

Choosing the right forage hybrid

Forage for Beef Cattle

For flexible feed

A sweet sorghum hybrid such as Sugargraze is the obvious choice. Often the feed requirements will depend on the season and could be summer, autumn or early winter. In this case Sugargraze is the ideal choice as it can be grazed during summer or left to grow and used later in the season.

Conserving excess feed as silage is also an option, rather than leaving the crop to slowly deteriorate in the field.

For late summer, autumn-winter feed

For this purpose, choose a sweet sorghum such as Sugargraze. The high sugar content of stems at maturity means Sugargraze is still palatable and utilised by stock, even after frosting.

For fattening beef cattle

Forage of high feed quality is required to fatten and finish grass-fed beef cattle. This means a diet with average protein of 13% and metabolisable energy of 10.0 MJ/kg. Forage oats easily meets these requirements and. In Queensland, oats are used for finished stock.

A young, well-grown crop of Sugargraze, BMR Rocket or BMR Octane can also provide the necessary feed quality for summer fattening. In circumstances where the crop is used later than the ideal growth stage, providing a supplementary feed will improve stock performance.

A grain-based supplement, or even a liquid feed supplement, will provide the extra energy and minerals to compliment the forage. With this method, weight gains of 0.9-1.0 kg/head/day can still be reliably achieved.

Small areas for general summer feed

Where small paddocks or strip grazing are used and maximum productivity per hectare is required, then Sprint, BMR Rocket, BMR Octane or Superdan 2 are all suitable. The final selection will depend on paddock conditions, stock needs and personal preference.

Large areas for general summer feed

Where large areas are sown and a set stocking rate is used, the most suitable hybrid is Sugargraze or BMR Octane. It stands along for this purpose as it maintains palatability through summer and into winter.

Forage for Dairy Cattle

High quality feed for milk production

Milk production requires feed of high crude protein and energy. BMR Octane would be the recommended choice. In this instance, to achieve maximum productivity, graze the crop when it is around one metre high and provide sulphur salt blocks.

Early summer feed for milk production

The best overall choices are Sugargraze, BMR Rocket and BMR Octane. For very early sowing. It is important to note that forage sorghum are best established when the soil temperature is 16 degrees Celsius and rising. If the soil temperature is below 16 degrees than establishment can be patchy and soilborne diseases can affect the crop leading to an undesirable result. Replanting may need to occur if this situation happens.

Feed for dry cows

All of the hybrids mentioned so far can be used for feeding dry cows. However, the sweet sorghum, Sugargraze has the added benefit of providing useful feed through to early winter.

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Fodder conservation from forage crops

With favourable seasons forage sorghum has the potential to produce large amount of feed very quickly. When feed production exceeds immediate requirement, there is the option of conserving excess feed before it deteriorates.

Fodder conservation is about harvesting and storage of plant materials to capture the plant nutrients at a point in time. This involves anticipating short-term needs and planning to conserve excess feed before it is too old.

Two weeks can be a long time and can mean:

- Height of crop goes from 1m to 2m
- More bales of hay but, lower quality hay
- Protein may drop from 16% down to 12% or less.

Growing just for hay

For specialist hay production, the sudangrass hybrid Superdan 2 is the first choice. Its fine stems aid drying and it produces very high-quality hay. It is tolerant of machinery traffic and has excellent recovery after cutting. BMR Rocket or BMR Octane are the second choice and, if cut early, can provide quality leafy hay.

For hay and opportunity grazing

Where hay is the prime objective, with the possibility of some grazing, Superdan 2, BMR Rocket or BMR Octane are all good options.

For grazing and opportunity hay

In the situation where grazing is the prime objective, with the possibility of obtaining a late season hay cut, Superdan 2 or BMR Octane are good choices due to their superior autumn feed quantity and quality.

Sugargraze is also excellent in this situation, because of its superior feed quality, however planting at a higher seeding rate may need to occur to reduce the stem thickness. Some plants may not survive the hay making process therefore the higher seeding rate may help when the plant returns for a second cut or grazing.

Forage crops for silage

All hybrids in this section can be used for making conventional fine chop silage (e.g. for pit or bunker stage) but for round bale and plastic wrap silage the finer stemmed types are the most suitable. As a general rule, whatever is suitable to make into hay, can be made into plastic wrap silage.

It is important to note that BMR Rocket and BMR Octane need to be wilted before being ensiled into pit bunkers. This is due to the moisture content within the plant being too high for direct cut silage.

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Growing possibilities

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