

Lucerne is More Than a Quality Pasture

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There are several agronomic, environmental and social benefits contributing to lucerne's value as a high quality pasture. The following are ten of these benefits.



A clean stand of lucerne (Navarre, summer 2003)

- ☺ **Weed Control.** When established, lucerne will compete with weeds. It can control problem summer weeds such as skeleton weed and heliotrope. This reduces the need to use chemicals for weed control. *“With lucerne, you only need 1/8th of the cost of selective grass control compared with annual legumes. Caltrop poisoning is not an issue with lucerne; because of the lucerne feed availability during summer-autumn period”* (a lucerne grower).
- Lucerne also provides an opportunity to control grasses before cropping.

- ☺ **Cereal Disease and Pest Control.** As a legume, lucerne provides a long disease break for cereal and oilseed crops. Subsequent cereal and/or oilseed crops will be healthier.
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- ☺ **Soil Builder.** As a legume, lucerne increases soil nitrogen and organic matter, enhancing soil structure and fertility. Approximately 100 kg N/ha/year for 3-4 years is available after its removal. The deeper roots of lucerne also bring to the surface nutrients that have been leached below the root zone of cereals.
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- ☺ **Soil Protector.** As a perennial with deep roots, lucerne provides groundcover year round, protecting the topsoil from both wind and water erosion.
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- ☺ **Recharge Control.** The deep roots of lucerne are capable of utilising water below the root zone of annuals, reducing the potential for salinity due to rising watertables.
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- ☺ **Drought Proof Component.** Including lucerne into the farming system in dryland regions can reduce risk. *“In the recent drought, lucerne paddocks were the only grazing available to me. Lucerne allows me to carry on with my normal program of lambing twice a year. Most farmers in the region either reduced their stock or sold out their stock. I did not have to reduce my livestock numbers”* (a lucerne grower).
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- ☺ **Wool Quality and Quantity Enhancer.** Lucerne pasture may increase wool productivity and quality. Weed free lucerne pastures will reduce grass seed contamination of wool.
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- ☺ **Summer & Autumn Green-Pasture.** Lucerne responds readily to any reasonable amount of summer or autumn rainfall, producing stands of green feed. This green part in a dryland farm, like an oasis in the desert, provides a positive relief for both the lucerne producers and those passing by.
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- ☺ **Flexibility.** Lucerne allows flexibility in managing livestock and rotations. It provides an extra 3-6 months of grazing, compared to annual pastures, opening ‘out-of-season’ opportunity livestock production. Lucerne can be a short (2-4 years) or a long (e.g. 5-10 years) component of farming systems, according to farm requirements.
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- ☺ **Labour Saver.** When established, lucerne is a low maintenance pasture. It allows growers to carry on with other farm tasks. *“You do not need to feed every day during the summer-autumn period”*.
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