also reduce soil contamination and the incorporation of bugs that break it down," he said.

"You will also leave enough stem behind for the pasture to regrow. The stem holds the sugar reserves for regrowth so if we cut too low, we lose the sugar and the rate of regrowth declines."

Dario also recommended that farmers start cutting mid-morning after the dew had lifted because there was up to two tonnes of water per hectare in dew.

The next step was to spread the cut thinly so it could dry more easily. This could be helped by using a tedder rack.

"When plants are cut they will close their pores within 30 minutes to two hours in an attempt to reduce water loss and stay alive. Once the pores have closed, drying is harder. That first two hours is when we can do most of our drying, so teddering straight away can improve drying by 30-60 percent and make a difference to ME content," Dario said.

The quicker that silage and hay is baled the better. Dario recommended a turnaround time between cutting and baling of 48 and 72 hours for silage and hay respectively.

For most hay producers, 72 hours seems impossible, so some are now increasing silage production which requires less dry matter content before baling.

Silage can typically achieve a higher quality product compared to hay, resulting in better intake, less feed-waste and better animal production and calving and lambing percentages.

The ensiling process can also kill weed seeds and aid weed management, while field losses are reduced compared to hay where you can lose a quarter of it through leaf shatter.

Silage also stores better than hay if conserved properly. Total losses with silage are around 15 percent compared to an average of 30 percent loss with hay stored in a shed. **However, there are significant risks and costs associated with silage.**

"If you are going to make silage it's got to be high quality because there's no point in wrapping hay," Dario said.

"Air is the enemy of silage. Any holes in the wrap will let air in and cause mould. So it's important to get good compaction of the forage to push air out. Then you need to wrap bales with four layers at 50 percent overlap and 50 percent stretch."

Holes can also be minimised by baling and wrapping at the storage site and storing on the butt-end, which has a lot more plastic. This minimises damage when birds land on them and grub damage from below.

Dario also warned against storing on slashed areas where stubble can pierce the wrap, and to use white or green plastic because black plastic gets hotter and softer, becoming prone to piercing by birds that land on it.

"If you get holes in the wrap, fix them with proper silage tape, not duct tape," he said.

"Get dust and moisture off before using tape to make sure it sticks properly."

Regardless of whether you make hay or silage, or just buy in hay, limiting storage and feed-out losses was also an important consideration.

“Storing hay outside leads to bigger losses compared to shed storage, which may justify investment in sheds. If it’s on the ground even in a shed, a wicking effect can destroy 50 percent of the bale so put it on a pellet,” Dario said.

As mentioned earlier, feed-out losses could be reduced by providing a high-quality product that stock waste less of. However, good infrastructure could also reduce wastage.

“Generally speaking, the more you spend on a feedout system, the less wastage you have,” he said.

“The average wastage from using a bare area or ring feeder is 18 percent. This compares to troughs that can cut losses to 1–3 percent. So, while infrastructure can be a short-term cost, it can also be a long-term saving.

“A good system needs something to stop stock throwing fodder around or defecating on it. To do this, some guys put a bar or hotwire above troughs or other feedout systems such as conveyor belts or bare ground.”

Dario’s presentation helped farmers understand the importance of quality in terms of cost savings and meeting targets such as calving percentages, and that quality didn’t mean yield was sacrificed. It’s no wonder several farmers walked away with feed testing kits!

More information can be found in the [Top Fodder](#) manual, which is free to download online. The Feed Central website has information to help [understand feed test results](#).

Big incentives for protecting paddocks during summer

Most farm paddocks have a long history of phosphorus build-up that represents a lifetime of investment in soil fertility. With phosphorus and other nutrients concentrated at the soil surface, leaving soil bare and exposed to wind and water erosion is putting that investment at a significant risk, especially given that nutrients are commonly attached to finer clay soil particles which can be transported long distances by wind and waterflow.

The topic of how best to protect paddocks over summer and autumn was discussed at a Grazing Matcher™ group meeting in Donnybrook with discussion lead by local agronomist Dan Parnell.

“The risk of erosion is a big issue on hills when we bare-out areas that are then vulnerable to wind and rain,” Dan said.

“You can lose valuable topsoil down the hill in summer storms or harsh opening rains. So, you want to have enough of the soil covered with pasture residue to keep the soil in place.”

One tool to maintain cover on paddocks is rotational grazing. While this is more commonly associated with the management of living plants, it can also be useful in dry months.



Groundcover of almost 100% was retained on this Kirup property in March 2019.

“Most people still keep rotating over summer to try to keep control on the grazing and get an even residual (post grazing cover). The alternative of leaving stock in a paddock for a considerable time means they can be more selective and put too much pressure on specific areas,” Dan said.

“This leads to a combination of overgrazed bare areas and under-utilised areas that remain a fire hazard.

“With rotational grazing, it’s the farmer who is in control of the residuals, not the animals. So, they keep rotating until they reach a minimum groundcover target.

“The [minimum target for groundcover suggested by Evergraze](#) is 70 percent (or 800 kilograms of dry matter per hectare), but this should be closer to 100 percent on steeper paddocks.”

Another benefit of retaining cover on paddocks is the effect on seedling establishment. One farmer at the meeting spoke of how he had better establishment in 2019 where there was more groundcover, putting the result down to the groundcover acting as a mulch and conserving soil moisture after

rain. Another possibility is that groundcover increases infiltration and reduces the effect of raindrop impact on bare soil.

The power of a raindrop can smash soil aggregates apart, not only making them prone to transportation, but also blocking pores and creating a hardpan on the soil surface that can inhibit seedling emergence.

Retaining groundcover reduces this risk and remains useful when green pasture starts growing by adding roughage into the diet.

However, it is hard to stay above minimum groundcover levels in all paddocks, especially if early-season grazing is deferred to allow pastures to establish.

Deferment is when one or more paddocks are sacrificed and grazed below target levels to protect other paddocks. Some sheep and beef farmers are now reducing the size of these sacrifice areas by building confinement pens. These sacrificial paddocks and pens should be in an area protected from wind and runoff such as a flat, timbered area where the risk and impact of erosion is lowest.

Paddocks that need renovating are often sacrificed so stock can control weeds and the impact of heavy grazing is overcome by re-seeding.

Farmers can take steps towards protecting paddocks by setting groundcover targets, selecting sacrifice paddocks, building confinement pens and considering feed budgets early in the dry season.

‘Bang for buck’ supplementary feeding

Understanding nutritional requirements, testing feed quality and monitoring animal condition can help producers make good feed budgeting decisions.

Condition scoring is an estimate of body fat reserves in livestock to check that supplementation programs are achieving their aim and ensure that animals are fit for reproduction or meeting production targets. Jeisane Accioly from Accioly Livestock Industries Services and coordinator of the Grazing Matcher Program described condition targets for calving animals at one of the Program meetings.



Jeisane Accioly explaining animal condition scoring at a Grazing Matcher group meeting in Kirup.

“Calvers should be between a [condition score](#) of 2.5 and 3.5 (on a scale of 1–5) to ensure they can cope with early lactation demands and resume cycling in time to produce another calf next season,” Jeisane said.

“For younger breeders, aim a bit higher, between 3 to 3.5, because they are still growing themselves so need to be in better condition. But we need to avoid calving at a condition score above 3.5 because this can cause calving problems.”

After calving when cows begin lactating, nutritional requirements in terms of both feed quality and quantity increase drastically. Cows will take a couple of weeks to adjust their appetite to new feed requirements so will lose condition initially, emphasizing the importance of achieving the target condition before calving. Feed requirements drop in late lactation.

Other stock vary in their feed requirements, providing managers with options to allocate different quality feeds to different animals.

“Weaners have a high requirement for energy and protein if growth is required. However, weaners in maintenance or dry cows need comparatively less energy and protein, so are more suited to lower quality feeds.

“One should however ensure young stock don’t go through long periods of growth check as this may compromise future production.”

With an understanding of stock requirements for feed, attention turns to the quality and quantity of feed on hand to identify possible deficits and either source complementary feed or sell stock before they lose condition. This requires a good understanding of feed quality.

“The quality of feed can vary widely between different feedstocks such as dry standing pasture, hay, silage and grain. Knowing the [quality of all feed sources](#) enables better calculations of feed budgets, but quality can even vary between different sources of the same feedstock. To get the best understanding of feed quality we need to get it tested,” she said.

The key [variables](#) to look at from tests are:

- Metabolisable Energy (ME), which is used by microbes in the animal's gut to repackage protein into a useable form. This is often considered the most limiting factor, because without energy, a high protein ration can't be properly utilised by the animal. Getting the energy right is often the first consideration in a feed budget. High ME indicates high digestibility.
- Crude Protein (CP) is considered the building blocks for animal meat and milk, with more required as production targets increase.
- Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF), which is basically the structure of the plant that holds it together. NDF increases at seed set, reducing the quality and digestibility of pasture. However, some fibre is needed in their diet.

Once producers know the feed quality, they can allocate depending on the class of animal and growth rate requirement. However, the problem is that lower quality feed is harder to digest.

"Low digestibility means the feed is processed slowly, and animals feel full which inhibits appetite. In this situation there is a risk that they won't eat enough to meet daily protein and energy targets, resulting in weight loss," Jeisane said.

"Animals typically take in 1–3 percent of their liveweight in feed daily, with intake increasing with feed quality, so if you have low quality feed, you can't necessarily just feed more of it. It may need to be complemented with a higher quality feed.

"The other thing that limits intake is space in the abdominal cavity, so at late gestation the animal will have less physical space available. They can't eat as much and need a higher quality feed to meet daily nutritional requirements."

Another important consideration in allocating feed is to take moisture content into account when feed budgeting. Feed budgets typically use dry matter as the unit of measurement, but feed like hay and silage contain moisture. If your hay is 80% dry matter and 20% moisture, feeding out one ton means you have only fed out 800 kg of dry matter.

To complement feed budgeting, animal condition and weight should be monitored to ensure adequate nutrition is being provided or whether feed can be reduced. This is essential because it is difficult to predict how much individual animals will take in and how they respond to it.

“Without monitoring you may find that animals are not eating as much as you expect, or they may be getting more nutrition than required and can have their nutrition reduced.”

Jeisane also advised producers to vaccinate animals (and give a booster) with 5 in 1 (or 7 in 1) prior to starting supplementation, especially if grain-feeding is likely.

How well does your pasture meet livestock feed requirements?

Supplementary feeding of livestock is a costly but necessary part of farming in Western Australia. To get the best return on supplement, farmers need to understand nutritional requirements for livestock and what components can be filled by pasture at different times of the year so they can plug seasonal gaps with the most appropriate feed.

Animal needs and pasture components were discussed by livestock specialist Jeisane Accioly at the first meeting of the 2020 Grazing Matcher™ group south of Bridgetown.

Jeisane said the first step to understanding how well your pasture was meeting the needs of livestock was to estimate dry matter requirements for different livestock classes.

"The amount of dry matter they need to eat each day is anywhere between 1.5 percent and 4 percent of their liveweight depending on the class of stock and the quality of feed," Jeisane said.

To convert dry matter requirements into kilograms of feed, Jeisane said producers needed to consider how dry matter content of pasture changes throughout the year.



Jeisane Accioly speaking at the Grazing Matcher meeting held south of Bridgetown.

“From the break of season to early spring, pasture is usually about 80–90 percent water and 10–20 percent dry matter. So, assuming 10 percent dry matter, a kilo of pasture will only contain 100 grams of dry matter and the rest will be water.”

Jeisane compared it to eating watermelon, suggesting they would need to eat a lot of melon to satisfy nutritional requirements. Hence, we often see animals eating well into the night in winter, which is a good indication they are hungry. Livestock tend to lose condition during this period if they aren't supplemented.

However, before supplementing with hay or silage, it's good to know what component the pasture is lacking. In winter the answer is most likely to be fibre.

“Ruminants need fibre to digest properly. Increasing fibre intake during periods of lush pasture by supplementing with hay, or even straw, slows down the digestion and helps the animal use the other nutrients (energy and protein) that are usually high at these times. You can see whether they have

enough fibre by monitoring their faeces. If it's too watery or they have a wet bum they will need more fibre," Jeisane said.

"Animals usually know how to balance their diet, so if you have hay or straw in the paddock and they need fibre, they usually "self-medicate" and eat what they need."

As dry matter increases through the season, so does fibre in the pasture, so animals will stop eating the extra roughage offered. However, in some cold and wet years they might need fibre through to late August. Continued monitoring of behaviour, body condition and faeces will help assess when you can stop feeding out fibre.

In spring, pasture has a reasonable balance between fibre, energy and protein and can meet animal requirements without any supplementation. However, this period of balance is often short, perhaps only a few weeks.

In late spring or early summer when plants go to flower, a marked drop in energy and protein and an increase in fibre occurs. This change can happen very quickly and affect the quality of conserved fodder. This trend continues into summer and autumn, when dry pasture has plenty of fibre but is lower in energy and protein.

At these times, fibre content in pasture can be a major barrier to nutrition.

"In summer, high fibre content in pasture makes it harder to digest so animals get full and you will see them stop eating. However, because the pasture is low in energy and protein, they often stop eating before they have satisfied nutritional requirements," Jeisane said.

"Digestion actually uses up energy which further diminishes energy available for production and can lead to weight loss. This also explains why poor-quality hay (low in energy and protein) is often left uneaten in summer and autumn.

"So, during the summer-autumn period, supplements need to be high in energy and protein, such as pellets and grains. Again, monitoring body condition and weight helps to check whether you've got the balance right."

The correct supplement would make livestock utilise dry, low quality pasture better and help them hold condition. Given the variation in supplementary feed quality, it makes sense to have it feed-tested to ensure you are meeting animal requirements and not wasting your money.

To understand how much energy and protein animals need depends on the class of stock.

“Lactating females typically require considerably more energy and protein compared to a dry cow or bull, especially if they need to be in good condition to re-join or they are already pregnant. Weaners that need to be finished also need relatively good nutrition. There are minimum requirements published for different classes,” she said.

In summary, pasture dry matter needs to be monitored to estimate whether livestock have enough feed to maintain condition. Then, to fine-tune estimates, producers need to consider the amount of protein, energy and fibre in the feed and understand that there is a narrow window usually in mid to late spring when all three are satisfied and supplementation will not be required.

At other times of the year, you will almost always need to supplement with something: either fibre in winter or energy and protein in summer and autumn.

After estimates and calculations have been made, it's best to monitor animal condition, liveweight, faeces and behaviour, and adapt supplementation where required.

For more information on feed requirements for different animal classes, see Agriculture [Victoria's Feeding Livestock webpage](#).

Grazing Matcher improves pasture utilisation

Bridgetown beef producers Ann Harris and Graeme Fazey have wanted to implement rotational grazing for a long time. However, it was only after joining a Grazing Matcher™ group in 2020 that they gained the knowledge and tools to motivate a change.

The Grazing Matcher™ program supports beef and sheep producers to improve grazing, ground cover, fodder and feed decisions for increased productivity and efficiency.

Ann said the program has improved their pasture utilisation.

“Our pastures are very much mixed capeweed, flatweed, ryegrass and clover. Normally, the cows will leave the weeds and overgraze the good plants, which don’t recover.

“After joining the program, we decided to make our paddocks smaller (with a single electric wire) to increase the numbers per hectare and move them more frequently to avoid grazing pasture below 4–6 centimetres.”

With less space, the cows ate all plants evenly and preferred species were more competitive.

“We were able to keep our cows in better condition compared to previous years because we grew more pasture and they ate more, even with the capeweed. The feed got ahead of the cattle and we actually had some time off!”



Graeme Fazey and Ann Harris practice condition scoring at a Grazing Matcher meeting near Busselton, assisted by coordinator Jeisane Accioly.

The better utilisation and growth means Ann and Graeme can increase stocking rates without putting environmental pressure on their land or sacrificing animal condition.

The program has also highlighted the benefits of feed testing and understanding their animals' nutritional needs.

"I'd never done feed testing because you typically know whether hay is good or bad. But I never realised that 'good' oaten hay can still be relatively low quality," Ann said.

"Also, it was a massive eye-opener comparing feeds and seeing how one with higher protein might be worse for the cow if it has a higher fibre content."

Growing with Grazing Matcher

Rosa Glen sheep producer Kevin Silverthorne can't help but feel a bit proud as he watches his daughter Kylie grow as a farmer. He attributes at least some of her development to the 12-month Grazing Matcher™ program that both Kylie and Kevin did together in 2020.

"It's made Kylie more interested in farming and the nitty gritty of rotational grazing," Kevin said.

"It's really good to see the younger generation taking it on. The subscription fee (for two people per business) is nothing compared to what she gets out of it."

Kylie is already seeing benefits from the program with a reduction in worm egg counts, which she has monitored since buying a microscope in March.

"Since starting rotational grazing we've noticed less worms because the grass is only eaten down to 4–6 cm. The worms don't travel up that far, so they don't pick up enough worms for drenching which is really good, especially because we were seeing resistance to the drench," Kylie said.

"Also, we're resting paddocks, so it allows the grass to regrow, and I've grown more grass because they haven't eaten it too low."

Kylie says the Grazing Matcher™ program, delivered by livestock consultant Jeisane Accioly and agronomist Dan Parnell, had shown her how to set up a rotational grazing plan, target and monitor ewe condition, and much more.

However, the opportunity to network with other businesses taking part in the program was just as beneficial.

"It's been really interesting going around to other people's farms as well and getting their insight and seeing what they're doing. That motivates you to make changes,' she said.

Kevin agreed: "Just going along and talking to other farmers and seeing what they do. Everyone's adapting and doing it a little bit differently."

"It's made a massive impact. And we've only just touched on it this year," Kylie said.

[Watch the video](#) to hear more from Kylie and Kevin.



Kylie (right) and Kevin Silverthorne (centre, back to camera) learning about condition scoring ewes at their Rosa Glen property.

Matching stocking rate to carrying capacity

Optimising your stocking rate is closely linked to profitability because it helps to utilise feed on offer without exceeding the land's carrying capacity or relying too heavily on imported feed. Stocking rate is a key indicator promoted by the Grazing Matcher™ Program, which supports livestock enterprises in the South West and on the South Coast.

Calculating stocking rate doesn't sound too complicated until you realise that energy requirements, and therefore feed demand, varies throughout the year depending on the animal class and stage of reproduction. To help standardise "stocking rate", numbers are converted to a Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE), which is the maintenance energy requirements for a dry 50-kilogram merino wether (or 45 kg wether in some low rainfall publications).

For example, a 50 kg ewe in late pregnancy (single bearing) need more energy than a dry wether and have a feed demand equivalent to 1.3 dry sheep.

Alternatively, a cow with a body weight of 500 kg and also in late lactation is equivalent to 21.5 DSE.

These conversions can be easily done with a stocking rate calculator that converts different animals into an annual and monthly DSE figure per hectare.

Grazing Matcher™ co-facilitator Dan Parnell says measuring DSE gives producers an idea of their productivity and the energy they're harvesting from their farm.

“DSE is really a measurement of energy. One DSE will need about 8.1–8.7 MJ of energy per day,” Dan said.

“That is how much energy producers need to provide. So, if we estimate the average energy of a pasture, we can see how much pasture is being utilised per hectare, or how much needs to be made available.

“I like to do these calculations because it helps me understand where a business is at. So, if they want to make some changes to either grow more pasture or run more stock, you can see how that might play out.

“A business with a relatively low DSE with surplus feed and surplus forage in most years should be able to support a higher stocking rate in most years. However, if they don’t have a lot of surplus forage with their current stocking rate but want to lift numbers, they need to figure out how they will achieve that.

“Once you understand your numbers you have a baseline to work from. So, if you want to run more numbers, how much extra pasture do you need to grow and utilise? That guides management. If it doesn’t mean providing much more feed, then it’s not too hard, whereas if it’s a big change you might be more wary.

“Maybe you can grow more by getting a good rotational grazing system in place, control weeds better or sow new varieties or species. So, it gives that context and confidence.”

Another benefit is to compare your DSE with costs.

“When managers invest to improve a pasture composition, they also tend to spend money on other things like weed control, lime and more fertiliser, which can increase pasture yield and quality but also adds to costs, so they need a relatively higher stocking rate to make a profit from this investment,” he said.

“Optimising DSE is a big profit driver for most farms. The tipping point is where you have such high stocking rates that you’re having to utilise more imported feed, which is more expensive compared to home-grown pasture. It’s

generally the businesses with a higher stocking rate, but where energy demands are met by home-grown pasture, that are most profitable.”

One manager involved in the Grazing Matcher™ program is Brendon Giudici who farms east of Donnybrook. He has found value in calculating his stocking rate since being introduced to the tool.



Dan Parnell with Brendon Giudici at Brendon’s farm east of Donnybrook.

“Before I started using the DSE calculator I knew how many sheep I ran per hectare, but not the nutritional demand, which is where DSE comes into it,” Brendon said.

“The big thing is working backwards to work out what pasture you need to provide to carry what you’re trying to run.

“I found it good to quantify your total operation and analyse what different lease blocks provide. Some blocks might have lower DSE but also lower cost. It’s good to be able to measure that and consider your management options such as time of lambing and pellet or lupin inputs.

“I used it to run scenarios such as adding extra weaners to see how it changed DSE – will we have enough energy, or do we need to drop a few animals on a hard year, how much does it actually change things?

“I might look at doing DSE graze days on certain paddocks, then break down what certain pasture species are doing.”

Stocking rate calculators are available online, including on the Evergraze website, linked [here](#).

Grazing Program supporting real change from producers

Feedback from farmers completing Grazing Matcher™ has shown just how valuable the program is at improving grazing management for productivity and environmental benefits.



*The 2021 Group at their final meeting in Lowden.
Peter Clifton (left) and Jeisane Accioly (centre).*

After meeting with consultants seven times within 12 months, a group of South West farmers attended their eighth and final Grazing Matcher™ meeting in Lowden where they discussed what they had changed and their plans for the future.

Michelle and Ole` McCully from Glen Mervyn changed from set stocking to rotational grazing in 2021 and saw benefits in cattle condition and behaviour.

"Eighteen months ago, our stockman would tell me I had to push the cattle," Michelle said.

"Now they just move. That's been the big thing for us and it's because of rotational grazing. They are a lot calmer.

"They are in good condition. Droughtmasters sometimes are a little bit light on, but they are looking good. When the vet came to preg-test for us, she was just like 'Oh look at that one, has that one got calf at foot? Gee!'"

Michelle and Ole` have been splitting paddocks with a hotwire to give them nine paddocks.

"The hotwires have been a godsend and something new that we've implemented," Michelle said.

"And it's helped us better utilise what pasture we've got."

Following recommendations aimed at maximising pasture growth, they have been limiting grazing on each paddock to three days when pasture is growing and then aiming to rest paddocks until tillers have regrown 2-3 leaves. Having nine paddocks means they can rest paddocks for 30 days, enough time to regrow 2-3 leaves for most of the year except in the depths of winter when leaf emergence is slowest.

Extending rest periods has made a big difference for fellow Glen Mervyn farmers Brendan and Robert Giudici.

"We were doing rotational grazing before, but not for long enough," Brendan said.

"We were doing 21 days. Whereas leaving it those extra days (up to 35) has been really, really big. And if you do break the rules, you can tell when you get back to that paddock.

“Understanding the growth cycle, you can quantify how much more you are getting by sticking to the rules.”

Having a few more paddocks can help extend the rest time or slow the rotation speed in winter without grazing paddocks for more than three days, as Ferguson producer Will Poot found.

“I was pretty lucky because the people who owned the property before me were involved in the Grazing Matcher course (in 2018) and had done a fair bit of division around the farm. I think I am up to 13 paddocks, so was pushing out to a 35-day rotation,” he said.

“The big thing I have observed is, if you don’t put enough pressure in the areas you want to put pressure on, then the wrong things grow. Then if you get it right, the right things grow and you can do a lot without chemicals.”

The program recommends that pasture is grazed down to a height of 4–6 cm to maximise utilisation without stunting plant recovery and growth.

Hosts for the day – Amanda Forrest and her father Lindsay – were already rotating stock through paddocks, but the program emphasized the necessity of a proper rotation based on growth cues mentioned above.

For the next year they planned to defer grazing early in the season to help pasture establishment.

“We haven’t really done that before which should really help everything get away,” Amanda said.

“We will definitely do it this autumn, putting stock into a sacrifice paddock that we’re going to reseed later.”

Like Amanda, other producers involved have been prompted by the program to make plans for the next year and beyond, such as designing and implementing fencing plans, doing more feed testing, making more silage or just improving how they implement rotational grazing.

The motivation to make changes is not just driven by the program, but also the regular interaction with other farmers.

“For me, being in a group and meeting more faces in the area was definitely a benefit,” Amanda said.

“It has been nice to pick people’s brains.”

Will Poot, who grew up in the Wheatbelt and has only recently returned to farming agrees.

“Meeting everyone else and chatting about things, that’s the biggest benefit for me being new to this style of farming. I had never run cattle before so I had a lot to learn,” he said.

While the program has finished, producers have built relationships over 12 months and will stay in touch with each other and consultants on WhatsApp, creating an ongoing legacy from the program.

To learn more about rotational grazing ryegrass pastures, click [here](#).

The Grazing Matcher program has been supported since 2017 by South West NRM through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program, and Western Beef Association Inc. Meat & Livestock Australia’s Profitable Grazing Systems program also supported the program in 2018 and since 2021. Also since 2021, the program has received funding from Healthy Estuaries WA, a State Government Program to run additional groups with support from local NRM groups Geocatch, Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee, Oyster Harbour Catchment Group and Peel-Harvey Catchment Council.

