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Proof and supporting sites for integrating R , D&E in grazing systems research

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Introduction The high rainfall ($> 600\text{mm pa}$) zones of southern Australia urgently need new perennial-based grazing systems-systems that simultaneously improve landscape health and increase profitability compared to traditional livestock enterprises . This paper describes the planning processes that underpinned the expansion of the EverGraze Project for Australian Wool Innovation , Meat & Livestock Australia and the Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre .

The original EverGraze project commenced in 2005 at three large , systems-based research sites . These sites used highly productive perennial pastures and livestock to achieve a 50% increase in profit , and 50% reduction in groundwater recharge , compared to current best practice . Only a proportion of the grazing land in southern Australia is suited to high input , sown exotic pasture systems with the remainder better (or only) suited to lower input pastures , often dominated by native species .

Planning methods The approach taken to enable the project expand its relevance to a wider sector of the livestock grazing industries included :

Extensive review of the scientific literature and development of a Directions Paper to guide the expansion into native based pasture systems .

National native pastures workshop to bring together the experience of key researchers , specialist extension agents , land management agencies and livestock farmers .

Series of regional native pasture consultation workshops where livestock farmers had input and called for more knowledge and understanding about native pastures with particular reference to : achieving a balance between pastures dominated by native species versus introduced species ; fertiliser application ; grazing management ; and fencing to land capability . They also wanted the research to be more locally believable and applicable .

Discussion The planning team developed the concept of Proof sites and Supporting sites as the basic units of R , D&E activity .

Proof sites (or intensive research sites as the word Proof implies) , must be benchmarked and monitored in detail-any changes must be quantified and verifiable with appropriate statistical analysis and peer review . The improvements at Proof sites are to be achieved from the implementation of technologies and management options that combine increased dry matter production , and/or better pasture utilisation , and/or improved management , and/or integration with other forage production systems to meet both profit and resource management goals .

Supporting sites are local trials or demonstrations where farmer groups implement a sub-set of the pasture and grazing management technologies being applied at the Proof sites , to demonstrate their impact on increasing productivity , profitability and better land management outcomes within commercial farming operations . That is , farmers showing other farmers what can be achieved and demonstrating the scale of improvement that is possible at farmer initiated research sites .

To achieve integration , the Proof sites are the hubs to which the Supporting sites are linked and farmer groups test and demonstrate local applicability , practicality and ability to deliver within commercial livestock farming operations .

To provide the potential for dramatic increases in possible impact , the Proof and Supporting sites concept was combined with the following features :

- 1 .Ambitious practice-change targets for simultaneously increasing profit and whole-farm natural resource management effects that provide the basis for collaboration between national , state and local funders ;
- 2 .The integration of exotic perennial and native based pasture systems to provide a focus on whole of farm benefits ;
- 3 .Assisting farmers to develop the capability to integrate component research and different pasture systems into whole farm business management to improve profitability , manage risks , and contribute to landscape management targets .

Further information about EverGraze A quarterly EverGraze e-newsletter is available by contacting Simone Heather *simone.heather@dpi.vic.gov.au* .