

Site Specifications - Tim Heffernan

Owners' name: Tim and Libby Heffernan

Property size: 1900 ha

Annual rainfall: 375mm / yr

Main enterprise: Cereal and meat sheep

Soil Types (general sum up): The property has a good mix of sandplain duplex soils, some grey clay and numerous ironstone gravel outcrops in hilltops.

Area of property cleared and approx when: 1600 ha arable; approx. 1800 ha cleared. Most of the property was cleared between 1910 and 1940.

What made you choose this site?: This site is a break of slope situation with a porous duplex sandy gravel soil type on the slope and a loamy duplex soil on valley floor. It represents one edge of a large area of valley floor which either is already saline or under threat of salinity in the near future.

Why did you decide on this method for solving the problem?: I have been experimenting and planting tall wheat grass in other similar sites since 1986, totalling an area of about 100ha over 6 different seasons. Drainage banks are already in place but appear to only deal with surface water. Perennial pastures (like tall wheat grass) pump water back into the atmosphere all year round across the entire area. Tall wheat grass is particularly active during the summer months when summer rainfall and reverse osmosis cause the greatest accumulation of surface salt. At a cost of approx. \$67/ha it is the cheapest and easiest broadacre salt treatment that I am aware of.

Are you seeing improvements (results - financial, aesthetics etc)?: Since planting tall wheat grass the salt scalds have stopped spreading and mildly saline sites have "dried out". It provides invaluable autumn sheep feed, is very resilient to overgrazing and ungrazed tussocks (rank ones) provide excellent shelter belts for newborn lambs.

Main challenge you are facing: The only challenge with established tall wheat grass is managing the grazing. Overgrazing for long periods in very dry and late seasons has caused a thinning out of the original stand, especially where plants are already stressed with high salt levels. I am a little surprised that tall wheat grass has not been promoted more by the Dept of Ag and others. It has many advantages over saltbush, Puccinellia and balansa clover. It is a very good option to use in conjunction with these and other saltland options. It would be an excellent base-plant for plant breeding improvements in its salt tolerant levels and palatability would be useful. I see no reason why cereal crops can't be grown in amongst established Wheatgrass. The Wheatgrass is dormant during early winter and I think it would handle Sprayseed and Round-up.

Tim Heffernan

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