



Farmer Observation V Scientific Proof

When farmers observe some fundamentals that really work for them these observations often are not treated seriously by their fellow farmers. They get comments like: Where is the scientific proof? If that was so, why aren't more farmers doing it? Etc.

Recently a dairy farmer told us of his observations which he made after he trialed spraying *weeds v not spraying weeds (*weeds = unwanted vegetation).

Where he sprayed weeds in his irrigation bays so they would not grow rampant and where he sprayed weeds on his irrigation check bank, the re-growth has actually resulted in less grasses growing and instead a mass of the unwelcome weeds, especially Paterson's Curse, has appeared on the check banks.

However where he didn't spray he observed that he now has an increase of grasses, in fact a wide range of species including native grasses, and very few weeds.

He further observed that the corners of the bays where the spraying has not ever been done there are very few weeds and that the grasses grow considerably better than in rest of the sprayed paddock. He also has noticed that the cows always head for the corners first; graze them out before they graze the sprayed areas in the paddock.

Why do the cows graze in the corners? The cows know what is best for their bodies. It was obvious to the farmer that the grass was not only more palatable where the sprays had missed but that the grass in fact was more nutritious. In fact, if you observe any animal when first entering a paddock, where they head first to eat the vegetation will tell you a lot about the nutrition in your vegetation and hence the condition of your soil. **With this fact alone he is not continuing with the spraying of weeds in the future.**

This dairy farmer is now putting in place methods where he feels confident that he will manage his farm with minimal and later no spraying of weeds at all. In fact he is now using grazing management to manage his weed problem by carrying out intensive grazing with a long recovery period.

On the other side of the coin, farmers have been given plenty of scientific "proof" and encouragement to use weedicides to get rid of their weeds. They are told that the best way to stop weeds from spreading is to spray them out with weedicides and to rid the farms of weeds forever! This will also prevent a seed bank from building up or weeds out-competing the more desirable species and resulting in the loss of productivity. However after some 60 years of using weedicides there is little evidence that this "scientific" approach is winning the war!

So who gets it right? The scientists and researchers conducting their expensive trials or the farmers making changes through their on farm observations? What do you do? Many farmers we know just ignore the government bylaws to get rid of toxic vegetation because of the simple fact that getting rid of them with sprays simply doesn't work. In fact, like our dairy farmer, the problem actually gets worse.

Farming Secrets says: Avoid practices that perpetuate the problem. Work in with nature to maintain the balance.