

Where has the grass gone?

There is increasing discussion around the quality of pastures in the greater Waikato, and in fact in much of New Zealand.

New Zealand's economic wealth is fundamentally based on growing grass and then converting that grass into saleable products. Isn't it?

So why is pasture growth sub standard?

- My personal belief is that, the pasture is very short on lime. Just because the pH is around 6, does not mean that calcium is readily available in the soil. I have a client who is putting on 750 kgs of lime per hectare, with spectacular results. The pasture is green and drought resistant.
- Dare I say that because the fertilizer companies are not paid to recommend lime, they do not? Those that attended the recent lime field day at Tatanui, heard the eminent Professor Walker, who is a leading authority on soils, talk extensively about the role of lime in pastures.
- Increased nitrogen application tends to 'sterilise the soil'. It is imperative that high nitrogen application should be balanced with equal applications of lime.
- Lastly, I feel that the compaction of pasture needs attention. Years of trampling the pasture by tons of stock, have compacted the soil to its detriment. Aeration by any means is important and essential. This could include the famous 'ground hog' and or soil revitalizers.
- Lower the stocking rate to raise residuals and you will grow more grass.

Why do I know and believe these statements?

Because, I have studied, these subjects, at University.

I see the results from increased lime application on every farm I visit, where the farmer, follows the above guidelines.

These are the opinions of Don Fraser of Fraser Farm Finance. Any decisions made should not be based on this article alone and appropriate professional assistance should be sought.

Don Fraser is the Principal of Fraser Farm Finance and a consultant to the Farming Industry. Contact him on 0800 777 675 or 021 777 675.