

## Grazing over the Top!

For the small acreage owner who wishes to increase the carrying capacity of their acreage, subdividing paddocks and managing grazing is essential.



By organizing your grazing regime and better managing the pasture resources, you can realize worthwhile gains in productive capacity that are greater, in terms of cost and labour input, than alternate strategies.

The outlay of capital in developing the infrastructure is the initial cost. Do it once, do it right is the mantra here. *I'd suggest a Sota Kubota with a 4 in 1 bucket is a good place to start!* - Seriously though, put some thought into paddock size, roadways and watering points. Also think about gate size and stock handling facilities. We supply a full range of implements to help get the job done, including post hole borers, rippers, slashers, graders and box scrapers.

At this time of year, a good way to manage your pasture is by trying to keep it as palatable and nutritious as possible. Like all good farming techniques, an integrated approach is often the best. During the summer months, this can be achieved with grazing management and a method of tractor powered pasture management called 'topping'. Most permanent grass species are active in the warmer months; they also become reproductive. When grasses mature and flower they become less nutritious. After they flower, many species tend to go into a senescence phase, or, if they are an annual variety, die. Topping can extend the useful grazing period of many grasses by prolonging their vegetative state.

The trick to topping a pasture is getting the cutting height right. Basically, grasses keep a lot of their energy stores in their lower stems (crown). If they are grazed off or slashed too low, the energy store is

lost and they struggle to re-grow. Similarly, if they are continually preferred by stock, they are unlikely to develop into an established sward, and unwanted grasses and weeds begin to establish.

You should aim to limit the area of pasture to graze. This discourages selective grazing, and the grasses present are better utilized. By removing stock, once grazed to the desired level, the grasses send up vigorous new shoots that will be highly palatable when the rotation returns to that particular strip or paddock. Topping should be used to assist this aim.

Set your slasher up to a height that is above the 'crown' of the grass sward. Ensure that the slasher is going to remove mostly the mature, less digestible leaves. Your slasher is probably going to be sitting relatively high, so be aware that this may send material flying longer distances. Also make sure the [PTO](#) shaft is not excessively akimbo. Your blades must be sharp and it is also necessary that the slasher operates at the optimum RPM.



A good tip is to incline the slasher so that the rear is higher than the front cutting height. This negates, to some extent, the tendency for slashers to blow the long grass over. It also creates an aggressive cutting angle for the blades.

I raised the point about the benefits of subdividing and better utilizing your pastures. You might find that you can increase your stocking rate by these means alone. By using educated guesses and a bit of trial and error, you maybe able to find a balance where, in an average year, you can sustain your stock with minimal supplementary feeding. Management techniques like pasture topping are a very cost effective way of increasing the productivity of any small acreage pasture.



*Mark's Farm Tips* provide useful farming advice to help take your farm to its full potential, from Sota's Agronomist & farming guru, Mark Crakanthorp.