Effect of herb-clover mixes on weaned lamb growth

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Animal Science

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

by

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2014
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Dedicated to my ever loving parents

Amma and Thaththa

Abstract

The quality and production of ryegrass (*Lolium perenne* L.) /white clover (*Trifolium repens*) pastures are seasonal in New Zealand. Earlier research showed that a sward mix of plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), chicory (*Cichorium intybus* L.), white- and red-clover (*Trifolium pratense*) resulted in greater lamb live weight gains in the late summer early autumn period. However, this has not been tested across all the seasons in New Zealand.

Therefore, research was undertaken for two consecutive years (2011/2012 and 2012/2013) on three sward mixes; Pasture mix, Plantain mix and Chicory mix in early spring, late spring and early summer (late spring), summer and autumn. The Pasture mix consisted of perennial ryegrass and white clover. The Plantain mix consisted of plantain, white- and red-clover. The Chicory mix consisted of plantain, chicory, white- and red-clover. It was hypothesised that lamb performance (live weight, live weight gain (LWG) and carcass weight) and apparent carcass weight production per ha would be greatest in the Plantain and Chicory mixes in all four periods. Secondly it was hypothesised that Plantain and Chicory mixes would have lower feed conversion ratios (FCR) with higher herbage utilization efficiencies (EHU%) than the Pasture mix.

In each period weaned lambs were reared in the three herbage treatments for a maximum of two months. Lambs were weighed fortnightly and they were
slaughtered within 12 hours of being off the pasture at the end of the experiment. Carcass weights were obtained from the abattoir.

The Plantain and Chicory mixes had a higher feeding value than the Pasture mix during early spring to autumn. Both Plantain and Chicory mixes produced heavier (P<0.05) lambs, higher (P<0.05) live weight gains (LWG) and carcass weights compared to the Pasture mix in all periods. Total apparent carcass weight production per ha were 407, 748 and 709 kg/ha in year one and 474, 607 and 642 kg/ha in year two in the Pasture mix, Plantain mix and Chicory mix, respectively. Both Plantain and Chicory mixes had lower (P<0.05) feed conversion ratios (FCR) and higher (P<0.05) herbage utilization efficiencies (EHU%) compared to the Pasture mix.

This research has shown that sheep farmers in New Zealand can finish lambs at a faster rate for heavier carcasses using herb-clover mixes from spring to autumn than on ryegrass/white clover pastures.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank God Almighty for giving me strength, health, courage and perseverance for the successful completion of my PhD.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my supervisors, Professor Paul R. Kenyon, Professor Peter D. Kemp, Professor Steve Morris and Professor Patrick C. Morel for their kind guidance, support, friendliness and encouragement throughout the study period. Without your support, I would not be able to stand firm and continue, especially during those two years of farmlet trials. Thank you for your prompt feedback and criticisms throughout the writing period. Without those, I would not have been able to create this thesis.

I must acknowledge Coconut Research Institute, Sri Lanka for giving me study leave to come to New Zealand and carry out my PhD. I also thank New Zealand AID programme (open category) for selecting me as a NZAID scholarship student. Without your financial support, my PhD would only be a dream. Thank you very much that I was able to live comfortably and continue with my studies. Many thanks also go to Silvia and the group at the International Student Support for the immense support and guidance and looking after me throughout my stay at New Zealand. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to Gravida, National Centre for Growth and Development and the International Sheep Research Centre for funding my research. Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Bio Medical Sciences (IVABS), Massey University for providing the funds to attend two local conferences and also an international conference in Australia. I would also like to say thank you to New Zealand Grassland Association (NZGA) and International Grassland Congress (IGC) for providing me with travel funds to attend their conferences in 2012 and 2013. I also wish to thank the sheep and beef farmers, Manawatu Region who visited the farmlets every season for providing us with their invaluable ideas to improve the farmlet trials.

My acknowledgements are also extended to all the staff members of Moginie Pasture and Crop Research Unit, Sheep, Beef and Deer Production Unit and Keeble Farm, Massey University for their great support. Mark Osborne and Simon Orsborn, I
sincerely thank you both for your continuous guidance and help during my farmlet trials. Without your support I would never be able to complete my farmlet trials this successfully. I also remember all the lambs used in the trials though sometimes it was a headache, they performed well during each study providing me with great results. I would also say thank you to Facility Manager and the staff, AgHort C Laboratory, Massey University for providing me with the necessary facilities to process my herbage samples and also allowing me to use the freezer to freeze my hand plucked samples. Professor Bill Pomroy and the Technicians (Barbara and Anne) at the Parasitology Laboratory, IVABS, Massey University are also acknowledged for providing data related to the faecal egg counts. The manager and the staff, Nutrition Laboratory, Massey University are also acknowledged for analysing my herbage samples. I also wish to say thank you to Dr Anne Ridler who attended to my sick lambs promptly. My sincere thanks go to the staff at the IVABS, Massey University who helped me in numerous ways.

I wish to thank all the Brazilian (Liaz, Migel and Adriana) and Netherlands (Stephan and Jasmin) internship students, Kiwi summer students and Catriona for their great support during the farmlet trials. Thank you Lydia, Maria and Doris for your support throughout my study. My friends; Asmad, Eka, Liz, Rita, Sarah and Shash a very big thank you to you all for helping me to move the lambs especially during weekends. And a very big ‘Thank You’ to all my dear friends including Nadeeka and Niluka. The list is endless. You helped me to keep focused and continue my studies. You coped with the impact of my stress and frustrations and always lent a helping hand to me to get up and keep going.

I would like to show my gratitude to the Anglican Church, Square, Palmerston North and my ‘Home Group Friends’. In the beginning everything was all new and strange. But because of you all I was able to survive and continue my stay in New Zealand and my PhD. Thank you for your moral support, prayers and encouragements. Thank you my parents, Amma and Thaththa for your continuing support and belief in me that I would be able to succeed. You were the pillars that I always looked for support. My special thanks also go to my brother, sister and other family members for looking after me. I also extend my warm thanks to my teacher Professor Sujatha Premaratne for her encouragement and constant support.
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