

AGRISOL NEWS

Congratulations! You have just survived the driest period on record and now spring is beginning to push growth along in areas receiving recent rainfall or access to irrigation. Pressure on water supplies, soil degradation issues and dubious plant and animal health plus tight budgets and low fodder reserves has meant that it is timely to reassess how to do things on and around the farm.

Do you want to do it easier if the dry should come again? All of us would, and the best way to do this is to begin to question current practices. Should you continue to use conventional fertilisers such as muriate of potash, 'super' and urea which are all salts? (We know that salts are used to remove moisture and yet it is applied to the soil?) Or should there be a sensible combination of 'alternative' fertilisers and soil amendments?

AgriSolutions has never been busier because the drought has seen the 'alternative' inputs come into favour. Those who have adapted some of these ideas and persisted with them have come up trumps against the extreme weather experienced during the last season. (That is not to say that the period was not difficult for these people, but it meant that the conditions were more easily tolerated and recovery was much better.)

Now, with spring beginning to push growth along, this is the best time to build some resilience back into the soil and plants. By integrating natural methods into your existing growing program or by using the natural approach on its own, a living soil becomes established and acts as a natural buffer to extreme weather including frost and cold, hot and dry.

"How is this?" you ask. To provide a basic explanation, a living soil is made up of earthworms, dung beetles and a myriad of microscopic bacteria and fungi known as microbes. Ellinbank Dairy Research Farm has documented as part of the Phosphorus on Dairy Farms Project that their soils hold the equivalent in weight of one cow in earthworms per hectare and one cow equivalent weight in microbes a hectare. These organisms generate heat but also aerate the soil, create water percolation pathways and recycle organic matter to convert it back to plant food. This is the magic of nature working to sustain itself, to remain alive and productive under many conditions.

Of course you should always try to refer to a reliable independent soil test such as that conducted by SWEP. Knowing the complete soil nutrient balance makes it much easier to achieve healthy soil, plants and stock. The cost savings on healthy plants alone, let alone the overall continual production of wholesome mineralised plant material, would more than compensate the outlay on the soil tests.

Items to consider this spring are:

- Root establishment of plants
- Feeding the soil to feed the plants – not feeding the plants directly
- Resistance to pest and disease
- Tolerance of extreme weather stresses
- Optimising quality and quantity of product
- Creating a foundation for future improvement
- Reducing costs in the medium to long term
- Re-acquaintance with sensory skills