**Converting tropical pasture back to native pastures**

*By Anne Coote (Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator - North West)*

Can paddocks be converted back to native pasture without the use of chemicals? What are the tools and techniques that will lead to successful establishment? Anne Coote (RALF from Moree) provides some insight and advice based on some inquiries received recently from landholders in the region.

Tropical pastures usually deplete over time. The best and most cost effective way to get natives back into the system is to allow them to generate naturally and then support them by good grazing principles and rest.

The use of Glyphosate will continue to take out any natives, including forbs, annual and perennial grasses. Creating a native pasture with a diversity of plants and not just grasses will improve groundcover, provide diversity of species for grazing and build essential nutrients in the soil.

Use livestock with high density, short grazing periods, trampling to remove the bulk of the tropical pasture. Observation will be extremely important to identify new seedlings/forbs/grasses as they appear, so you give them rest to allow establishment to Phase 2. They then should be grazed before Phase 3 to stimulate growth and establishment. This will provide feed for the livestock, while the natives are coming back, it is a low input/cost system and it will take time.

Less desirable plants will appear, as this will be part of the successional process…these will be various forms of weeds. Weeds also have a purpose to convert sunlight into sugars to feed the microbes and roots systems of the plants and stock will eat these weeds. This will allow the soil to be protected with ground cover (critical 70-100%), maximising water infiltration and improving soil structure with the growing plants.

If you want to increase diversity to support the natives during the transitional phase, then you could direct drill a mix of multi-species dependent upon if it is an autumn or spring planting opportunity i.e. winter oats/rye/triticale-non bearded, plus radish, or medics. Summer is a bit more difficult as you are limited to your sub-tropicals, forage sorghums etc., which are expensive. Use ‘bare’ seed. Native pasture seed is expensive and sometimes hard to establish, however, it could be planted out as a % in a multi-species mix at an opportune time with good moisture and follow up rainfall.

If we want ground cover we need to let plants grow, use the stock to graze (as above) and this will change the diversity of the plants able to establish.

Manage for what you want, not for what you don’t want.