

Joint trial targets Giant Rat's Tail Grass



A LOCAL government-led trial which aims to arm landowners with better ways to manage chronic environmental weeds in high-rainfall areas is already showing positive signs.

The collaborative project is being led by the Livingstone and Gladstone Regional Councils, with expertise being provided by Biosecurity Queensland.

Central Queensland rural merchandise supplier Savage, Barker and Backhouse is also a key player.

Demonstration sites are underway at Yeppoon and Miriamvale, with a third site to be established at Byfield, north of Yeppoon.

John Reeves, senior biosecurity officer with Biosecurity Queensland, said the demonstration sites were looking at a different way of combating the highly invasive environmental weed Giant Rat's Tail Grass, in areas that received annual average rainfall of 800mm and above.

"The sites are combining the knowledge of the registered chemical for an environmental pest with the known economic use of fertiliser, inorganic or organic, to try to make pastures outperform the environmental weed," Mr Reeves said.

"It's not just a matter of controlling the weed, it's a matter of making the environment unpleasant for the weed, at a scale that gives an economic return.

"It's looking at renovating tropical pastures to get an economical return at the expense of the health of the weed."

Savage, Barker and Backhouse agronomist Ross Newman said many central Queensland producers had been fighting to control weedy sporobolus grasses such as Giant Rat's Tail Grass for many years.

"The first key to successful control is the presence of dominant pasture species,

either native or introduced," Mr Newman said.

"Introduced pasture species such as Signal Grass, Humidicola, Mekong Brizantha, Bisset Bluegrass and Rhodes Grass have the ability to form dense swards and trash blankets to assist in suppressing future seedling recruitment from the weedy sporobolus grasses.

"In order for these pasture grasses to function to the best of their ability, soil fertility

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needs to be examined and fertiliser considered.

"Once we have a functioning pasture, the next cog to the system is good grazing management, ensuring even grazing pressure throughout the pasture and providing a certain amount of spelling or rotation each year.

"Managing pastures coming into spring and early summer can be difficult, while we wait for rain, however it is essential that pastures at risk of weedy sporobolus grasses have sufficient above-ground biomass, so they are able to quickly respond to rainfall events assisting in providing excellent plant competition.

"Chemical control of weedy sporobolus grasses is the next step, however without the other cogs it can result in limited success.

"For many years, weedy sporobolus grasses have been treated with liquid formulations of Flupropanate in both targeted and broadacre treatment as well as glyphosate in targeted treatments, and yet we still appear to be fighting a losing battle.

"In recent years GP Flupropanate from Granular Products has become available, which has improved the reliability of control by ensuring the chemical is getting to the

target, the soil, in readiness for the incorporating rainfall event.

"Combine this with its ability to be evenly applied by air into open and timbered country and it has ensured that effective control strategies can be implemented to control and contain the spread of weedy sporobolus grasses throughout pastures.

"In an area where the seasons are variable and the need for optimum production is critical, we cannot afford to be wasting rainfall and soil moisture on growing plants that grazing animals cannot turn into

beef. Controlling and managing weedy sporobolus grasses is essential for longer term survival."

Mr Reeves said both the weed and pasture had responded to the treatment to date.

"We are about to start grazing on it and in August/September we will measure the number of grazing days treated as opposed to untreated," Mr Reeves said.

"We have noticed a significant weed response to the chemical and significant pasture response to the fertiliser."

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