



Plan for your pasture establishment

Successful pasture establishment starts with planning, according to Lee Menhenett and Jim Laycock, Incitec Pivot Fertilisers' technical agronomists. Plan for your next new pasture with these tips.

Productive pastures drive productive enterprises and often that means establishing new pastures that will support your growth objectives.

Planning is critical to the success of new pasture establishment.

Paddocks may need to be managed a year or two prior to the establishment of new pastures to control weeds and set up fertility so that the new stand will thrive.

The following checklist covers off the major points to consider.

Paddock selection

- A paddock-by-paddock approach is best, as no two paddocks are the same.
- A comprehensive soil test will show whether soil fertility levels need to be improved. Phosphorus, sulphur and pH levels often need attention.
- When planning to plant deep-rooted perennial pastures, such as phalaris, cocksfoot or lucerne, it is a good idea to undertake a segmented deep soil test to determine if there are any sub soil limitations or constraints that may inhibit root exploration.

Paddock preparation

- Summer weed control is very important in conserving soil moisture and also nitrogen.
- Run dry stock over the paddock to remove dry, low quality trash from the previous season's pasture.
- Lime and/or gypsum should be broadcast and incorporated two to three months prior to sowing if required.
- Phosphorus is critical for the root development of seedlings. Apply the required rate of phosphorus at or prior to sowing, placed with or slightly below the seed. Banding is more critical in low phosphorus fertility soils or with late autumn plantings.



Sowing

- Ensure that cultivated paddocks are even, have a good tilth and that the seedbed is firm.
- Paddocks being direct drilled should also be level and clear of excessive trash.
- Sow seed into a fine, firm, seedbed at 10 mm depth. Press wheels or a roller are often useful for improving the seed-soil contact and getting the pasture up quickly and evenly.
- Use the right fertiliser and rate at sowing. Ready access to nitrogen and phosphorus will ensure rapid and vigorous early growth. Never sow more than 15 kg N/ha with the seed in a direct drill application. Granulock® SS is a good N:P:S starter fertiliser to place with or near the seed, as it promotes the healthy growth and function of legumes. SuPerfect® also provides a good ratio of P:S for establishing pastures.

Monitoring the paddock after sowing

- Frequently monitor newly sown pastures for weed and insect pests. Controlling weeds early requires fewer chemicals, is more effective and often has less impact on the sown pasture. Insect pests can decimate an emerging pasture – prompt action prevents significant plant losses and loss of production.
- Monitoring nitrogen deficiencies during establishment is critical. Look for stunted, pale green/yellow leaves and correct with a nitrogen application as soon as detected. Potential yields will be affected if the pasture slips into a nitrogen deficient situation.
- Nitrogen deficiencies may be more pronounced on ploughed paddocks, particularly if large amounts of trash have been incorporated.

First grazing

- The first grazing should be when the seedling has anchored in the soil and won't pull (typically 6-8 weeks post emergence). The first grazing should be light to encourage tillering and stock should only be introduced to the paddock when pugging will be minimal.
- Following the first grazing, apply 30-60 kg/ha of nitrogen to promote quick recovery and encourage further tillering of the plants.
- Use leaf tissue testing prior to the next grazing to fine-tune the fertiliser program (particularly for micronutrients).



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