Say cheese! Tall wheat grass and dairying still a prize combination

Case study: Ken Shone
Location: Beeac, Victoria
Property Size: 220 ha
Rainfall: 550 mm per annum
Enterprises: Dryland dairy milking 210 cows, Jersey, Friesian and cross

By Jo Curkpatrick

It is just two years since *SALT* magazine profiled dairy farmer Ken Shone at Beeac in Victoria – and in that time his pastures have just got better and better.

Using tall wheat grass on salt-affected ground as a base to feed his herd of Friesian and Jersey milkers, Ken has achieved outstanding results.

"In August 2003 the *Australian Holstein Journal* had our Friesians at number three in Australia under the Australian Standards Index," says Ken.

"The Index is a reflection of production and these results show that we are achieving growth in production from our herd."

When last visited, Ken Shone still had some salt-affected areas across his farm, but today, thanks to his intensively managed pasture system, salinity is getting harder to find.

Working with his share farmer Kirk Bella, Ken's pastures are providing good cover and the production necessary to run over 200 milking cows on the property.

"You can't see the bare salinity-affected areas that were there before and our results show that you can grow grass around here, particularly if you manage it right," says Ken. "Our pastures are a mixture of tall wheat grass, ryegrass, fescue, Balansa and Kyambra clover. They are grazed on a 24 day rotation across six to 10-hectare paddocks. The paddocks are direct drilled and we graze our milkers on first year pastures.

"During the year we make a couple of applications of fertiliser. We start with DAP sulphur giving 18 units of phosphorus and 10 of sulphur in March/April at 95 kilograms per hectare. We also apply 150 kg/ha of pasture booster and add 150 kg/ha of urea, which provides a hundred units of nitrogen. Round silage bales in plastic are also made and fed out from March onwards."

Ken remains convinced that the key to productive pastures lies as much in how they are managed as it does in the species used.

He aims to keep the tall wheat grass well grazed to avoid the clumpy, tussocky growth it is often criticised for and if it starts to get away he will take the mower or mulcher to it.

"There are others in the area using tall wheat grass, but we are being careful with

Key points

- Tall wheat grass pastures underpin high performance dairying operation.
- Salt scalds have all but disappeared.
- Careful management prevents 'tussocky' or 'weediness' issues.

Opposite page: Productive, perennial pastures drive Ken Shone's successful dryland dairy operation and form an important component of his salinity management strategy

Below: Tall wheat grass underpins the pasture and silage base for Ken's 210-cow dairy operation. Salt scalds have all but disappeared since *SALT* magazine last visited the property in 2001.

where we feed out any hay, to ensure it doesn't develop as an environmental weed," Ken comments.

"There's plenty of useable food in there," he says, proudly surveying the paddocks of well-grown, healthy pastures for his high performance dairy cattle.

• *Jo Curkpatrick is NDSP Communication Coordinator (Victoria).*

CONTACT:

Ken Shone, Tel. (03) 5234 6387

Photos: Jo Curkpatrick, NDSP Victoria

Five years of awarding salinity excellence peaks in 2004

Nominations for the fifth W.E. Wood Award, Australia's most prestigious award for excellence in salinity research and development will close on Friday, 2 April 2004.

Australia's National Dryland Salinity Program (NDSP) sponsors this annual award for outstanding scientific or technical excellence, which recognises a unique contribution to managing salinity over a sustained period of many years.

Consideration is also given to applied, innovative technical and social responses to the salinity challenge. The W.E. Wood Award is open nationally to individuals and will be judged on scientific content, innovation and social implications and the potential for being of lasting significance to Australia. Nominations officially opened in early February.

NDSP national manager Richard Price said the prestigious award attracted a substantial prize and national recognition of work undertaken to overcome the salinity risk to Australia's land and water resources.

Submissions for the award must meet the key criteria of scientific content, innovation, and lasting significance to Australia, as detailed in the Award's Terms of Reference, which are available on-line from the NDSP web-site www.ndsp.gov.au or from your nearest NDSP Communication Coordinator (see p23 for contact details).

Submissions close on Friday, 2 April 2004.