

Dairy pasture needs extra help in Tasmania's extra cold winters

Grant Archer, dairy farmer at Cressy, some 30 km south of Launceston, is no stranger to cold Tasmanian winters, always quite a few degrees lower than in the northern states.

With his wife Kim, he share-farms a 150-hectare 450-cow dairy with the landowners Rob and Jo Bradley. Grant is the current Australian Dairy Business of the Year.

He uses Sumitomo ProGibb to bring up winter pasture levels, saying, "The winter soil temperatures get pretty low here, especially as we go down to five degrees at night and around ten to twelve during the day.

"That really keeps the grass down, so we apply ProGibb to help it along. Our soil moisture content is pretty good here as we irrigate during the summer and also get good winter rain.

"The nutrient levels are okay but the problem is that the soil gets so cold we get a limited response out of the nitrogen in it. So we look to ProGibb as a way of bumping up the growth rate so we can get some extra feed.

"When we apply it, we don't need to add nutrients like urea. But we might sometimes add a herbicide for broadleaf weed control. It's a lot more cost-effective to get a couple of jobs done at the same time."

Asked about results, Grant says "We haven't really done any trials here or taken exact measurements.

"But I've based my use of ProGibb on some trial work that was done by Basil Doonan (Macquarie Franklin) and others. They got pretty good results – and I was impressed enough to go with ProGibb.

"You only have to look at the pasture to see how well ProGibb works.

"I'd say we probably get about three to four hundred extra kilos of dry matter a hectare for each application. That's enough to feed the herd; it's a reasonably cheap source of feed.

"Without ProGibb, we'd only be getting about ten to fifteen kilos a hectare, nowhere near enough.

"We only apply it once during the winter, in late June – that's all we have time for. We're on a slow rotation here, about fifty to sixty days.

"We need to match our rotation to the leaf emergence rate – which becomes really suppressed because of our extra cold winters.

"After applying the ProGibb we start seeing good growth in the first month, ensuring we get adequate feed levels throughout the season. We generally use it all, with nothing left over for extra dry matter.

"At the same time, we're giving the cows plenty of good pasture and don't need to give them supplements or grain. ProGibb reduces the need for them.

"All in all I'd use it again; we're planning on applying ProGibb right now (end June) and I'd certainly recommend it."



Grant and Kim Archer at the Dairy Business of the Year presentation



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