BOOK REVIEW

A Guide to Better Pastures for the Tropics and Sub-tropics by L. R. Humphreys, 3rd (Revised) Edition, 1974. 95 pp. Published bp Wright, Stephenson & Co. Ltd., Australia.

This is the third edition of a very useful booklet written by Dr. L. R. Humphreys. The earlier second edition, published in 1969, has been updated in this edition which is some 20% larger. Most of the previous text has been unaltered and the increase is derived from expansion of advisory chapters, information about new cultivars released since 1969 and some additional information about old cultivars.

The booklet has two main sections. The first section opens with a discussion of the role of improved pastures and subsequent chapters offer good advice about establishing, fertilising and managing pastures. The establishment chapter deals in a sound practical way with such factors as seedbed preparation, sowing technique, sowing times, inoculation and use of companion crops. The chapter on fertilisation discusses why fertiliser is needed and outlines common deficiencies and ways of overcoming them, followed by a brief discussion of maintenance fertiliser application. The management chapter describes how plants differ in their reaction to grazing and how this affects desirable management practices, and then discusses how management must be related to the farm as a whole. Both these themes carry over into the final chapter in this section which deals with the factors influencing the choice of species used in pasture mixtures.

It would be unwarranted to take issue with many small points. However some statements give cause for concern. The sentences dealing with pelleting tropical legume seed (page 15) were rather unhelpful; there should be a clear statement that for most tropical legumes lime pelleting offers no advantages over the use of adhesive without a pellet, and in some cases can be harmful. Conversely there was perhaps undue emphasis on a commercial pelleting technique. The section on grazing management also tended to speculate too much on the merits of rotational grazing (page 25). In this section, and also in subsequent pages describing Siratro and Greenleaf desmodium (page 75 and 60), I feel there is a need clearly to point out that consistently heavy defoliation of twining or scrambling tropical legumes is detrimental. Although these legumes can be heavily grazed occasionally or even for a season, this does not mean they can be heavily grazed year after year without loss of production or even loss of legume.

The second and larger section of the book briefly describes the origin of pasture species and cultivars, their main agronomic characteristics and areas in which they have been used in sub-tropical and tropical Australia. This information is well presented, although one unfortunate error is the statement that Kenya white clover is distinguished "from white clover by the fact that the pinkish flowers do not droop when mature"—in both species the flowers reflex after pollination.

The booklet is written using English units of measurement, although there is an English to metric conversion table provided. I feel that metric units would have been more appropriate, especially as seed is already being sold commercially by metric measure.

However, all things considered, this booklet is a very useful guide to pasture development in the sub-tropics and tropics. It brings together a lot of information which is normally scattered throughout different books and journals and is useful for primary producers, extension officers and research workers. The booklet is not sold at bookstores but is available free of charge through Wright, Stephenson and Co. Ltd. It can be readily recommended to all who are interested in tropical pastures.

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