October 2, 2003

RESEARCHERS CALL FOR ANIMAL SUPPORT

Pasture researchers claiming that new varieties help return animals to grain farms to bolster livestock production want more research funds from animal industries.

Grain farms increased their crop area by 50 per cent during the 1990s, while a recent run of poor seasons has seen the national sheep flock dwindle to new lows.

However, those market-driven decisions are moderating and farmers are introducing pastures and livestock to help manage crop rotation issues such as herbicide resistant weeds, according to Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture (CLIMA) annual pasture legume improvement leader, Clinton Revell.

“The WA Herbicide Resistance Initiative recently confirmed that instances of glyphosate resistant ryegrass would continue to rise, making it a priority to develop new options for non-chemical weed control, such as grazing,” the WA Department of Agriculture researcher said.

“Biserrula and other new pasture species are bringing livestock back onto grain farms because grazing sheep can help eliminate weeds before seed set. Pastures also revitalise soils with nitrogen and help growers spread risk between enterprises by integrating grain and livestock.”

With its deep roots, Biserrula can survive dry environments receiving only 325 mm annual rainfall and help manage dryland salinity by reducing groundwater recharge. Spring herbage can typically be more than six tonnes per hectare and provide green feed for a month longer than traditional pastures based on sub-clovers and medics.

Although CLIMA and its partner agencies equally support Australia’s grain and livestock industries by delivering improved pastures, most of their recent research has been funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

Dr Revell said livestock industries should seriously consider supporting research investigating animal production from new pasture species and fodder conservation.

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