



THE PASTURE RESURRECTION

“*We were able to see a difference after the first compost application, but the second application, with lime, was just fantastic... the clover response was pretty incredible.*”



Darren Gregson (L), Paul Wyer, Roger Robertson and Andrew Harbourne

The grass isn't always greener on the other side of the fence; sometimes it is actually very clear that the neighbouring paddock isn't doing nearly as well.

Since 2009 Roger Robertson has managed the Deersbrook property, located along Braidwood Road, 10km south of Goulburn. It is one of several farms Lee Macarthur-Onslow has purchased, and nurtured back to a more productive state.

“The pastures were 30 years old and rundown,” explains Roger. “Compost really brought it back to life.”

Before setting out on a comprehensive pasture improvement program, Roger estimates the paddock had a carrying capacity around 5 DSE/ha. Now it is being comfortably run at 7.5 DSE, peaking around 12.5 DSE, and consistently turning off fat cattle.

Agronomist Andrew ‘Boots’ Harbourne from Green Leaf Agronomy believes the paddock is on-track for 15-20 DSE/ha, providing

a major return from the investment: “at the end of the day you're getting paid by weight, and if you can turn the stock off faster it reduces your risk against dry periods. The key is having deep rooted high quality grass pastures, such as phalaris, and a healthy clover pasture to help improve quality”.

The 10-12 month old Angus calves from Deersbrook last season averaged 440kg, with the top steers around 520kg.

While there is plenty of good data available to back the benefits of the pasture improvement - from stock weights, to soil structure and nutrient profiles - in evaluating the compost performance Roger says, “a lot of it's just eyeball”.

“We were able to see a difference after the first compost application, but the second application, with lime, was just fantastic... the clover response was pretty incredible.” says Roger.

The compost product is called Organic



Roger Robertson (L) with Michael Bonanno from Global Renewables

Growth Medium (OGM®) and was supplied by Fertspread, a family-owned company established by Paul and Georgina Wyer. Their daughter, Amy, is the fifth family member to join the 20-person team, which services an area from Cooma in the south, through to Sydney in the north, and to Cootamundra and Young to the West.

OGM® is a composted and pasteurised product that provides a rich source of organic matter, nutrients and biological activity. The nutrients are derived from garden waste, food, and other organic elements that are recovered from household waste.

OGM® is produced by Global Renewables at the UR-3R resource recovery facility.

Located at Eastern Creek in Sydney since 2004, the facility processes 220,000 tonnes of household waste per annum to recover valuable materials and make various products. Around 30% of the feedstock (70,000t/yr) is converted to high-end OGM®, which meets strict quality standards to the satisfaction of the NSW EPA and DPI.

Of more than 4,000 tonnes of OGM® used at Deersbrook so far, the vast majority was applied as top-dressing. With Fertspread distributing a wide range of products, improvements at the property are not only attributed to OGM®... although Roger says the response from compost is very evident.

An emerging issue for Roger is that the EPA specifies the maximum application rate of OGM®, which restricts how much of the product can be used in any one paddock. While there are always more paddocks to “bring back to life”, he is hoping the

regulations will be reviewed in the future, allowing more freedom in determining the optimal regime to maintain his paddocks.

As well as obvious benefits of increased farm productivity, Paul Wyer points out that pasture improvement can also provide a significant return in capital growth. He attributes a 25% increase to the assessed value of his own property, over a 2 year period, to an improvement regime that included OGM® applied at a rate of 10 dry tonnes per hectare.

The Macarthur-Onslow family have a long and proud tradition as stewards of Australian farmland, and over recent years OGM® has become another valuable part of the pasture improvement regime for many of the paddocks under their care.

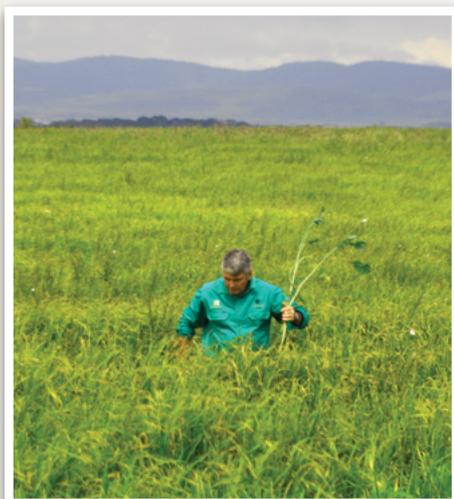
“ While we’re getting it spread at a good price and getting a good result, we want to keep using it.

”

Roger Robertson



INTO THE MILLET, BOOTS AND ALL



As well as providing carbon, moisture retention and soil structure benefits, OGM® contains trace elements and nutrients that support plant growth. The NPK ratio is 1.5:0.3:0.6, not the sort of figures that will see it replace synthetic fertilizers, but it does give paddocks a good lift.

There was some concern OGM® might fall short of the requirements for establishing a nitrogen-hungry millet crop. But after a good 2014/15 growing season, the growth results were impressive. The bigger issue has been holding enough stock to keep

the feed down so that the brassicas and legumes are not swamped...some would call this “a very good problem to have”.

While good crops in good seasons make for good photos, farm manager Roger Robertson points out that it’s actually in the tough times that OGM® paddocks really stand out.

“When the dry times come, the OGM® paddocks will hang on a lot longer, and if the stock are in good condition the OGM® paddocks will help hold their condition even better,” Roger says.



GLOBAL RENEWABLES™

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