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FOR(CED) SALE: HIGH COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT

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This is a record of the concepts included in a play 'For(ced) Sale: High Country Development' presented at the 1986 NZ Grassland Association Conference. Three pasture development options considered for high country properties were:

1. high input nitrogen fertiliser and improved grass;
2. oversown improved legume species and an improved package of management options which are especially applicable to dry sunny faces where establishment has been traditionally difficult; and
3. low input development based on meeting the nutrient requirements of resident legumes using high analysis fertiliser.

Aspects of the nitrogen option have been considered by Hall and Scott (1985); the oversown legume option was reviewed by Allan *et a/.* (1985) and some background for the system based on resident legumes was reported by Boswell (1986).

Emphasis was on the capital available for development and on the suitability of each development technique to different parts of the high country landscape.

The play provided some insight of current attitudes towards both research and farming at the farmer/researcher interface and stressed the need for more critical awareness by both parties of what is being reported both in scientific reports of research findings and in the popular press of the economic status of farmers.

Development options may be currently of little interest to most farmers struggling to cope with interest repayments; whereas two and three years ago the same people may have been very receptive to such options — especially where they were supported by research evidence. However, there remain some farmers who are interested in following up new development ideas and others who are potentially interested given an improvement in their financial status.

For their part researchers are also now operating under the pressures of restricted government funding which is going to progressively constrict over a five year period to 1991. Alternative sources of funds for basic high country pasture research are not clearly identifiable at present. Government policy does not support research levies being applied to producer groups, and even if it did the runholders, who collectively are the target of much of the research, are few in number and could not support current research programmes. The play highlighted the need for research groups to offset the government funding restrictions by diverting some of their efforts into commercial activities.

Despite the limited commercial return to researchers the most persuasive reason for continued consideration of high country pasture development remains the potential yield responses to development. In one example with lucerne and mixed clover pastures on a YGE soil at Glencairn Station in the Upper Waitaki Basin these responses reach over 1000% (Table 1).

The reduced financial returns to farmers in the past year has had the effect that acceptance of comparatively expensive and/or risky development options is less spontaneous than in the past. Practical lower cost options with inherently lower short term benefits, are more likely to be accepted under current farming conditions.

On some properties the lack of capital may negate any development option. On other properties where capital is not limited and the landscape ranges from flats to

Table 1: Pasture yields (kg DM/ha/yr) and yield response to development (%) at Glencairn Station, Upper Waitaki.

Year	Unimproved pasture, (nil S, nil P) (n = 24)	Improved mixed legume pasture (S and P non limiting) (n = 32)	Response to development (%)
1982183	480	5210	1065
1983184	1650	10990	666
1984185	710	7240	1020

high altitude tops, all three options are likely to have a place in an overall development plan. The choice of which option is used when, is dependent on where the major production constraint is on the property, and the option best suited to alleviate the constraint.

References

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