

PRESS RELEASE

Improved irrigation efficiency boosts Lucerne production

After 40 years of dairying, Mooroopna farmer Michael Gaffy, decided to sell his cows and try something new. Lucerne hay seemed a likely winner. After all, he had a plot of particularly good dirt with abundant underground water.

With the local area shrouded by severe water restrictions and in desperate need of stock feed, it should have been a case of ‘just add water’.

But as Michael soon came to discover, even after all those years working the land, there’s always a lot to learn with any new farming enterprise.

Up until 2004 his Lucerne block, which includes about 20 percent Shepparton east fine sandy loam, with the remainder either Shepparton fine sandy loam, Lemnos loam or heavy clay country, was non-irrigated.

But after sinking a couple of bores and installing centre pivots that all changed. And Michael came to realise very quickly that getting water to the soil and turning that water into productive Lucerne hay can be two totally different things.

“We put up the centre pivots and started irrigating only to discover that a lot of the soil was water repellent,” he recalls. “In other words we would irrigate and the water would only penetrate about 1.5 cm into the soil and the rest would runoff.

“When we dug down through the top half an inch or so of moist soil, the soil underneath was absolutely dead dry, the water just couldn’t get to it

“It didn’t really matter how much water we put on, or, how often we irrigated. The soil would just shed the water, which would run to the lower spots in the paddock and back into the recycling system.

“Initially we tried gypsum at varying rates. We experimented with lime at different rates. We mixed lime and gypsum together in another trial and it made absolutely no difference at all.

“In my investigations, I found talking to other people with similar operations, there’s a widespread water repellent soil problem in this area, particularly under pivot.

“Then, I was talking with a local chemical reseller who said there was a new soil surfactant called AquaGro[®] Gold and David Bell was the man to talk with.

“So I got David out. He was fairly confident that this product would allow the water to move better into the soil.

“My wife and I tossed the idea around.



“David was talking more in terms of test plots, but we had 180 acres of Lucerne. We had enough water when the allocation on the local channel system was down to about 24 percent, and there was a huge demand for feed.

“I had a dairy farming mate who needed the feed, so we took a punt and decided to do the whole area.

“So we put the AquaGro[®] Gold on at 5 L/ha and to all intent and purpose, at least initially, it didn't live up to expectations.

“I was going out each day looking at the paddock, then coming home to my wife Kay and saying I think that stuff is not working. I don't think I'll do it again.

“She said, I don't think you can afford to stop. I think you should do it again. At that stage it was probably about five weeks after the first application.

“I assumed it would take about 4 weeks to see a result.

“So then we put a second application on at 2.5 L/ha and then it started to work. Since the second application, the paddock has completely turned around.

“We've got about 98 percent of the paddock wetting up now and producing well.

“As you can imagine in an area absolutely devastated by drought, the sort of productivity gains we've enjoyed have been tremendous.

“The area I'm talking about is on a main road and it really stands out. It's created quite a bit of comment from others in the area and the paddock has been very productive.

“People have come to me and asked what are you doing and I've told them. I've said it's working for me.

“I can't guarantee it will work for you but if you've got this water repellent soil problem, I think it's worth a shot.

“The thing that has convinced me that it's going the right way is the increase in productivity!”

“I'd say the third cut this year, after the AquaGro[®] Gold started to work, doubled the first cut of the year.

“That surprised me, it surprised everyone. The dairy friend of mine that I'm selling the Lucerne too just couldn't believe that the productivity could change as much as it has.”

Michael said his first AquaGro[®] Gold application went on with a boom spray. Two 2.5 L/ha follow up applications went through the centre pivot.

His feelings are that the boom spray application suited his situation better.



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Mooroopna Lucerne grower, Michael Gaffy said for him, specialised soil surfactant AquaGro[®] Gold has been a tremendous product. It has improved his water utilisation efficiency, reduced water losses caused by runoff and greatly improved his hay production.