BIOLOGICAL FARMING

Shifts showing promise *(Summary Article)*

By Nikki Reynolds

BLIGHTY farmers, Jarrod and Jeff Andrews, are in the business of growing livestock feed, and plenty of it.

The southern NSW farmers originally ran a irrigation property but now their focus has shifted to lot-feeding sheep and cattle.

To run the feedlots as cost-effectively as possible they aimed to grow a range of grazing crops, grain and silage.

In recent years they have switched from using granular conventional fertilisers to applying biological products.

Jarrod said it was difficult to prove there was any monetary saving from the switch but he was confident things were going well so far.

And if, down the track, it doesn't work the pair were prepared to switch back to conventional methods again.

Jeff said he was prepared to give new things a go and at the moment biological farming was showing some promise.

He said since using NutriSoil and Charlie Carp on their paddocks the broadleaf weeds had reduced significantly.

This meant applications of herbicide were cut right back and passes over the paddocks during the growing season were minimised.

Blighty's bio test-drive *(Main Article)*

By Nikki Reynolds

BIOLOGICAL farming methods are being put to the test by a father and son combination at Blighty in southern NSW.

Jeff and his son, Jarrod Andrews, "Carnbrae", have been investigating the suitability of biological applications in their operation.

They aimed to grow large amounts of livestock fodder to support their lamb feedlot and newly established cattle feeding operations.

The farm produces about 1500 to 2000 square bales of silage and 500 large bales of hay annually.

Although it was early days they were confident the biological applications, which included NutriSoil and Charlie Carp, would pay off.

In recent years their 615-ha farming operation has been pushed hard in a bid to make money without the use of irrigation.

With constant restrictions on the supply of water in the region they took the plunge and sold their irrigation entitlements in 2006.

This meant the farm near Finley is now exclusively dryland.

Jeff Andrews said even in dry years their property was able to grow valuable crops.

“We don’t think there are many years when we can’t get something off a winter cereal,” Mr Andrews said.

The aim at Blighty was to drive the cropping system hard so feed for livestock could be produced.

A couple of weeks ago Jarrod planted Wedgetail wheat for grazing and it was treated with liquid application of NutriSoil before sowing.

He said soon after emergence he would apply NutriSoil combined with Charlie Carp, both at a rate of six litres a hectare, through the boom spray.

The aim was to get some grazing benefits from the Wedgetail and then later strip a grain crop.

Apart from the wheat they also grow lucerne, oats, barley, and brassica crops.

Jeff said the farm had to be self-sufficient by growing enough fodder to turn off more than 6000 export-weight lambs a year.

The steer finishing job was new to the mix and they had 50 steers and the aim was to increase this side of the business down the track.

Last year’s price spike in conventional fertilisers, such as mono- and di-ammonium phosphate, to more than $1000 a tonne was part of the reason for pursuing biological inputs.

However, they had used biological products on their farm for about four years.

Jeff said the price of granular fertiliser had since come down again, but he was still keen to continue using biological applications.

“We are going more towards liquid fertilisers, we are hardly using any granulated fertiliser.”

Jarrod said he believed the germination of seed treated with the liquid fertiliser before planting was faster.

He said it was efficient because rather than applying fertiliser in a blanket coverage to the paddock it was **targeting the individual seed.**

And from a logistics perspective he said it allowed him to fill both boxes in the planter with seed.

Traditionally a box contained granular fertiliser to be applied at the same time the seed was sown.

“We are doing 12ha on one fill instead of six,” he said.