

Red clover: milk production and growth rate responses

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Grasslands Pawera, a late flowering tetraploid red clover cultivar, has transformed what was previously low fertility pastures dominated by browntop and annual grasses with low summer productivity, into legume-dominant pastures over the summer to mid-autumn period on a Bay of Plenty dairy farm. Neither N nor supplements were used on this farm. The red clover was introduced into the pastures by (1) feeding out red clover hay; and (2) grazing red clover pastures after seed set. Milk production (kg milk solids/ha) for the 1995/96 season, compared to the zone average, was:

- * 24% higher for the full season
- * 30% higher in the November to April period when pastures were red clover-dominant
- * 35% higher in the December to February (summer) period.

Trials were carried out in the Manawatu in which milk production of Romney ewes, and growth rates

of suckling and weaned lambs, were monitored weekly over periods ranging from 10 to 12 weeks. Treatments comprised either red clover or ryegrass–white clover pastures.

Compared with ryegrass–white clover

- * ewes grazing red clover produced 24% more milk
- * suckling lambs on red clover had 20% higher rates of growth
- * weaned lambs on red clover had 24% higher rates of growth

It is concluded that red clover has the potential to increase milk production and growth rates over what is achievable on ryegrass–white clover pastures.

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