



CLIMA Media Release

LEGUMES LIFT LIVESTOCK 17.8.05

With sheep and beef meat prices on the up, graingrowers want a slice of the action.

Farmers, researchers and industry addressed the emerging issue of how best to maximise profits while integrating livestock and cropping, at a recent Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture (CLIMA) and CRC for Plant Based Management of Salinity forum at the University of WA (UWA).

It was agreed that pasture and grain legumes will play increasingly important roles as phase farming is integrated more into livestock and cropping enterprises.

CLIMA Director, Professor Kadambot Siddique, said legumes had an obvious fit because of their nitrogen fixing capacity, value as high protein livestock fodder and as cash crops in their own right.

“The forum’s 60 delegates, after a day’s vigorous debate, agreed that while legumes weren’t the only ticket to the game, they were an obvious entry point for fence to fence croppers moving into livestock,” he said.

UWA’s Dr John Milton, Director of Independent Lab Services, said the major product and income source from sheep on mixed farms was no longer wool, but quality meat.

Quality meat is big business, with WA cattle and sheep meat exports soaring since 2000 and now contributing \$340 million a year to the state’s economy. Sheep meat exports rose 70 per cent from \$112 million to \$191 million and beef exports rose 150 per cent from \$60 million to \$149 million.

“While quality pastures underpin livestock production in the growing season, grain legumes, such as lupins and roughage play important roles in delivering nutrients for more efficient livestock production during the annual feed gap,” Dr Milton said.

Animal biologist, Professor Graeme Martin of UWA, emphasised that while graingrowers talked of precision cropping, mixed farmers or meat producers should talk about precision animal production.

He introduced the concept of ‘focus feeding’, which involved maximising the value of pasture and other feed sources by focusing attention on the key stages of the reproductive cycle sensitive to changes in nutrition, such as at joining and weaning.

“We need to better understand how nutrition works, so we can fully develop clean, green and ethical tools for managing our animals,” Professor Martin concluded.

Image caption: At UWA for the CLIMA & Salinity CRC “Integrating livestock profitably with crops” forum were Jerramungup farmer Geoff Bee, CLIMA’s Dr Debbie Thackray and Merredin farmer Mick McGinniss.

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