

# Rolling out the research

**N**ine farmers in the Murrumbidgee region of NSW are optimistic that they can take the ovulation research from the *EverGraze* project and implement it into their day-to-day operations.

Working for the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority (MCMA), *EverGraze* Project Officer Vivien Thomson is helping farmers establish *EverGraze* Supporting Sites to compare reproductive performance on a grass-based pasture with performance on lucerne-based and chicory-based pastures.

As Vivien explains it's a big commitment from the farmers, but they are keen to be involved.

"We've always thought of lucerne as a summer feed source, but we haven't considered its potential to improve ewe fertility," Vivien said.

"We have started setting up the Supporting Sites with soil tests to check the suitability of land for lucerne or chicory, and then we'll get going with on-ground activities. We have farmers involved from Galong between Harden and Binalong, to Tarcutta, with the main cluster around Bookham in NSW.

"The farmer trials will be prescriptive as we want to make sound comparisons and control as many variables as possible. However, we need to keep things practical, as Supporting Sites aren't research trials. Instead they allow farmers to test new technologies on their farms under realistic commercial conditions."

There will be two test paddocks on each property, one grass-based and one lucerne or chicory-based and the farmers will swap rams from one pasture to the other half way through joining.

The ewes will be allocated at random to each paddock and condition scored before entering the two pastures to ensure they are at the same score before grazing starts.

In a further effort to take out variability and add quality assurance to the trials, farmers will use the same contractor to scan the ewes for multiple pregnancies. Because they all have to score their ewes and swap rams, the farmers involved are being encouraged to share some of the tasks, further adding to the consistency by doing jobs the same way.

"We want them to come together as a group and interact, by learning from each other and being more involved," Vivien added.

"The two treatments will be run side by side to compare reproductive performance between mobs on the grass and the perennial pastures."



*Fast-growing woody perennials at the Wagga Wagga site were used as biological sheds to increase twin lamb survival, while reducing recharge and increasing biodiversity.*

Because of the drought conditions the region has been through, Vivien expects the pastures to be sown during autumn, giving farmers time to tackle any post-drought weed problems.

"We'll also fertilise any of the old grass-based, drought-affected pastures for optimum production, as it would be unfair to compare directly with new perennial pastures," Vivien said.

"It will be next summer before we can start making these comparisons.

"We have so much research going on, but it has to make an impact on the ground and that's what is great about *EverGraze*.

"We need to build it into our day-to-day enterprises without it being too much of a burden, so that it can be embraced by farmers." 🌱

## ➡ More information

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*EverGraze* is a research and delivery partnership bringing together the Future Farm Industries CRC with Meat & Livestock Australia and Australian Wool Industry. It aims to increase profitability by 50% over current 'best' grazing systems, while also managing problems such as dryland salinity through a reduction in recharge to groundwater.

To achieve this, a range of pasture species is being compared in systems that are matched to soil type and topography. These species and cultivars include perennial ryegrass, phalaris, tall fescue, lucerne, chicory and kikuyu.

Demonstration sites in the Murrumbidgee region are supported by the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority.

## ➡ More information

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