

TALL FESCUE DEFIES THE DROUGHT

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A NEW generation tall fescue has proved a hardy and productive perennial pasture during the drought in northern NSW.

On Ken McLennon's Bonny Rigg at Warah Ridge near Quirindi in northern NSW, 3 and 4 year old stands of Flecha Max P are strong and dense - considering the drought the pasture has come through.

The core business at Bonny Rigg is breeding and growing Angus cattle for the EU market. The main role of Flecha fescue is to provide autumn, winter and spring forage to enable heifers to grow to their target 300kg joining weight.

The drought tolerance of Flecha demonstrated on Bonny Rigg is supported by recent trial work in central NSW, where 5 replicated trials showed Flecha Max P retained 68% ground cover compared with 28% cover of phalaris (Australian & Sirosa) after the drought.

Mr McLennon explained 'my 3 and 4 year old lucerne and phalaris mixes have performed poorly, I now have all lucerne with the phalaris dropping out in the drought, I have Flecha Max P in the paddock next door which is still strong and has given me twice the number of grazing days'

In the winter of 2007, steer growth on first-year Flecha Max P (1.3kg/day) was comparable to winter wheat (1.5 kg/day) – making Flecha tall fescue an attractive option for high performance autumn, winter, spring finishing pasture, without costly yearly re-planting.

Tamworth PGG Seeds territory manager Charlie Roberts described Flecha MaxP as a fine-leaved highly winter-active tall fescue that is extremely drought tolerant and persistent – going dormant during hot dry summers, but recovering quickly in autumn to produce a large volume of feed in autumn, winter and spring.

Mr Roberts urged producers to take another look at fescues.

"The new varieties are more palatable, with higher animal production than the old fescues. The growth potential and persistence of the new generation tall fescues provides a proven winter-feed alternative for growing stock."



FLECHA Max P tall fescue on Ken McLennan's property 'Bonny Rigg' near Quirindi, Ken (right) is pictured in January with Charlie Roberts (PGG Seeds).