

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE 22ND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE TROPICAL GRASSLAND SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA—1984**

FROM PROGRESS TO POVERTY

M. B. JOYCE*

*"The Overflow", Beaudesert, Qld, Australia, 4285.

Sixteen years ago in 1968 we cleared and ploughed 162 hectares of light sandy loam undulating country, which was heavily blanketed with acacia regrowth. The clearing involved the use of heavy machinery, and as we were uncertain what sort of plough to use at this stage, we contracted both the clearing and ploughing.

The area was then sown with a shotgun mixture which included the legumes, siratro, lotononis, white clover, lucerne and glycine, and the grasses, green panic, ryegrass and molasses grass. 500 kg of Mo super per hectare was applied with the sowing. The total cost was \$86 per hectare.

We considered our country in its natural state, with regrowth reasonably controlled, worth about \$100 per hectare as a grazing proposition, with a carrying capacity of 1 beast to 2.4 hectares i.e. \$240 per beast area in the natural state.

With an improvement cost of \$86 per hectare and an estimated increase in carrying capacity to 1 beast to 1.2 hectares, we considered that we had a viable proposition.

i.e. Value of unimproved country \$100 per hectare + improvement value \$86 per hectare = Total value of land for grazing proposition of \$186 per hectare equivalent to \$222 per beast area in the improved state.

In other words by putting in improved pasture we increase our carrying capacity on 162 hectares from 70 cattle to 140 cattle, without increasing our beast area value.

With bank interest running at 4-5% (as close as I can remember) we were on a winner. The estimated stocking rate of one beast to 1.2 hectares proved readily attainable over the years.

Then something happened—the land boom. It is said today that this land could be worth about \$1000 per hectare. (Certainly not as a grazing proposition).

I would estimate that today the clearing, ploughing, fertilizer, seed and sowing costs would be \$490 per hectare MINIMUM. Therefore, the approximate cost of improving the same 162 hectares in 1984 could be \$80 000-\$100 000.

By increasing stock carried by 70 cattle and allowing a margin of \$150 per head per year, we are gaining at the rate of \$10 500 per year on this 162 hectare paddock. With development bank interest running at 14½% our interest bill in the first year will be \$11 600-\$14 500—where are we going? Costs are killing us.

The Tropical Grasslands Society of Australia has and must continue to play a vital and important role for rural Australia. We must continue to bring scientists and producers together in the field and in the labs to promote greater understanding and knowledge of the problems associated with pasture improvement and management in this country, and to maintain a close liaison between the academic and the producer.

The Society must stay abreast of these rapidly changing times and be prepared for any eventuality in rural Australia. For example, advent of serious stock disease into Australia and the loss of livestock and meat export markets.

We must put particular emphasis on minimum tillage cropping, and low key pasture improvement. We must have a close look at long established, mismanaged legumes that have stood the test of time, drought, fire and heavy stocking. For example, the stylos, lotononis, leucaena, to name a few.

The reason for this is that the large grazing areas of Australia need above all else a low cost pasture legume that will stand up to the harsh climatic conditions and in many cases mismanaged areas, and still be there at the end.

We must continue to look at alternatives in time of crisis. Mike Hawley—field day organizer—and I have tried to do this by organizing a field day this year on tree “dieback”. This was a very interesting day, and we had the opportunity to see the first steps in a reforestation program on Ross McConnel’s property in the Brisbane Valley. This has made us think about conserving timber for monetary gain in times of crisis. Agro-forestry?

Today you had the opportunity of seeing a turf farming project on a cattle property. The beef crisis of 1974–78 instigated this project. It kept us fed and we were able to keep our children in school. Many, because of non proximity to a large urban area, were not so lucky.

The Society must, in conjunction with crops and pastures, keep a close watch and keep members and the rural public informed on water harvesting. Water is no doubt going to be a problem in the future and although considerable steps have been taken, a lot more is to be done.

Costs

The cost of clearing and establishing improved pastures in the straight out grazing areas of Australia is prohibitive. The greatest enemy to establishment of improved pasture is COSTS.

One cost that I think this Society may be able to do something about is SEED.

I am not suggesting that the Tropical Grasslands Society try to do this themselves, because we are not geared for this sort of thing. Nor do our guidelines permit us to do this.

What I am suggesting is that the Society instigate through some other body, a thorough investigation into the price of grass and legume seeds in Australia.

It seems to me that as a world leader in pasture development Australia should be able to produce any amount of pasture seed at a reasonable price. This is not the case today.

I have enjoyed my term as your president. I feel that in many ways I have gained more than I have contributed. I wish the Tropical Grasslands Society the very best of luck for the future, and I am sure the next 12 months will be completely secure with Barry Walker as your new president.