



MEDIA RELEASE

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Lucerne looms large

As one of the most efficient users of water and nutrient resources through the summer, lucerne looms large as an ideal forage crop for immediate planting.

Ballance Technical Consultant Jeff Morton says lucerne is making a bit of a comeback because of its efficiencies.

'On top of its excellent water use credentials, it fixes its own nitrogen and is a very effective at extracting phosphorus from the soil. It produces a very high-value feed, delivering high energy and high soluble carbohydrate,' says Jeff.

Another plus is that new varieties of lucerne are much more resistant to some of the pests and diseases that affected the crop in the past.

Jeff says lucerne prefers well-drained situations, and would be a suitable crop to sow as part of a pasture renewal programme.

'With soil temperatures on the rise, now's the time to start sowing nationwide. Lucerne needs 6.2 to 6.4 soil pH, so liming is quite important.

'If you have limited irrigation water, use it on lucerne, because of its very high water-use efficiency. In the dry summer, it grows for longer and recovers quickly from a setback.'

He says to expect a dry matter yield of 5t/ha in very dry situations through to 12t/ha under irrigation.

'You'll need to soil test to 15cm to calculate the optimum fertiliser requirements for the crop. It needs an Olsen P of 10-15, and a potassium level of 5-7, and may need boron and molybdenum.'

For more advice on soil testing and fertiliser strategies for lucerne, contact your local Ballance technical sales representative on 0800 222 090.

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