

Southern Soils FERTILISER

A BALANCED APPROACH



Summer 19/20 Newsletter

Peter Ham

At this time of the year it is important to reflect on the year we've had. It was a tough autumn for many, with the eventual break coming for most of us in mid-late May. Since then we have had ideal growing conditions and a spring that has kept going, reminiscent of 'the springs we used to get'.

Those that have stuck to their guns, still sown pastures, fertilised, fed stock as required and managed to the conditions are now really well placed to capitalise on a great finish to the year. With livestock markets buoyant and grain prices still good, we look to be finishing off 2019 with another financially rewarding year, as well as livestock in good condition and fodder reserves replenished as we head into 2020.

It has been really rewarding working with many of our clients who continually demonstrate to me that you get out what you put in and those that continually make good educated decisions are continually rewarded. Particularly with the way land and stock prices continue to climb, it is essential to make every post a winner and ensure that your farms and business continue to grow and be productive entities.

We expect 2020 to be another big year for Southern Soils with continued growth and a busy, busy autumn period. Our aim is as always to deliver excellent value for money to our clients in order to help them run really successful, sustainable and profitable businesses.

Most of us will have some time off during the holiday season, but we will be in contact early in the new year as planning and preparation go a long way to successful outcomes. We envisage the autumn spreading period to be hectic as always and will be encouraging clients to take advantage of early deals and complete whatever operations they can early.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our clients for their support this year on behalf of myself and the rest of our team. I hope that everyone is able to take the chance to take some time off, relax and celebrate with their families and friends, before we do it all again next year.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Peter Ham
General Manager
Southern Soils Fertiliser



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THE MUST DO'S FOR SUCCESSFUL PHALARIS ESTABLISHMENT

Peter Ham

Establishing a Phalaris based pasture, is not difficult, but does require following some key steps to ensure success. Initially Phalaris is much slower to establish than perennial ryegrass, as it lacks seedling vigor making it more susceptible to pest attack and competition from annual grasses. I find in most situations it is not until late September/Early October in year 1, that there is any grazing value from a newly sown Phalaris paddock (see photos below).

However, once established and when done well, it more than makes up for its slow start and is fast becoming the preferred perennial pasture choice in Southern Victoria. It is a highly productive, genuinely persistent and flexible plant that drives pasture-based livestock systems in a variety of climates and soil types.

Plenty of time, effort and money is spent in the process of pasture establishment, too often we are back to square one in 2-3 years' time because of lack of preparation, so it is crucial to do it well or not do it at all.

1) Preparation and Monitoring

- Preparation needs to begin at least 18-24 months prior to sowing. Pick a suitable paddock, address the fertility requirements, weed issues, soil constraints and potential pests so that it is in good shape by the time you come to sowing.
- Once sown, monitor closely particularly through the first 2-3 months of establishment.

Late August



The photos in this article as above and on the next page show a new Phalaris and clover pasture sown in late May 2019 north of Caramut. Sown with 4kg/Ha Holdfast GT Phalaris, 9kg/Ha Balansa clover and 0.5kg/Ha Hard seeded Persian clover.

2) Soil fertility

- Most cultivars of Phalaris are very sensitive to acidic soil conditions. Particularly in the establishment phase roots can be severely restricted by high aluminum levels.
- An added benefit of correcting soil pH, in conjunction with balancing levels of calcium and magnesium, is increased soil biological activity and nutrient availability. Many clovers will grow at lower pH levels, but their ability to fix nitrogen through rhizobium is very limited in acidic soils.
- Without functioning clover nodules in our perennial pasture, nitrogen fixation is severely reduced and grass production reduces as well.
- Remember soil fertility is more than just Phosphorus, address sulfur, Calcium, Magnesium, Potassium and trace minerals including Copper, Moly and Zinc to ensure establishment, persistence and performance are not compromised.

3) Seed Bed Preparation

- With Phalaris having low seedling vigor, seed bed preparation becomes even more important than when establishing ryegrass. If a paddock needs to be cultivated and leveled, this is best done during the preparation phase.
- I find the best way to prepare for Phalaris establishment is after 1 or 2 years of summer fodder cropping. If cultivation needs to be done, the bulk of this can be done in this phase, removing old dry trash and other impediments.
- Phalaris is a small seed and should be sown no deeper than 20mm, ideally sown at 10-15mm.

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4) Competition.

- A clean seed bed is essential when trying to establish a good phalaris paddock. This is more than simply doing a knockdown in the autumn before sowing, as a rule a minimum of 2 spring knockdowns should take place prior to sowing.
- It is essential to get good annual grass control including barley grass, silver grass, brome grass and ryegrass prior to planting phalaris, as these grasses cannot be controlled in the establishment phase of Phalaris.
- Broadleaf weeds should also be controlled, however unlike the above grasses, weeds such as capeweed and wild radish can be controlled in the establishment year.

Late September



5) Pest control

- The best pest control comes from good preparation. Healthy, vigorous seedlings in a good seed bed with adequate fertility regularly have less pest attack than poor seedlings which are struggling to grow. A healthy vigorous seedling is also able to grow through and withstand insect pressure far greater than a poor seedling.
- Having said that slugs, Red Legged Earth Mite, Lucerne Flea and a range of pests can cause havoc at establishment.
- Slugs are routinely worse in direct drilled paddocks, but can still cause trouble in cultivated paddocks. Often slug pressure comes in from the sides of the paddock. Slugs can cause catastrophic damage; this is one pest that I would rather see baited at sowing in nearly all cases rather than leaving to chance.
- If you can monitor closely and avoid spraying unless necessary this is best, as this will encourage beneficial insects that help control the pests. However, if the paddock can't be monitored or there is an insect problem present, a preventative spray can be best.
- Consider insecticide treating seed as a preventative, this is softer on beneficial insects and can be quite cost effective.

Mid October



In Summary, Phalaris is a wonderful plant that fits our grazing systems really well, do the right thing by the plant in establishment and it will repay you over and over for years to come.

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COMPOST APPLICATIONS – MORE TO IT THAN JUST CARBON

DANIEL HILL

It has been well publicised that soil organic matter (SOM) and soil organic carbon (SOC) are vital in our agricultural systems for storing soil moisture, feeding microbial populations as well as storing and cycling plant nutrients. A question we get asked regularly is “should we be applying compost to our pastures or crops”. Like most things in agriculture, the answer is not always simple, it depends on what you are trying to achieve and what your soil is lacking. Is your soil depleted of nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulphur and traces or does it need a lift in microbial activity and soil carbon? To answer that properly we need to dig a little deeper!

Stored SOC levels, are influenced by annual rainfall, dry matter production, soil drainage, soil type, soil fertility and farming practices, i.e. grazing v cropping, no-till vs conventional tillage and annual vs perennial pasture. For grazing enterprises in a high rainfall zone like SW VIC, SOC levels are rarely a limiting factor, however without adequate soil fertility and microbial populations, nutrient cycling and soil structure can be poor.

In SW VIC, we regularly observe SOC levels in the 2.5% to 6.0% range, whilst there can be benefits in lifting this further, these levels are typically more than adequate for optimal production. However, plant nutrients, such as phosphorus, calcium, potassium and sulphur are regularly limiting production. In contrast to this, for some of our clients in the horticultural areas of Northern VIC and SA, SOC levels can be very low in the range of 0.5% to 1.2%. Often in those same areas, soil nutrient levels are ideal to elevated due to high applications over many years.

It certainly isn't a case of one size fits all! We need to ensure that the desired production outcomes are understood and the correct inputs are prescribed accordingly.

A good product used in the wrong situation, renders it ineffective and expensive.

In general terms, a grazing operation in a higher rainfall zone will require a mix of nutrients, address soil structural problems and often a microbial boost. A manure-based compost can be a good option in this situation, often mixed with lime, dolomite or gypsum for additional calcium, magnesium and sulphur depending on your soils needs. Manure based composts typically contain good levels of plant available macro nutrients, micro nutrients and microbials.

For a soil with adequate nutrient levels, but very low SOC levels, like the horticultural soils in northern VIC, a green-waste based compost, applied at high rates, that is high in carbon, but low in nutrient levels is generally a better option.

We are finding that there are more growers applying and interested in compost applications, ranging from graziers to vineyard operators. As always, start with a soil test and paddock inspection to understand what the limiting factors are, and then look at what product or combination of products are best suited to address your soils needs.



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RHYNIE PASTORAL FIELD DAY

DANIEL HILL

In October this year Pete, myself and a number of our clients attended a field day at Jack and Celia Tucker's property 'Rhynie Pastoral', Willaura North. The day was facilitated by Nic Kentish from Resource Consulting Services and looked at Jack and Celia's decision to move away from high intensity cropping to managed grazing and regenerative farming principles.

The morning session provided a history of the property and farming business, and a great discussion on Jack & Celia's reasons for the change in farming practice.



Nick Kentish from Resource Consulting Services discussing the benefits of maintaining 100% ground cover 100% of the time at the Rhynie Pastoral Field Day.

Whilst the discussion covered a large number of topics, the key take home messages included the following;

- Aim to establish a diverse pasture mix suited to the local climatic conditions and soil characteristics, including both perennial and annual species. In Jack and Celia's case this included phalaris, cocksfoot, fescue, sub clover, Lucerne and herbs.
- Changing the grazing regime to establish larger mobs, smaller paddocks, much shorter grazing periods and long rest periods for each paddock.
- Ensuring ground cover is maintained throughout the year, '100% groundcover – 100% of the time', to protect the soil.
- Transitioning from high input synthetic fertilisers, to a more balanced fertiliser approach, supplying a broad range of nutrients to support plant growth, address soil physical constraints as well as encourage beneficial soil micro-organisms.

After lunch we had the opportunity to complete a paddock walk, starting in one of the new perennial pasture paddocks. Jack described the establishment process of the new pasture, what he had learnt this year and what he would do differently next year and also how the new pasture had been grazed this season.

The area planted to new pasture this year received a custom broadcast application of BioAgPhos, gypsum, and trace elements. It was speed tilled prior to sowing to level it out and provide a nice seed bed. It received a knock down herbicide after the autumn break and was planted with a low rate of MAP (pop-up fertiliser), as well as receiving a seed treatment of 'Soil & Seed'.

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Left - Dorper sheep grazing at Rhynie Pastoral

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Above - Rynie Pastoral's multi species cropping mix of barley, lupins and canola – "Barlupinola"

In the next paddock we looked at an example of 'Inter-cropping' or 'Multi species cropping'. This was a mix of barley, lupins and canola, or as it was creatively termed by Jack "Barlupinola". The really positive aspect of this concept was there had been no in crop herbicide, no fungicide or insecticide treatments and yet was free from disease and insect attack. There was clearly a synergistic affect between the species working here to benefit the overall condition and health of the soil and plants.

The last area we looked at was a native wildlife reserve that Jack & Celia had set up several years ago. The area is fenced to keep out pest animals like feral cats and foxes, is monitored closely with cameras, and it is also periodically grazed by sheep. Jack and Celia described how and why they had established the area, as well as what they have observed in terms of native vegetation establishment and an increase in native animal population, including bandicoots and native swamp rats.

We would like to thank Jack and Celia Tucker, as well as Nic Kentish from Resource Consulting Services, for making your farm available and putting on the day. From the number of attendees and the discussion throughout the day, it is fair to say that the day was a great success.



Above - Rhyne Pastoral, grazed in the foreground, ungrazed in the background



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Follow us on Facebook & Twitter to keep up to date with our current promotions, happenings with the team and our clients.

If you have photos you would be happy for us to post with a few words describing the photo that would be great, email to admin@southernsoils.com.au or text to 0409 427 963.

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November - January

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**DEFERRED PAYMENT
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To place your
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Daniel Hill -
0409 858 346
Office -
1300 11 81 81



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Spread in January/February 2020

- 3% off total job with full payment by 31st March 2020
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- 1.5% off total job with full payment by 31st January 2020
- & extra 1% discount if pre-paid by 31st January 2020
- & extra 1% discount on orders over 100t (BioBlend 250t)

Orders must be placed by 14th February 2020 with immediate spreading

The Southern Soils Fertiliser team would like to wish all our clients Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous 2020.

Hamilton Depot Festive Season Operating Hours

Tuesday 24 th December	7am-12.30pm	Monday 30 th December	Open
Wednesday 25 th December	Closed	Tuesday 31 st December	Open
Thursday 26 th December	Closed	Wednesday 1 st January	Closed
Friday 27 th December	Open	Thursday 2 nd January	Open

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