

Chapter 2 - Grazing To Handle Giant Rat’s Tail

Shane Okay. So what are we doing up here? This part of the farm is what I call the Badlands
Joyce: because there's a there's a strip through here on this hill on the western fall of it that's got a lot of rock on it. So historically it's never been plowed and had improved pastures put in. So it was a band through here that had the worst infestation of what we call giant rat's tail, which is one of the Sporobolus grasses, which is unproductive, unpalatable, totally indigestible. Tends to take over in some cases and my observations here is the giant rats tail is colonizing on the worst soils, the most degraded soils. So it's an indicator that we've gone too far down the scale and we need to pick it back up again. So we've been dealing with it through biodynamic preparations, changing the soil, the nature of the soil with the grazing system to change the nature of the pasture through managing the grazing.

So what have we got up here? This was one paddock we've now subdivided into six with permanent electric fence and so in each of these paddocks when we've got the cattle in here, we're using just an electric string to subdivide and strip graze. So we're really concentrating the animals to get a knockdown. We're getting a certain amount of utilisation of the rat's tail, but we're also opening the country up for spring growth. So we're letting the light back into the good species of pasture that are in here.

The cattle you might notice look a little bit different. The ones with horns and spots are Angoni. So they are an African breed. They are a small animal. They are very environmentally adapted to climatic conditions pasta conditions as well as any parasites. They are immune to so these animals are basically get zero treatment for ticks, flies, internal parasites, and they are not getting any supplementation.

We've also got amongst these some of these charbray heifers which come out of the local sale yard, and we've just gone through and done a preg. test. These charbray animals to me are a high-maintenance animal and they proved themselves at the preg. test because out of out of nine charbray heifers we got seven empties. Then in the angoni heifers out of 30 heifers we got three empties, so totally different result. So what are we doing in this pasture is in terms of why we grazing it like this is to get better utilisation to drive the pasture through to a better condition to drive the soil forward to a better condition, but also it gives us this opportunity with things like giants rat's tail that it makes it really obvious where it is.

So if we're in a strip here, that's a hectare or half a hectare, it doesn't take very long on a quad bike with a with a sprayer with acetic acid to go around and spot spray these giants rat's tail plants and remove them out of our pasture or keep them to very much to a minimum and the pasture.

I don't believe that the rat's tail is really a problem. I believe it's become a problem because of management, but from the point of view of living in our local community and under our state, local and federal bylaws giant rat's tail is on the noxious weed list. So we're bound to get rid of it.

I don't see it as such a problem. I really have an issue with all of our noxious weeds that largely they've been put on a weed list by somebody sitting in an air conditioned office under a fluoride light who's probably aligned with petrochemical companies who are selling the product that we spray on it to kill it. As we're running an organic system here I'm using acetic acid which is basically just a vinegar to kill this grass and to fulfil my obligations to the authorities to be seen to be controlling the Rat's Tail Grass. I believe the biggest effect we're going to get with controlling things like rat's tail grass is by moving our landscape forward that there won't be a need for this stuff to grow. It's growing on all the worst degraded soils as a pioneer species to help rehabilitate the soil. If I brought myself a pickaxe up I could have dug one of these out. They have a massive root system that is almost like a coconut fiber mat that you put in a hanging basket. It is so good at tying the soil together and so good re-establishing soil biology. So in a way, it's like I have a real issue with spraying it out of my pasture, but socially I need to do something.