Adoption of higher sowing rates of subterranean clover in South West Victoria

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Low sowing rates (0.5-4.0 kg/ha) was identified as the main reason why farmers in south west Victoria had been unsuccessful in introducing Trikkala into their old subterranean clover pastures (1). An extension program was conducted in the Hamilton district of S.W. Victoria in late summer-autumn 1985 promoting higher sowing rates.

Method

The extension program encouraged farmers to sow Trikkala subterranean clover at 10 kg/ha. It emphasised the results of the survey conducted in the district in 1983 (1) and the benefits of Trikkala (2). Local newspapers and radio stations were supplied with several articles and articles were placed in four statewide agricultural publications. The program was discussed personally with all local pasture seed retailers and professionally prepared posters and pamphlets were distributed through them.

The program was evaluated by six local seed retailers conducting, under my supervision, a phone survey of 80 farmers in late winter 1985. This approach was expected to minimise bias in the evaluation. Retailers were asked to divide all their invoices for the main period of their Trikkala sales into 10 (or 20 in the case of the two largest retailers) roughly equal lots and to phone the first person in each lot who had purchased at least 50 kg of Trikkala seed and lived within 100 km of Hamilton. An introductory sentence was suggested together with the one question to ask (sowing rate used) and possible pitfalls (eg. rates being expressed as kg/ac).

Results and Discussion

Eighteen per cent of the respondents sowed Trikkala at 10 kg/ha or more in 1985, 56 per cent sowed it at 6 kg/ha or more and 21 per cent sowed it at less than 4 kg/ha. The average sowing rate used was 5.8 kg/ha. These sowing rates contrast sharply with the pre 1983 rates where 95 per cent of farmers sowed Trikkala at less than 4 kg/ha and the average sowing rate was 1.9 kg/ha (1).

The main reasons for the success of the program are:-

1. The program was based on objective information collected in the district, which farmers could identify with.

2. The recommended change was relatively simple. No new skills were needed.

3. The cost of Trikkala seed was reasonable ($1.50-$1.80/kg).

4. Farm returns were relatively good.

It has been observed that farmers who adopted the recommended sowing rate have achieved a dense sward of Trikkala within 2 years of sowing.

1. Schroder, P. 1985 Proc. 3rd Aust. Agron. Conf., Hobart. 216.

2. Reed, K.F.M., Schroder, P.M., Eales, J.W., McDonald, R.W., Chin, J.F. 1985 Aust. J. Exp. Agric. 25: 351-61.