



SEASONAL UPDATE WEBINAR - RECAP

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1 Key messages & actions

- Pasture growth is still responsive to irrigation:** Irrigated pastures can continue to grow strongly through late summer if water is supplied to match demand. Well managed systems can achieve 70 to 80 kg of dry matter per hectare per day where irrigation, fertility and grazing management are aligned.

Species	Grazing Trigger	Rotation Length (days)	Pasture growth rate (kg DM / ha / day)
Ryegrass	2.5 - 3 leaf stage or canopy closure	25 - 28	70 - 80
Lucerne	Late veg to early flower bud	28 - 32	
White clover	15 - 20 cm	25 - 30	

Fig 1. Current pasture irrigation scheduling

- Replace daily pasture water use:** Across most regions, irrigated pastures require around 5-6 mm per day to meet evapotranspiration losses. Coastal and higher wind areas may sit slightly higher, while some inland areas may sit closer to 4-5 mm per day. Consistently applying less than this will slow growth and extend grazing rotations.
- Irrigate to maintain rotation length:** Ryegrass pastures should be reaching the 2.5 to 3 leaf stage in around 25 to 30 days at this time of year. Lucerne should reach late vegetative to early bud stage in around 28 to 32 days. If rotations are blowing out, under-irrigation is a common cause.
- Avoid under irrigating whole systems:** Applying reduced amounts across the entire irrigated area quickly reduces pasture growth. Where water is limited, maintaining full irrigation on a reduced area is generally more effective than under irrigating all paddocks.
- Small rainfall events do not replace irrigation:** Rainfall below 10 mm contributes little effective moisture. Irrigation decisions should be based on water received, not forecast rainfall.

Current Conditions & Regional Strategies

- **North West** – Pasture growth has benefited from earlier spring conditions but irrigation demand remains high. Most systems still require around 4-5 mm per day to maintain pasture growth.
- **North East & Fingal Valley** – Light soils are drying rapidly with little soil moisture buffer remaining. Maintaining irrigation depth is critical to avoid rapid declines in pasture growth.
- **East Coast** – Dry conditions mean irrigation is essential to sustain pasture. Reduced irrigation will quickly result in feed shortages.
- **Northern Midlands** – Windy conditions have lifted evapotranspiration. Many soils have limited infiltration capacity, increasing the risk of falling behind irrigation demand.
- **Southern Midlands, Coal & Derwent Valley** – Soil moisture reserves are largely exhausted. Cracking soils reduce the effectiveness of rainfall, placing greater importance on irrigation depth and timing.
- **Flinders & King Islands** – Soil moisture is similar to, or slightly below, last year. Spring rainfall was generally well utilised but summer conditions are now drawing profiles down.

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Things to think / chat with your advisor about

- **Matching irrigation to pasture demand:** Check that irrigation systems are delivering enough water to replace daily losses. 5-6 mm per day is a useful guide for most pasture systems at this time.
- **Water budgeting through late summer and autumn:** From early February to mid April, fully irrigated pasture systems may require around 3 ML per hectare if rainfall is minimal. Review available water now to avoid forced decisions later.
- **Depth of irrigation and soil moisture:** Pasture roots commonly extend beyond 30 cm. Dig holes to confirm moisture depth and avoid relying on shallow assessments.
- **Monitoring pasture performance:** Measure pasture growth and post grazing residuals. If growth rates are consistently below 70 kilograms of dry matter per hectare per day, investigate water, nutrients, pasture composition and grazing pressure.
- **Managing water when supply is limited:** 3 main options exist when water is short –
 - a. Continue irrigating fully until water runs out
 - b. Reduce application rate across all paddocks, or
 - c. Reduce irrigated area and keep remaining paddocks fully irrigated.Reducing area while maintaining full irrigation generally preserves pasture growth more effectively.

- **Grazing management:** Avoid grazing too low. Ryegrass pastures should generally not be grazed below about 4 cm to maintain growth and persistence.
- **Preparing for autumn:** Do not carry excessive standing feed into late summer. Well prepared paddocks respond faster when moisture returns.

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Tools & next steps

- **Pasture measurement tools:** Use rising plate meters or pasture rulers to track growth rates and rotation length. Check out the [TIA YouTube clip on how to use a rising plate meter](#).
- **Weather stations and evapotranspiration data:** Daily evapotranspiration data supports more accurate irrigation scheduling. Adjust irrigation as conditions cool into March and April.
- **Seasonal irrigation planning:** Begin spacing irrigations further apart as evapotranspiration declines in autumn, rather than stopping irrigation abruptly.
- **Sign up to TIA weekly pasture growth rate report:** Request from jacob.lightman@utas.edu.au
- **Track crop factor and ETo:** Sign up for the [Weatherwise Forecast Updates from SWAN Systems](#) to receive daily Eto data in your inbox.
- **Read Soil Health Farming for Tasmania (Chapter 7):** https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/book/Soil_health_for_farming_in_Tasmania/23247812



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