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Moola Landcare Day Crop mulch lifts moisture and soil health

By MILES NOLLER

There is a trend among farmers to grow crops that can be used to increase soil carbon levels, reduce evaporation, and reduce weed competition.

A recent field day at Moola highlighted some of the simpler and easier ways of achieving these aims.

The field day, organised by North East Downs Landcare, and one of its catchment groups, Moola Creek Landcare, included a visit to a property operated by Brenden Ballon.

Brenden and his family have a dairy business at Maclagan, and grow barley on the Moola Creek property.

The two dozen landholders inspected a trial which is being conducted by Conservation Farmers to assess four different crop mixtures, to increase soil carbon levels, reduce evaporation, and reduce weed competition.

The trial is being conducted in 5ha plots in barley stubble, and all have been direct drilled.

The first contains just lab lab. The second has a blend of lab lab and guar, the third a blend of lab lab, guar, and white French millet, and the fourth lab lab, guar, white



An inspection of a trial during a field day on Brenden Ballon's property at Moolah.

French millet and forage sorghum.

Brenden said that when the crop in each trial area matures, it will be run over with what he calls a crimping roller to bruise the stems of the plants which will be left on top of the soil as a cover crop.

They have opted for this treatment rather than ploughing in as a green manure crop.

Brenden said that by leaving the crop on top of the ground, they hope to smother the weeds and reduce evaporation from the soil. He said the best rains occur during autumn, and it is hoped that better use is made of any summer rains.

The next barley crop will be direct drilled into whatever cover crop remains.

The lab lab trial area will be rolled down with the crimp roller when

the crop is about a metre high.

It is the first time the Ballons have planted guar, a legume that likes hot weather and good drainage. But the seed can produce 45 percent crude protein.

It appears the trial area with the white French millet will also maintain a reasonable content of the legumes, lab lab and guar.

But in the fourth trial, the forage sorghum appears to have shot ahead of the other components.

The trial is on Moola Creek flats, although there are three soil types on the farm.

COVER CROPPING AND MULCHING

The field day included a visit to another Moola property where the aim also is to reduce weeds, and retain sub-soil moisture.

The property was a former dairy farm, but is now a lifestyle block for Kylie Tuckerman and her partner.

Both work off farm. Kylie has horses and said they are very hard on the soil by compacting it.

They eat everything, opening it up for erosion and for the emergence of weeds.

They are looking at different ways of cover cropping and mulching and they want to restore farm sustainability by managing soil compaction, weeds, soil erosion, and through better pasture management.

They use a flail mower to cut remaining crop and use a direct drilling system.

This was made by removing the undercarriage of a combine and fitting it with disc openers for direct drilling. - Miles Noller.



Brenden Ballon among the legume guar which is being discovered as a crop and seed was \$1 kg.



Kylie Tuckerman with self-set Faba beans grown in a mix during the colder months.

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**Sale Date: Monday, December 14
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**TOOWOOMBA CATTLE &
PIG MARKET REPORT**

Monday, December 14, 2015

CATTLE: Numbers reduced to just 113 head at Elders Harristown Saleyards today Monday 14th December for the last sale of the year. Virtually No export cattle yarded a few good boner cows made 226.2c while a pen of store cows realised 234.2c. A few heavy feeder steers 435kg topped at 320c. Weaner Shorthorn cross steers 306kg topped at 380.2c to return \$1163. Murray Grey heifers ex Pittsworth 310kg reached 335.2c in pen lots.

PIGS: Last sale for the year, numbers increased to 309. All classes of pigs sold much dearer with pork selling up to \$50 dearer than last week stores in large numbers sold to a dearer market with all buyers keen to fill orders. Prime Pork \$316, Prime Light Bacon \$300, Prime Bacon \$280, Boars \$90, Sows to \$315, Forward Stores \$218, Weaners \$140 & Suckers \$100.

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