
Introduction

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Welcome to the Pasture Persistence Symposium. This Symposium is being held under the auspices of the New Zealand Grassland Association to help understand and improve the persistence of particularly ryegrass-based pastures.

Poor persistence is a major issue currently confronting dairy, sheep and beef farmers through many areas of New Zealand. While there has always been a degree of dissatisfaction with pastures, this has grown stronger with the intensification and greater pressure put on them over the past 3 decades.

For example, when I grew up in the Waikato in the 1970s, families made a good living from milking 150 cows, 400-kg Jerseys stocked at 2.5 cows/ha. Today the same income comes from 400-500 cows, likely 450-kg Jersey x Friesians, stocked at 3+ cows/ha. The sheep industry has also had parallel increases - in stock numbers, stocking rates, ewe size, lambing percentages and lamb carcass weights.

Another change in farm systems has been the movement from hay to silage, and to strongly controlling spring ryegrass quality. Hay used to be

deemed ready to cut when the seed started to fall from the seed heads – not ideal in terms of feed quality! But it did build a ryegrass “soil seed bank” from which new plants arose after adverse events such as drought.

While persistence has always been a problem, over the last 3 years northern North Island pastures have been particularly badly affected by dry summers, combined with damaging black beetle numbers and widespread usage of an inappropriate endophyte.

So we have organised this Symposium to bring together many of New Zealand’s top pastoral scientists, along with farmers, consultants and agribusiness people to provide information and to discuss persistence issues. There are sessions on pasture establishment and management, insect pest challenges, the effect of climate, pasture species and cultivars, and how to change farm systems to improve persistence.

The Symposium Organising Committee, hopes that as well as defining the persistence issues and providing good information on solutions in this Proceedings, that the Symposium will be the start of a wider programme to help farmers improve the persistence of their pastures.

