

Book review

Forage Husbandry

By Wolfgang Bayer and Ann Waters-Bayer. Published by Macmillan Education Ltd, June 1998. ISBN 0 333 66856 1.

This is a little gem of a book.

The Tropical Agriculturalist series, of which this is but one of thirty-odd titles, sets out to provide information for students, extension agents and farmers that is easily understood and up-to-date. This title concentrates on smallholder farmers and pastoralists although it's hard to imagine many of them reading it, easily understood though it is.

Forage husbandry is defined as: *the careful management of forage resources to meet the multiple objectives of farming and pastoralism in social, economic and ecological terms*. Chapters deal with farming and pastoral systems, some basic biological principles, livestock feeding strategies, managing natural forage, forage as a byproduct of farming, sown forages, forage conservation and supplementation and research and development in forage husbandry.

The early chapters are particularly good in describing the complex web of relationships among objectives, variable environment, forage resources, animals, labour, gender, resource-use rights and food production. The importance of understanding the intricacies of existing systems before intervention is properly emphasised, as is the distinction between the demand-driven livestock production systems of Western Europe and North America and the supply-driven systems of smallholder farmers and extensive pastoralists. The stratification of forage resources by quality and their use for different animal classes is mentioned several times, along with the admonition

that interference with this in, for example, feeding exotic, high-producing stock, can have untoward consequences for the local animals and the essential functions they fulfill. A short section on putting economic value on forages ought to be mandatory reading for all students, including those who have long ago left school.

In the chapters on cultivated forages, conservation and supplementation, the authors seem a little out of date and academic in some parts and technically wobbly in others. Redemption follows in the final chapter, where the evolution of research and development from the "here's the solution, what was the problem?" model through various participatory models is followed by a description of such an approach, together with some techniques used in participatory research.

A good feature of the structure is the use of boxes to outline case studies, checklists and conclusions and recommendations. English usage is direct and simple, and punctuation is excellent (no Australian apostrophes looking for a home!); the book could serve as a model for many native English-speaking technical writers. The editing has been thorough overall, with only a couple of minor slips. The heading hierarchy is unclear in its font style, there are occasional trite statements and referencing seems a bit erratic and arbitrary.

Ecologists and other technocrats will find plenty to quibble with in this book but, approached in the right spirit, it provides a good grounding in the imperatives of feeding livestock in subsistence farming systems as well as having some lessons for Australian livestock production research and development.

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