



EDITORIAL

I am at a loss to understand the hoo-hah about Australia's contribution to global carbon emissions. I recently spent 12 days in China and never saw the sun, other than a red ball in the sky. I was shocked at the level of air pollution. In the six years I have been travelling to China this accelerating pollution level has been astounding. Every six weeks they commission another coal fired power station.

Australia cannot be blamed for supplying the coal for this massive expansion as China is a major producer of coal in its own right. I am sure the level of air pollution happening there now will have a major effect on athletic performance in next year's Olympics in China.

On my way back to Australia I had a stopover in Malaysia. At present Malaysia has a major outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease. Fortunately I did not venture outside Kuala Lumpur. I was shown photos of Aussie cattle that were sent there and now have severe gum, mouth and hoof lesions. What a sorry sight! I am not certain whether there were any eradication plans in place.

When I came through Quarantine in Sydney, AQIS officers had no knowledge of the outbreak and were not in the slightest bit interested in inspecting my shoes. I got the impression they were more interested in screening my luggage for explosives. My enquiries since have not indicated any awareness of the outbreak by AQIS officials. If a terrorist wanted to wreak economic havoc on Australia he would only have to smuggle in a small piece of infected animal product and Australia would be brought to its economic knees.

Few of us get dizzy from doing too many good turns.

ON THE ROAD



The changing face of China

BIG HEAD IN HORSES

- Dr Ross McKenzie, QDPI -

What is Big Head in grazing horses?

Big Head is a calcium deficiency in horses grazing on introduced tropical pasture grasses. It is caused by crystals of calcium oxalate in the grass blades, which prevent the horse absorbing calcium from the grass during digestion.

The signs of Big Head include:

- lameness – animals appear stiff and have a shortened gait.
- ill thrift – loss of condition on pastures which look nutritious.
- swollen jaw bones – upper jaws, lower jaws or both.

Some or all horses on a pasture may develop Big Head. The disease can develop within two months of horses being put on hazardous pastures but commonly takes six-eight months. Mares and foals are more susceptible than stallions and geldings, but all can get the disease.

Which grasses are hazardous?

Cases of Big Head have occurred on pastures of the introduced tropical species: buffel grass, green panic, setaria, kikuyu, guinea grass, para grass, pangola grass and signal grass. Purple pigeon grass is also hazardous. The hazard is greatest when these grasses provide all, or almost all, the feed available. Native grasses have not caused the disease. Introduced temperate grasses, eg. rye grass and the sorghums, have not caused Big Head.

How can Big Head be prevented?

Use native pastures where possible. Avoid grazing horses on the grasses listed above for periods greater than one month. Some introduced tropical grasses are non hazardous. They include Rhodes grass, Jarra, the paspalums, the couches and Creeping Bluegrass.

If only hazardous grasses are available, encourage the growth of a legume component in the pasture to provide a source of feed free of oxalate, and feed a calcium and phosphorus supplement.

Mineral and supplement mixtures which will provide the required amount of calcium and phosphorus for horses include:

- 1kg rock phosphate mixed with 1.5kg molasses
- 1kg of a mixture of 1/3 ground limestone and 2/3 dicalcium phosphate (DCP) mixed with 1.5kg molasses.

Either of these should be fed to each horse once a week while grazing hazardous pastures. The molasses is used as a carrier and to make the supplement attractive. It can be omitted if the animals can be persuaded to eat all the minerals by other means. Do not be concerned if your horses eat their week's supplement in one or two days. It contains enough mineral to last them the full week. You may divide up the weekly amount and feed it each day if you wish.

To provide approximately the same amount of calcium and phosphorus as the above mineral mixtures, 20kg of good quality lucerne would need to be fed to each horse weekly. Other mineral mixes which provide a calcium to phosphorus ratio of 2:1 can be used but are likely to be more expensive than rock phosphate or ground limestone and DCP.

Can Big Head be cured?

The lameness and ill thrift can be cured. The swellings of the jaws may not fully disappear if the animal was severely

affected. Double the amount of the above mineral supplements should be fed to affected animals for at least six months to replace the minerals lost from their bones.

Each year insects eat one third of the world's food crops.

SOUTHEDGE SEEDS PHOTO COMPETITION

- Ross Newman -

The inaugural Southedge Seeds' photo competition has come to a close. I am pleased to announce that this year's prize goes to Mr Phil Cook of "Desert Oaks," Charters Towers for his photo entitled "Would you like Buffel or Panic with that?" It was pleasing to see the results of planting ENVIROGRO™ pelleted seed, combined with rainfall and resting a paddock.

Congratulations Phil, your \$550 gift voucher to purchase any seed from our ENVIROGRO™ range will be making its way to you in the next little while. For those of you who missed out this time round, I will be running this competition again next year. I just hope the season is a little more favourable then.



WOULD YOU LIKE BUFFEL OR PANIC WITH THAT?
Winning entry by Phil Cook – photo competition

GAMBA GRASS - WHAT'S NEXT?

- John Rains -

The momentum to ban Gamba Grass, which includes banning seed production for domestic and export markets, as well as planting it for pastures, is gaining pace.

I have just completed a critique of a submission from DNR to the Queensland Government to declare it a noxious weed. I was amazed at the emotive, biased nature of the submission. If you would like a copy of the submission, we can direct you to the website.

How will banning Gamba make it go away? I am at a loss to understand, unless you believe in the good fairy. To want to ban the planting of one of the most palatable, productive grasses suitable to Northern Australia is pure nonsense.

I recently went to a meeting of the Mitchell River Catchment Committee and saw a very slick presentation which presented an emotive, biased submission for banning Gamba.

The facts are that 7% of Australia's problem weeds have come from pasture plants, but over 50% have originated from ornamental or nursery introductions. In spite of these statistics the grazing industry is being targeted. Maybe this is happening because graziers are not vocal enough. Let's take a stand, otherwise we will have a second rate industry in Australia.

An action group has been formed in the Northern Territory to facilitate the banning of Gamba there. Their group website can be found on <http://www.gamba.org.au/> The eco-nerds have put the grazing industry on notice that Buffel and Leucaena are next on the list. It will be sad if the northern grazing industry sits back and lets this happen.

There is information available to support Gamba's retention as a pasture plant. It is lengthy but can be emailed provided good internet connections are available. Contact John Rains at

johnr@southedgeseeds.com.au or Ross Newman at ross@southedgeseeds.com.au and we will endeavour to forward it to you.

We also need to ask these miserable people to give us alternative plants that will do everything the existing plants deliver. I am adopting an attitude of turning the answers from these eco-nerds into questions. If they want to deny the grazing industry these productive plants, then make alternative plant recommendations that will have a similar production, palatability, drought tolerance, commercial seed availability and ease of establishment to that which Gamba has.

PRE END-OF-JUNE SEED PURCHASES

Well, the end of the financial year is near. For anyone wishing to make purchases before 30 June 2007, Southedge Seeds will happily store the seed in their controlled climate storage area until dispatch is required. This will ensure that seed is secured for this year's planting season, and you can be confident that it will be of the same quality as the day it was bought.

There will be an attractive discount for payments made before the end of the month on these June purchases.

ROSS' RANTINGS

If the grazing industry in Queensland and the Northern Territory is going to continue to remain viable and productive, we need to start getting smart in the way our agri politicians lobby governments. The green movement is starting to gain momentum, and the way it is going about it is quite sneaky. Think of how it has gone about the gamba grass debate, buying properties in the north to turn them into national parks. These properties previously had gamba grass planted for grazing purposes, and since grazing animals have been removed it has grown rank, and now the movement is able to press its claim to ban it.

I have heard whispers that they have bought properties in the south which are predominantly buffel grass, with

the same motive in mind. Without buffel grass, the Queensland beef industry wouldn't be the force that it is, and if they get the momentum who knows what they will target next?

Pasture plant species are selected for their ability to establish under harsh conditions, produce reasonable levels of dry matter and produce seed, i.e. the same characteristics that weeds have. Without that weediness potential they are not suitable for the grazing industry.

Any work into new pasture cultivars has all but stopped as the fear of litigation plays on the minds of researchers and industry bodies, so where do we go from here? Your guess is as good as mine. Maybe we should be hitting governments with the benefits of carbon storage within grasslands over that of woodlands - really prove how much benefit we are providing to the environment with the productive grass species we have...

