

SEASONAL UPDATE WEBINAR - RECAP

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by Marek Matuszek (Ag Logic) and Rowan Smith (TIA)

1 Key messages & actions

- Pasture species are responding differently under dry conditions. Deep rooted species such as lucerne and chicory are maintaining growth by accessing moisture deeper in the soil profile.
- Chicory has shown strong tolerance to heat and moisture stress, remaining green and productive when other species have slowed or stopped growing.
- Shallow rooted species and annuals are highly dependent on surface moisture and are more affected by short dry periods and false breaks.
- Subterranean clover germination has occurred in response to rainfall but survival has been poor in many areas due to lack of follow up moisture.
- Species such as cocksfoot respond well to intermittent rainfall but require consistent events to sustain growth.
- Pasture species diversity can improve resilience to dry conditions by allowing different rooting depths and water use strategies.
- Autumn rainfall has been patchy and in many areas has not provided a true seasonal break. Pasture growth is limited where rainfall has only wet the surface.
- Soil moisture is often concentrated in the top layer, with deeper profiles still dry. This increases the risk of rapid drying without follow up rain.
- False breaks are common. Early germination of clover or pasture species may fail without continued rainfall.
- Rainfall effectiveness depends on timing and intensity. Smaller, spread out rainfall events are more effective than single heavy events.

- Soil type strongly influences how rainfall is stored and used. Cracking clays and dry soils can lead to water bypass and reduced plant access.
- Irrigation demand is reducing as evapotranspiration declines. Weekly irrigation should be adjusted based on rainfall and crop stage.
- Pasture and crop growth is currently limited by moisture availability rather than temperature in many regions.
- Monitoring soil moisture depth and plant response is critical to determine whether rainfall has contributed to usable moisture.

Current Conditions & Regional Strategies

Soil moisture across Tasmania remains similar to recent seasons, with many areas still recovering from prolonged dry conditions.

Recent rainfall has improved topsoil moisture in some regions but most of that moisture has been utilized by pasture growth.

Pasture growth is variable and highly dependent on soil type, rainfall timing and follow up events.

North West

- Recent rainfall has supported short term pasture growth but has not fully replenished soil moisture.
- Soil moisture is similar to last year, with limited deep recharge.
- Follow up rainfall is required to maintain growth and avoid rapid drying.
- Well-structured red soils are responding better than lighter soils due to improved water holding capacity.

North East & East Coast

- Some areas have received useful rainfall with short term pasture response.
- Water movement has bypassed the root zone in soils prone to cracking.
- Pasture growth is uneven and depends on species and soil type.
- Without further rainfall, current growth will decline quickly.

Northern Midlands

- Conditions remain dry with limited effective rainfall.
- Rainfall events have often bypassed the topsoil, especially on heavier or cracking soils.
- Pasture response is stronger on lighter soils where moisture is retained near the surface.
- A sustained period of rainfall over a few days is required to initiate consistent pasture growth.

Southern Midlands, Coal Valley & Derwent Valley

- Soil moisture remains low with minimal effective rainfall.
- Dry soils are reducing infiltration, especially on sandy or hydrophobic surfaces.
- Rainfall to date has produced a green appearance but limited ongoing growth.
- Review pasture species performance and identify which species are persisting under current moisture conditions.
- Consider including deeper rooted species such as lucerne or chicory in future pasture mixes to improve drought resilience.
- Assess whether current pasture mix is suited to soil type and rainfall patterns.
- Pasture recovery will depend on multiple days of consistent rainfall.

Flinders Island & King Island

- These regions have had a more effective start to autumn compared to mainland areas.
- Pasture growth has responded to rainfall but moisture is being used quickly.
- Follow up rainfall is required to maintain growth momentum.
- Higher rainfall totals will be needed to rebuild soil moisture heading into winter.

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Things to think / chat with your advisor about

- Assess whether recent rainfall has contributed to real soil moisture or only surface wetting.
- Dig into the soil profile to check where moisture is sitting and how deep roots can access it.
- Review pasture response to determine if growth is sustainable or likely to decline.
- Plan for pasture renovation with a clear contingency if rainfall does not start, or continue.
- Evaluate species mix and select pasture species suited to local soil and rainfall conditions.
- Use containment feeding or supplementary feeding to protect key paddocks during recovery.
- Monitor early subterranean clover germination to determine if conditions represent a true seasonal break.

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Tools & next steps

- Monitor evapotranspiration and adjust irrigation to match reduced plant demand.
- Use soil moisture probes to track depth of moisture and plant water use.
- Compare rainfall totals with soil moisture response to assess effectiveness.
- Record paddock observations including pasture growth and soil condition.
- Identify soil type variability across paddocks to guide irrigation and grazing decisions.
- Track rainfall patterns including timing and intensity rather than total amount alone.
- Find out more about the Pasture365 trial on developing drought resilient pastures here: <https://www.utas.edu.au/about/news-and-stories/articles/2024/developing-drought-resilient-pastures>



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