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Continuous Grazing on Rose Clover at Northampton

By R. J. PARKIN

BECAUSE of its upright growth habit, it is often thought that rose clover may require some form of specialised grazing management. It has also been said that the sheep find the plant and in particular the seed head, undesirable in the dry stages. However, more recent observations refute this (Bailey 1966). The present commonly-grown strains of rose clover are later flowering generally than the medics or Geraldton subterranean clover and stay green later in the season.

Field observations have suggested that its winter growth is inferior to the sub. clovers and medics. However, cutting data from small plots trials (Bailey, 1964, 1966) do not support these observations.

In 1964, a well-established stand of commercial rose clover* was selected to test its ability to withstand continuous grazing.

The site is some 10 miles north-east of Northampton in an area of 17 in. annual average rainfall. The rainfall for the past two years has exceeded this.

The rose clover was originally sown in 1959 on yellow loamy sand which increases in yellowness and loaminess with depth. While the pasture was dominantly rose clover, a high density of brome grass was also present.

The area was small (5 acres) and grazing was commenced in early July, 1964 with ten ewes. This stocking rate of two ewes per acre was maintained until October, 1965 when the stocking rate was increased by leaving on the plot the ewe lambs born there.

Three ewe lambs remained on the plot to make the present stocking rate 2.6 ewes per acre. Despite the increase in stocking rate the grazing pressure is still not

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*Commercial rose clover consists of a mixture of at least a dozen different strains of Trifolium hirtum. It was the original rose clover material imported from California in 1950. The present commercial strains such as Kondinin, Sirint, Troodos, Olympus and Hykon are all selections from commercial rose clover.

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excessive. For the period August to April, the pasture available is far in excess of requirements. For the remaining months, feed is limiting and under the stocking rate used, winter growth does appear to be slow. After germination, the grasses are the dominant component of the pasture.

As the photograph shows, summer feed is abundant. Flowering does not appear to be retarded and seed set in both years has been prolific.

The grazing pressure in spring was not sufficient to prevent a high level of grass seed in 1965. As shown in Figure 1 a rapid weight gain to October-November was followed by a weight loss. In December, the ewes again put on weight rapidly. The weight loss coincided with the period when grass seeds were at their worst and the December rise occurred after the seed had fallen. It appears that the seed problem may have been severe enough to affect feed intake.

Figure 2 shows the liveweight increase of the ewe lambs on the plot. Gain in weight was rapid up until mid October, when it ceased. This again may have been the result of the high level of grass seed as the rose clover was still green and was expected to provide sufficient quality to produce further weight gains.

The growth rate of the lambs is comparable with similar plots of different pasture species in different areas, for the same time of lambing (see Fig. 2). The growth rate for the first three months was 3½ lb. per week, a satisfactory rate of gain for Merinos. This rate of gain was recorded in both years.

The wool production of the ewes was 11 lb. per head at the July, 1965 shearing. This represents a greasy wool cut of 22 lb. per acre.
In Brief ... 

- The present stocking rate of 2.6 ewes per acre has not approached a "crash point" as the amount of dry pasture at the beginning of summer and the end of autumn is considerable.

- Well established stands of rose clover can support moderately high rates of continuous grazing without detriment to seed set of the pasture or to animal health and production.

- While relatively high stocking rates have been possible in this demonstration, this does not necessarily indicate that rose clover is superior to other species on this soil type for stock carrying capacity. Such relationships have yet to be determined.

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REFERENCES


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