Yarra Yarra News

Yarra Yarra Catchment Management Group

SEPTEMBER 2007 QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Fodder Shrub Options for Growers

Rhagodia is an Australia native shrub. Different species occur through out Australia. Rhagodia can be found in remnant vegetation, road sides and fence lines through out Western Australia. It is found from the beach to the rangelands in the Mid West region.

Rhagodia is a member of the salt bush family that can grow on a wide range of soil types. It is a shrub that grows of a height of 1.5 to 2.5 m.

Rhagodia is a highly palatable to both cattle and sheep. It can provide feed during the late spring and autumn, or can be rotationally grazed all year round. In addition it can stabilise soil to prevent water run off and wind erosion. Planting Rhagodia will also add to the biodiversity in our landscape as it is a native plant

The intense interest for this plant derives from the fact that it is a native shrub that it is naturally adapted to wide range of soil types in WA. The long-term objectives is to develop mixed forage systems using Rhagodia, saltbush and perennial grasses to better withstand Australia's dry climate. Leaf samples from Rhagodia grown at Greenoil Tree Nursery were sent away to Agronutritional for lab testing. The results re-enforced the belief that Rhagodia was the species to work with, Lab tests results were 82-85% digestibility and crude protein of 12.5-16.9%. However the real animal digestibility of Rhagodia has not yet been confirmed from animal feeding trials. These trials are about to commence at CSIRO in Perth. Animal performance will also be measured from paddocks Rhagodia at Binnu this year.

The 2006 drought at Binnu showed that Rhagodia can be established in prolonged periods of low rainfall. Rhagodia was planted in winter 2006 on 30 ha at 5 sites in the Binnu region with a PIRD grant from Meat & Livestock Australia. One paddock failed due to a mice plague. The other 25 ha was successfully established despite it being by far the driest year on record.

Rhagodia plantations have been grazed since 2003. Rhagodia have responded well with long-term grazing at Eneabba. But there is more to learn about the habits of the plant and how to best manage it. It will probably need some form of intensive grazing systems. Average planting density in the range of 600 to 800 plants per hectare appears to be best. The benefits of Rhagodia are not limited to its' foraging potential. It can also be used as an understorey in windbreaks, as part of nature conservation strips and for soil stabilisation in wind blown areas. Ultimately the benefits to farmers are being maximised by deliberately designing plant mixtures that are drought proof, can deliver animal health, higher animal production and improved land management outcomes; which in turn will help lower input costs and increase profitability on the farm.

Please contact Ian Pulbrook (08) 99281281 if you would like more information.

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Broombush Plantings

Melaleuca uncinata and related species can be grown on land that is not highly productive for conventional agriculture, including sites that are marginally saline and seasonally waterlogged for the production of Brushwood fencing products.

Yarra Yarra Catchment Management Group purchased 100,000 seedlings this year to plant along sections of the Bowgada and Merkanooka deep drainage projects. Plantings were carried out on the properties of Damien Ryan, Chris Moffet and Dave Baxter.

Agronomy in Saltland

Current research indicates that saltland, particularly mildly and medium saline sites can contribute greatly to increased farm productivity and profitability by providing good grazing value, particularly in the autumn period. To gain the greatest benefit however, saltbush and bluebush grazing needs to be complemented with a surrounding grass and legume component.

If legumes, cereals, and grasses are to be grown side by side with saltbush or bluebush forage bushes, there are many agronomic issues that need to be addressed, including herbicide tolerances, weed control, and fertilizer regimes.

Current work by Lorinda Hunt and John Borger of (DAFWA) is looking specifically at this question of saltland agronomy under a **NACC** funded project in the shires of Morawa, Perenjori & Dalwallinu.

Sadly it is not so simple. When establishing cereals, clovers or legumes alongside saltbushes, many agronomic issues arise including problems with establishment and weed control.

Current trial work is focused on finding herbicide options that control slender iceplant, while allowing clovers, bluebush and saltbush to germinate. Equally, pre-emergent control of broadleaf and grass weeds are needed when establishing saltbush either by seed or seedling.

Trial work in 2007 has found that the herbicides Stomp®, Broadstrike® and Goal® show some promise for cheap and effective weed control in saltland. It is important to note that none of these herbicides are registered for this purpose. A pot trial is being conducted at UWA to replicate two field trials currently established near Gutha and Pithara. The trials are looking at the above mentioned herbicides and others to determine pre-emergent herbicide options for germinating bluebush, river saltbush and old man saltbush. Results are expected to be available by November.

Other agronomic trials include using organic matter (chaff, seed weed, biosolids and organic waste) to remediate the non gypsum responsive soils. Farmer anecdotal evidence has suggested that organic matter such as hay, may bring a “concrete” soil back into production, after experiencing a soil structure degradation event (such as flooding). A trial is underway in Morawa looking at this possibility.

Have you had problems getting sheep to eat saltbush? We are looking for a trial site to test the feasibility of applying a sub-lethal dose of phenoxy herbicide (eg. 2,4-D amine) to increase the sugar levels, and therefore the palatability of old man saltbush. We would like to hear from you if you are interested in hosting such a trial. A suitable site would be a saltbush pasture with adequate fencing and watering points, sheep for the trial, plus a cooperative farmer who is willing to keep an eye on the site. If you are interested, please contact us.

This project is funded by the National Landcare Program, through NACC and work is being undertaken with the cooperation of the Morawa Farm Improvement Group and the Liebe Group®.

Contact-

Lorinda Hunt on 99543344 or 0427 388 642

John Borger on 99541095 or 0427 987 591

Dry Season Assistance Scheme

The 2007 Dry Season Assistance Scheme is part of a $9.34 M package announced by the State Government on 29 August 2007. The package includes direct farmer grants to assist those farmers worst affected by the 2007 dry season, grants to assist with rural counselling services, and grants to affected Shire Councils and Community Organisations for social or community activities.

Grants of up to $8,000 in total (exclusive of GST) are available to help farmers deal with the impacts of the 2007 dry season. The major objective of the direct grants is to address animal welfare issues and to assist eligible farmers to retain their livestock while minimising the risk of land degradation due to overgrazing, and to engage specialists to provide business advice or to prepare farm business plans or obtain specialist technical advice.

It is preferred that successful applicants will, wherever possible, spend the approved funds through local contractors/suppliers to provide a flow-on benefit to assist local businesses in rural communities during this difficult time.

Grants are available for any one or a combination of any of the following eight areas of assistance to a maximum of $8,000, *for eligible expenditure incurred between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008*:-

- Freight on Fodder
- Freight to Agistment
- Water and its Transport
- Water enhancement, dam cleaning etc
- De-stocking
- Feedlot infrastructure
- Professional and Technical advice
- Other

For further information and eligibility/ assessment criteria, please contact the Farm Business Development at the Department of Agriculture and Food WA

FREECALL 1800 198 231

Applications will be processed on a first in, first considered basis, and will be subject to the availability of funds

Local Government NRM Involvement in the Northern Ag Region

WA Landskills is involved in projects with local governments within the Yarra Yarra– including the shires of Coorow, Dalwallinu, Perenjori, Three Springs and Morawa. The projects are all based on protection remnant vegetation, mainly on shire managed land. A few projects involve land outside that description, but do have involvement from the shire at some point, usually places with high visitor numbers. Conservation and management of these remaining areas is important for a number of reasons including aesthetic value, seed store, recreation, natural habitat for wildlife, soil conservation, water management and tourism.

The sites will be surveyed to determine what species are present, and comparing these to nearby areas in better condition to determine what species of plants will be required to return the areas to the near natural state. Surveys will also be used to determine what threats are present or likely (litter, salinity, wind erosion, recreation, feral animals) and how these can best be managed.

Reserves

- Canna reserve
- Koolanooka Springs
- Latham town site
- Cnr Mason Rd and Wanara Rd (Orchid viewing area)
- 5 reserves in the Shire of Dalwallinu

Road Reserves

- Coorow– Latham Road
- Munckton Road
- Approaches to three Springs

Surveys on the sites will be carried out this spring. For more information, please contact Jenny Borger on 9954 1095 or borger@bbnet.com.au

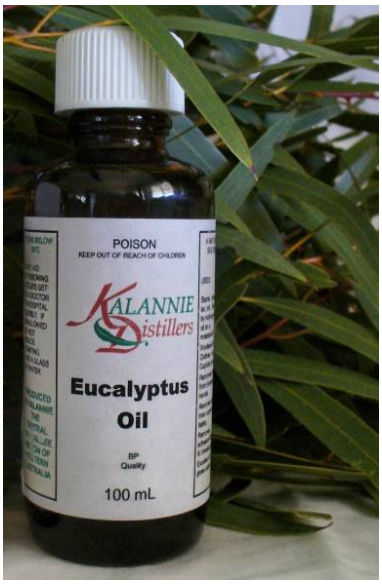
Yarra Yarra Oil Mallee Project

Another dry year has had an impact on the number of seedlings planted for the project, with some growers hoping for a rain in the next week to plant the last of the seedlings, or give the ones in the ground a good drink. There will be seedling subsidies available again next year – please look out for the package in the post in November, or call if you have any queries.

All mulching subsidies have been utilised. Trees are recoppicing at a similar rate as compared to mulching at the same time last year.

Harvesting trials have commenced again, with our accredited boiler attendant. The impact of the drought and beetles appears to be quite significant, with some losses occurring. The decision to continue harvesting lies with the grower.

12 months regrowth of 13 year old Polybractea after mulching. Unmulched trees on left side of photo. Showing regrowth after recoppice was attacked by Spring Beetles over



Kalannie Distillers Eucalyptus Oil

The final product.

We sell in all sizes up to 5L. If you would like to try some if this great WA grown and produced product please contact kalanniedistillers@bigpond.com

Next exciting move is the combination of our project with the OMC brickette project. We will be working closely with them to trial and "perfect" the site layout and biomass transfer system to allow for as much future development as possible in the industry – without a crystal ball! The introduction of the brickette plant ensures the profitability of the system.

For any queries please contact Jo Ashworth 9666 1033.

Landline

Look out for the Yarra Yarra gang who will be appearing on the ABC's Landline program sometime in the next few weeks!