

Establishing Dryland Lucerne

There is no doubt that on many of New Zealand's dry land farming regions Lucerne has proven over a long period of time to be a very suitable plant.

Over the last few years there has been a noticeable increase in the use of Lucerne on dry land farms and we often get asked for tips on how to best establish Lucerne in dryland areas. For this reason we have produced the following simple plan that has worked very well for our dry land farming clients.

Paddock identification.

Farmers normally select their Lucerne paddocks from existing pastures that are performing poorly. This poor performance will be for a number of reasons which may include thinning out from summer drought, winter pugging or insect attack.

These paddocks typically therefore will have other issues which can include lower the desired fertility and perennial weeds (e.g. couch/thistles). The following easy steps will help overcome these issues with end result being a well established Lucerne paddock.

We have made chemical recommendations within this plan and have mostly used the original brand name. We do recognise that there are many options for these chemicals and suggest that farmers compare like with like when purchasing their chemicals for this plan.

Step 1: November. One year prior to drilling into Lucerne.

Once the paddock has been identified you should obtain a soil test,

The following base fertility levels are the most desirable:

- Soil pH: 6.0 to 6.4
- Olson P: 20 - 30
- Sulphate S: 10 – 12
- Mg: 8 – 10
- Aluminum: < 15mg/kg
- Sodium: < 6%
- CaMg: > 2:1

Bear these in mind and correct any deficiency between now and sowing the paddock into Lucerne.



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Step 2 : November. One year prior to drilling into Lucerne.

Spray the paddock with 4 litres of Roundup + 40 grams of Granstar. Applying chemical at this time of year is done to ensure there is green top growth to absorb enough chemical to achieve a good kill.

Step 3 : End of November until Mid February

Leave the paddock in a “fallow” state until early February. Some farmers may see this “fallow” period as a bit of waste however dry matter production on run out pastures during a typical New Zealand summer period is low, soil moisture levels will be enhanced by this “fallow” period.

Apply a further 2 litres of Roundup per hectare. On or about the 15th of February direct drill the paddock with 100 kilograms of suitable feed barley.

Do this regardless of soil moisture conditions as barley seed is big enough to stay in the ground and will germinate when it gets sufficient moisture even if this takes several weeks.

Step 4 : Mid February until early October.

Use the barley as a multi-graze greenfeed option during the winter into early spring. In early October spray the paddock with 3 litres of Roundup + 750 mls Lorsban per hectare.

Leave for 3-7 days and direct drill 10 kilograms of bare seed Icon or SuperSonic Lucerne + 6 kilograms of Nodulator granular inoculant.

Step 5 : 6 - 8 weeks after drilling.

Inspect the paddock for weed control, look at the weeds and young Lucerne and if you have greater than 50% ground cover apply 4 - 6 litres of 2,4-DB + 500 mls of Lorsban per hectare.

This is a simple but effective way for getting a paddock of Lucerne established from old run out pasture into weed free productive Lucerne.

If you have any other questions please don't hesitate to contact Specialty Seeds.



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