

At Last...

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- ◆ A big step forward—SWEP now have a COMPLETE soil test—nutrients, cations and biology. Check out the value.
- ◆ The World Congress of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) is being held in Adelaide in September 2005. Theme: Shaping Sustainable Systems.
- ◆ A Victoria-wide organic livestock body is being formed with support from government. More information on request
- ◆ AgriSolutions is an “InCalf” Advisor.

Welcome to this first edition of *The AgriSol Argus*. The purpose of this bulletin is to keep you informed of seasonal events, presenting ideas for your consideration and as a forum for information exchange.

With regular occurrence, natural, biological and organic and biodynamic farming is making the headlines. It is our contention that the frequency of these stories will increase as more people investigate and convert to these farming practices. This is happening in response to limitations imposed by modern conventional agriculture in managing the whole available resource base, and tempered by the economic reality attached to a viable

farm business.

Increasingly conventional farmers are facing changes to practices due to environmental, economic and consumer pressures. For these reasons, it is important



Mike Parish, Merriwa, NSW with adlib supplementary feed trailer.

that every farmer, no matter the style of farming, MUST embrace new and selected older practices to begin to cut costs and lessen impact

on the environment. As part of the learning process, this newsletter is offering to present what works (and what doesn't) for others. For this to succeed, your contributions are encouraged and will be acknowledged in future editions.

The soil is fundamental to creating a solid foundation to any growing situation. Consequently, the focus will primarily be in looking after the soil so that it can then look after you! This message will be repeated time and again as it is too important to neglect—even for the shortest time. Of course it takes time for the mass of soil to change, so supplementation of plant and/or animal enters the management plan at strategic times.

Rumours Arife

Heard it said the other day that AgriSolutions has gone out of business—but of course this is not the case! Yes, it has been a long time since the last newsletters (under the banner of NatraNews (Gippsland) and there is much to report since then. Apart from the regular seasonal and economic challenges we have all endured during the last 5

years or so, much work has taken place participating in (or conducting) seminars, conferences and field days, being involved in establishing Gippsland Organic Livestock Incorporated and sitting on the Board of the Organic Federation of Australia. This has put demands on time not enabling regular contact with you, but it should change in future as

the other workload becomes more predictable. You can then be kept up to date with the latest (and some older) ideas to make your growing enterprise as effective as possible. It is business as usual with the view to keeping you better informed and I welcome your enquiries or the opportunity to catch up on past or future events.

Sincerely, *Gerhard*

Lessons from last year—Gippsland



Notice the difference? With the control at right, the left side had 1 litre/ hectare of hydrogen peroxide added. Can anyone offer an explanation? A drum of peroxide will be given for the best answer.

Here in (nearly always) green Gippsland, many (dairy) farmers, still fresh with the memory of two of the most difficult seasons, are constantly reviewing their feed and fertiliser strategies to ensure that their farms remain viable. It has been a difficult lead-up to winter, having virtually no autumn break after a hot and

dry summer. Then straight into a cold and wet spell resulting in some soils still not being adequately saturated and yet others having become a quagmire with stock doing it hard. Nurturing soil is still the best course of action and taking care not to graze too hard is one essential aspect of this. Keeping a reasonable covering over the

ground at all times ensures that the soil is less affected by frost during the cold, and that it stays cool and moist in the summer, ready to bounce back when good growth conditions return. Just *think* like a piece of dirt – and treat it just as you would want to be treated if you were a happy living soil!

**AS A FARMER, YOU
ASK, “WHAT HAS
THAT GOT TO DO
WITH ME?”**

A refractometer is used to measure mineral sugar levels (brix) in sap or liquids. “What has that got to do with me?” you ask. Well, if say the sugar level in the plants you grow are high, you get better quality feed. So why not grow the best feed for your buck by

Brix for Building

measuring it during its growth, applying the right fertiliser and then picking the best time to harvest. It costs little more to do this and can be applied equally to grapes as it can to silage and hay or any other crop. Did you know that the higher the brix level at any

stage in the life of a plant, the less prone it is to pest and disease and the more feed value it has? If you are not familiar with this, let me give you a demonstration with a refractometer to see just how easy it is. Particularly useful with the silage and hay season upon us.

WANTED



REWARD

Soil Aeration
Fly Control—
And heaps more!

Dung—using one of nature’s tools

Seeding of dung beetles for year-round activity is now very possible – and we know the benefits of these busy little critters. Together with earthworms, they incorporate organic matter into the soil, and in the process aerate it, breaking

down the hardpan and providing paths for moisture penetration and root growth. With summer not far away, fly populations are reduced and there is no need to pasture harrow in order to spread manure, once the beetles have done

their job and made it one less for you to do. Of course you have to know how to manage them to give their best, so a little bit of learning is needed. Call this office if you want to explore the possibilities of using this tool of nature.

Soil—your most valuable resource

Right now is the very best time to look at what nature is dishing up for you to deal with – by going out into the paddock and having a good dig around in the soil. We don't really know what is happening under the soil surface without exploring and feeling, smelling and seeing for yourself. Is it still dry? And if it is,

how far down is the moisture? How are the roots coping with the soil situation – is there a hard pan? Is it dry in the subsoil? Are the roots penetrating deeply to extract optimum moisture and fertility? How many earthworms are doing their thing? And are the dung beetles digging it? Now is the time to begin plans

for future fertiliser applications, based on your observations and soil testing. So get out there with the shovel or soil sampler and dig it, smell it and touch it so you know first hand how much life is in your soil. And if really keen, ask me about the penetrometer to measure the soil hardness—the result will surprise!



The only way to predict plant growth—check the root system regularly.

Best of both worlds

A range of mineral fertilisers fortified with fish fertiliser and/or kelp is now available. The benefits of these blends are :

No need to spray the fish separately - less overall cost ;

The effect in the soil of the mineral fertiliser is both quick

and slow release of available nutrients for the whole growing season—not feast or famine;

Fish fertiliser is a great food source to soil life, giving it a kick-start during active growth and setting the

soil up for a more productive summer and winter;

Contain many balanced minerals and trace elements that are not in conventional fertilisers ;

They largely remain in the soil, even after floods.

**“QUICK AND SLOW
RELEASE OF
AVAILABLE
NUTRIENTS FOR
THE WHOLE
GROWING SEASON”**

Heeding the experts

A report in *The Weekly Times* (page 106, Feb 5th, 2003) warns of vitamin deficiencies due to the drought. Vitamin A injections are recommended, but if that is not your style you may want to use Vitec Omega Fish Oil. It has similar qualities to

cod liver oil, containing vitamins A and D and omega fatty acids. Application is by drench gun, mixed with feed, or even directly into water troughs. In combination with Vitec Kelp for Stock or MinKel, it makes a superb

pick-me-up for distressed stock. If you have daggy sheep or loose cattle, this is strongly recommended. An application on the rump where the stock can lick it off their coat might be an easy way to administer.



Healthy young organically certified cattle at Noondel Grazing Company, Dandaragan, WA.



PO Box 81, Darnum VIC 3822

Phone: 5627 8663

Fax: 5627 8663 (by arrangement)

E-mail: seagrow@dcsi.net.au

Advisory Service:

Biological soil management, Organic Conversion Advice, Independent soil, plant and water testing, "InCalf" Advisor, Natural animal health care.

Suppliers of:

Apple cider vinegars, Biologicals (microbes & inoculants), Books, Dolomite, Farm merchandise, Fish fertilisers, Fish oils, Grass seeds, Humates (solid & liquid), Hydrogen peroxide, Kelp meal & liquids, Liming materials, Magnetic water enhancers, Manures (composted and pelletised), Mineral fertilisers, Molasses, Orange pumps, Refractometers, Trace elements.

IN THE NEXT ARGUS:

Seeds of time—the debate for **Native Grasses**

InCalf—tools for the dairy farmer

Minerals—their use and their form

Reflection—where have the years gone?

Topical **seasonal** issues.

Your comments—and more.

Mailing Address Line 1

Mailing Address Line 2

Mailing Address Line 3

Mailing Address Line 4

Mailing Address Line 5

The Final Wrap



Harvest of Gippsland 2004, Lardner Park, Warragul, Victoria.

What will the future bring? Polish your crystal ball and you might have a better chance than I to predict it! In this light, if you feel uncomfortable about another dry summer, consider spraying kelp on your growing crop or plants to assist root penetration and establishment before the dry sets in. Not only will you get up to 3 weeks longer growth, but recovery after the autumn break is often much quicker. Of course this is contingent upon the roots being able to penetrate through the soil—no hardpans allowed! If there are hardpans in your soil profile, an aeration with dung beetles, earthworms or a mechanical aerator might be necessary. To encourage earthworms, a dose of fish fertilizer will supply the food that will fuel their growth and breeding. While active growth occurs, consider applications of fish and kelp even after cutting hay or silage and after grazing as the paddocks are rotated or spelled.

As a producer and consumer, you might like to know about Farmer's Markets. Governed by sensible rules to only allow local growers to hold stands, they have become very popular over recent years because the food quality is high, but more importantly the consumer and producer can develop a positive relationship. We don't often consider it, but consumers place a lot of trust in the suppliers of their food and what better way than to support that trust by liais-

ing directly with the grower? Farmer's Markets operate in many regional centres and capital cities. Ask your local council for details—they like to support local agriculture.

It is intended to mail this bulletin to you on a quarterly basis, with special editions as needed. If you would prefer to have it emailed (to save paper), please send me a message at seagrow@dcsi.net.au requesting to be put on the email mailing list. On the other hand, if you don't wish to receive this newsletter at all, please let me know so that your request can be acted upon.