



Media Statement

1 Midland Square, Midland, Western Australia 6056

Tel: (08) 9273 7564 Fax: (08) 9273 7690

Email: katie.schoch@landgate.wa.gov.au www.landgate.wa.gov.au

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Satellite imagery gives farmers an eye in the sky

Farmers throughout Western Australia are moving into the digital environment, using online satellite imagery to estimate their pasture growth rate and stock feed during the growing season.

Landgate Manager of Satellite Remote Sensing Services Matthew Adams said an online product called Pastures from Space was allowing farmers to manage their pastures and stock feed from their home computers, helping them realise their full economic potential.

"One of the big messages to come out of this year's Agribusiness Livestock Updates was to match available feed supply with demand during the growing season," Dr Adams said.

"Pastures from Space gives farmers the information to achieve this by supplying near real-time satellite data to help with strategic decision making.

"MODIS Feed on Offer (FOO) estimates the amount of green foliage that appears in satellite images to a resolution of 250 metres.

"This information can then be combined with meteorological information such as local rainfall and temperature readings for a particular region and calculated into an estimated pasture growth rate in kilograms per hectare per day.

"MODIS FOO estimates and pasture growth rates are provided on a weekly basis."

Pastures from Space was developed by Landgate in conjunction with CSIRO Livestock Industries, the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food and Fairport Technologies.

Recent improvements mean it can now provide historical time series pasture growth and total dry matter (or feed available) graphs from 1993 to present for individual farm properties.

This valuable information will provide farmers with weekly growth trends and give an insight into seasonal patterns of growth, hence productivity, which then gives a clear picture of the climatic trends through the seasons.

Dr Adams said producers were increasingly accessing this data for management purposes.

"By comparing with previous years' data, they can get a feel for whether the year is going to be good or bad or similar to a particular year from the past," he said.

"They can then make decisions based on this information, or make predictions on the farm's productivity for the rest of the year."

The public Pastures from Space website now also has improved shire charting abilities, meaning it is possible to compare a shire's pasture growth rate performance in a given year with up to seven other shires.

../2

The individual performance of a shire can also be compared to its previous years' performance, going back to 2003.

Arthur River farmers and 2008 Western Australian State Raising the Baa winners, Brad and Tracy Wooldridge have been using Pastures from Space for the past five years.

Brad said they believe strongly in being proactive rather than reactive, and Pastures from Space is one of the management tools that has helped them better deal with poor seasons and capitalise on good seasons.

"Initially I used it to get a handle on pasture growth rates, to start to put some figures on the impact of weather and time in the season," Mr Wooldridge said.

"Now I use its 10-year historical pasture growth rate and annual total dry matter data to determine the season we're in so I can look back on history and try to match stock requirements with other seasons.

"This helps determine the stocking rate for the year and the most economic time needed to allow pasture to reach sustainable grazing levels.

"I've also found the state map very interesting as it shows you which parts of the state are having a dry run or a good spell. This is a very exciting tool to use when considering agistment options."

Mr Wooldridge said Pastures from Space had also given him a better handle on green feed budgeting when rotating crops.

"As farmers, we have to be accountable for our animals and Pastures from Space is a great tool to ensure stock have sufficient supplies," Mr Wooldridge said.

"It's been really useful for us and I think it has helped us become more responsible and sustainable farmers."

Landgate will be exhibiting Pastures from Space at this year's Dowerin Field Days along with other exciting products to help farmers better manage their business.

For more information on Pastures from Space visit the Landgate Farming Channel
<http://www.landgate.wa.gov.au/corporate.nsf/web/Farming+Channel>

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Landgate media: Katie Schoch 9273 7564

Additional information: Raising the Baa is a national competition open to all commercial sheep and wool producers, and was initiated by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) as a way of identifying and encouraging innovation within the industry.