Higher stocking rates for cattle on irrigated pasture: a report from Wokalup Research Station

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The possibility that higher cattle stocking rates than those commonly used could be economical was suggested by the results of a stocking rate trial at Wokalup Research Station reported in the March, 1966, issue of the Journal of Agriculture.*

This trial was carried out on irrigated pasture over two irrigation seasons and one winter, and the highest gain was from animals stocked at 1\(\frac{1}{4}\) per acre. Higher rates—two per acre and above—proved too heavy in the winter, with heavy weight losses and serious overgrazing.

As a follow-up to the above trial and to test the possibility of higher stocking rates on irrigated pasture in summer a further trial, limited to one summer, was carried out on Wokalup Research Station. The pasture was a paspalum-white clover-perennial ryegrass mixture.

Yearling dairy steers, four Friesian and two Jersey, were placed in each of four different sized paddocks to give stocking rates of 2, 2\(\frac{1}{2}\), 4 and 5\(\frac{1}{2}\) beasts per acre. The animals were grouped on liveweight to give the same approximate average weight in each paddock, with total weights in each ranging from 4,640 lb. to 4,980 lb. The trial began on October 21, 1966, and was concluded at the end of March, 1967.

Under the conditions of this trial the most lightly stocked paddock, with two animals per acre, gave the greatest returns, both per animal and per acre. At this stocking rate the pasture produced ample feed throughout the trial, and there was a gross liveweight gain of 447 lb. per acre. At 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) beasts per acre there was a gross liveweight gain of 380 lb. per acre. On the more heavily stocked paddocks the animals lost weight.

The results are considered a further indication that higher stocking rates than usual are practical but that adjustments to pasture management would probably be needed to achieve the best results.

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