

Media Release



FUTURE FARM
INDUSTRIES CRC
PROFITABLE PERENNIALS™ FOR AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPES

16 January 2008

Native plants show promise as green fodder during drought

A group of Australian native plants has demonstrated its potential to supply year-round green fodder during the drought-prone summer and autumn on deep sandy soils in Australia's wheat growing regions.

Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre (FFI CRC) PhD Student (The University of Western Australia) Richard Bennett has been assessing the ability of native legume species in the *Cullen* genus, collected from the wild, to provide profitable perennial pasture systems over acidic or waterlogged soils in low rainfall areas of the Western Australian (WA) wheatbelt.

Richard said that while introduced perennial legumes have traditionally had difficulties in growing in this region, *Cullen* has shown exciting results at two trial sites, one at Shenton Park and one at Buntine (located in the north eastern WA wheatbelt).

"There has been a high enough level of drought stress at Buntine during the summer and autumn to make it obvious which plants are better suited to survival and growth in the targeted environment – and there has been a few of them," Richard said.

"Besides surviving the harsh conditions, measurements at The University of Western Australia's Shenton Park trial site in particular have shown a large diversity in growing patterns with sufficient variation to select some of the plants with more suitable traits for further testing."

Preliminary research into these native legumes in Queensland during the 1980s showed that the more low-growing forms were tolerant to grazing while the erect, shrubby types were more productive.

"Where a paddock of *Cullen* is integrated with annual pastures or even annual weeds, the animals will most likely select the annual pastures and weeds during winter and spring, when they are available, and leave the *Cullen* as a green-feed store to be used in the summer and autumn, when feed is scarce," Richard said.

Further results will be collected during the next two years with glasshouse trials planned to specifically test the selected species' ability to tolerate acidic soils and waterlogging.

Richard's research work has been supported by Meat and Livestock Australia, The University of Western Australia and the AW Howard Memorial Trust.

A more detailed article about Richard's work with the *Cullen* species of native legumes can be found in the latest edition of FFI CRC's research-in-progress newsletter *Focus on Perennials*. Copies can be downloaded from the FFI CRC website: www.futurefarmcrc.com.au

FFI CRC was formed in July 2007 to build on the former Cooperative Research Centre for the Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity's work to make dryland agriculture in southern Australia more adaptable through innovative research, education and training, and commercialisation.

Media Enquiries: Greg Lawrence, T: 0429 101 675 E: greg.lawrence@futurefarmcrc.com.au

Further information: www.futurefarmcrc.com.au

Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre aims to transform Australian agriculture and rural landscapes by developing and applying Profitable Perennials™ technologies to innovative farming systems and new regional industries.
