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## New Tetila annual ryegrass, producing a highly productive pasture at Witchcliffe.

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Witchcliffe dairy farmers, the Mottersheads, had the best pasture they've ever had last year. The abundant pasture was largely the result of well-timed rains but good luck doesn't go the whole way to explain the sheer quantity of grass on the Margaret River property: choice of pasture and canny management by the farming family were also behind the success.

Miles Mottershead and his father Bill and brother Andrew have been relying on New Tetila annual ryegrass for the past five years and in that time they have worked out a successful fertilising formula for their pastures.

Last year's pasture was so plentiful that the farming team were able to graze 1000 head of their own cattle, cut 2400 rolls of hay and 2700 tonnes of silage, agist another 400 cattle between May and the end of August and produce 4.1 million litres of milk.



The Mottersheads run 550 milking cows and around 550 heifers on their own farm of 80 ha and on 530 ha of extra land that they lease in the area.

The Mottershead pasture fertiliser program relies on soil testing and plant tissue testing for accuracy and includes a targeted mix of elements for dairy pastures, and a different fertiliser for the run-off blocks.

The dairy pastures receive 17 units of P, 60 units of K, 230 units of N and 45 units of S per hectare per year every 24 days.

The run-off blocks get 110 units of N, 16 units of P, 4 units of K and 34 units of S per ha, per year in seasonal applications. During the middle of winter the run-off blocks are given more nitrogen.

"Last year it was so wet that the nitrogen levels were down," Mr Motteshead said.

"When we did the tissue test we quickly realised that we had to increase the nitrogen. Once we did that the feed moved quickly."

Last year they sowed 400ha with pure New Tetila annual ryegrass in the last week of April using a Shearer disc seeder.

The Mottersheads direct drill at a rate of 20kg per hectare on their dairy blocks and at a rate of 15 kg/ha on the run-off blocks.

"New Tetila is a bigger plant and goes a bit earlier – that's a big advantage," Mr Mottershead said.

"It suits our production system well. It's upright, aggressive, doesn't mind the wet and responds exceptionally well to applications of nitrogen."

The dairy cows had their first full graze during the last week of May and then the dairy pastures were grazed every 19 days. During mid-winter the rotation slowed down to 24 day intervals and by the end of spring the pastures were growing so quickly the dairy cows were grazing the pastures on a 13 day rotation.

Some of the pasture was shut up for hay and silage in mid-July to be cut in late September. The rest of the pasture was shut up between the first week of August and the first week in September.

The Mottersheads started cutting the majority of their silage on October 20 – a week after they would have liked to have started cutting. Wet weather meant that machinery was unable to get on to the pasture paddocks at the right time.

"The quality of the silage reflects the bad timing and the fact that the pasture needed more nitrogen because of the season," Mr Mottershead said.

The Mottersheads were unhappy with the 9 and a half per cent ME and 13.8 per cent protein levels of their silage but have determined that next season they will use more nitrogen a month before cutting.

They inoculated the silage for the first time last year and were pleased with the result. "The silage has cured really well." They plan to continue inoculating in the future.

When it comes to growing good pasture Miles Mottershead believes the secret is in using sufficient amounts of nitrogen and managing the cows so that grazing is well-timed.

"We graze at the two-and-a-half leaf stage, when the New Tetila is at about four to five inches high down to an inch and a half to two inches high."

The timing of the sowing is also important, he said.

"You have to sow as soon as it rains – the difference four or five days makes is incredible."

The secret to profitability in the dairy industry, he said, was increasing the quantity of feed from pastures so that bought-in feed costs were reduced. "Utilising more pasture reduces costs so much."

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