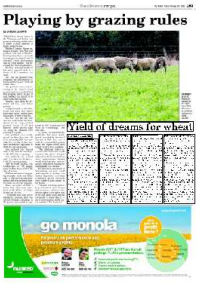
Playing by grazing rules
Yield of dreams for wheat

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Yield of dreams for wheat

By SANDRA GODWIN

DERRIMUT and wyalkatchem are the two ''best-bet'' wheat varieties for grazing in the Mallee, according to research by the Birchip Cropping Group and the CSIRO.

A comparison of seven wheat and two barley cultivars at Woomelang last year found barley produced more feed than wheat at the time of grazing and was nutritionally superior.

But derrimut and wyalkatchem wheat both yielded well and did not suffer a yield or screenings penalty when grazed.

A report on the trials by Kaylene Nuske, Dr James Hunt and Fiona Best concluded there were several potential benefits from grazing cereals in the Mallee. These including helping fill the early winter feed gap, reducing lodging in barley, reducing stubble loads and controlling canopy development of crops sown early into paddocks with high available nitrogen.

''The timing and intensity of grazing cereals early in the season can influence grain yields,'' the report said.

''Greater yield penalties are likely to be seen where grazing occurs at a later time and at higher intensities.

''Shorter-season cereals have also had mixed results with higher yield penalties occurring in some years.

''The challenge of adopting this practice is to ensure correct grazing techniques are applied to the most suitable varieties to avoid compromising grain production.''

Grain crops intended for grazing should be sown early — from mid-April to the first week of May — because grazing delayed crop maturity by about a week, depending on timing and intensity.

Grazed crops also needed time to recover.

Stock could be introduced to cereal crops intended for grazing at about growth stage 13, or when plants could not be pulled from the ground.

To avoid a grain yield penalty, stock must be removed before the end of tillering at growth stage 30.

The Woomelang trial was sown to 150 plants per square metre on May 7, using a cone seeder with knife point and press wheels on a 30cm row spacing, and 40kg a ha of diammonium phosphate.

Varieties used were yitpi, correll, axe, wyalkatchem, young, derrimut and Clearfield stiletto wheat, and buloke and hindmarsh barley.

Half the plots were fenced and 10 lambs grazed for four days in late June.

Dry matter production was then measured at growth stage 30, 65 and at crop maturity.

Heads also were counted at flowering.

The results showed hindmarsh suffered the biggest yield reduction from grazing (0.32 tonnes a ha) but, even when grazed, still yielded more than all other varieties in the trial.

Grazing did not reduce the yield of buloke barley but it did increase screenings.

Biomass recovery three weeks after grazing was greatest in wyalkatchem and derrimut, but by flowering the barley had outgrown the wheat, with no difference between varieties and whether they were grazed or ungrazed. The researchers suggested higher screenings in grazed buloke, correll, young and stiletto may have been caused by a lack of time for the grains to fill, so they ended up small and pinched.