

Lablab, a very cost-effective source of crude protein.

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Lablab has traditionally been planted dryland with the purpose of growing feed for the autumn feed gap. It is now being rediscovered as both a dryland and irrigated pasture crop grown in much larger areas as a contributor of high quality forage for milkers between December and April.

Lablab can be a cheaper source of crude protein in the diet when compared to adding protein in the form of protein meals or by-products when grazed as pasture.

Image 1 – Lablab pasture pre-grazing



Forage quality

The forage quality of lablab pasture is high in crude protein (CP) at 31.5% and moderate in neutral detergent fibre (NDF) at 38% due to cows being able to selectively graze the best of the plant.

Grazing management

Under dryland conditions, Lablab takes 14 weeks to first grazing. Yields are typically 3-5 t DM/ha over 1 to 3 grazing's. Under irrigation, Lablab takes 8 weeks to first grazing yielding 8tDM/ha over 4 to 5 grazing's.

The grazing rule is, when leaf cover forms a complete canopy, remove this with a short grazing period. Lablab needs to be grazed by over allocating feed to avoid crop trampling. This method of allocation allows the cows to selectively strip the leaves from the top of the plant. Forty percent of the lablab pasture on offer is composed of leaves and young stems and the remainder are mature

stems. The cows normally graze 35% of the pasture height, which is about 58% of the total pasture on offer.

Image 2 – Lablab post-grazing



Lablab is a resilient forage source, meaning if you have good growing conditions of another pasture or crop, utilise it as the Lablab will maintain quality (making it one of a few pastures that is versatile from a pasture management perspective). In this instance, reduce the amount of Lablab being fed, but don't totally remove it from the diet completely.

When other pasture options are less favourable, Lablab can contribute to a greater amount of the diet to maintain or improve milk production.

The economics of Lablab

Lablab can be grown as either a dryland or an irrigated crop. It is an economic way of adding protein to the diet of milking cows.

Dryland Lablab is weather tolerant and represents good value at 8c/kg DM when utilising 4.2tDM/ha. Dryland Lablab has lower crude protein levels of 24% CP when compared to irrigated Lablab. Irrigating Lablab offers a certainty of a yield with the added bonus of a higher crude protein level up to 35% CP. If 5.6tDM/ha is utilised of an 8tDM/ha irrigated Lablab crop, this costs 13c/kg DM. If high levels of utilisation are not achieved, then irrigated Lablab could be a more expensive feed than a well-managed and fertilised pasture. Potential risks limiting yield would be over-grazing or grazing in wet conditions leading to destruction of the base of the Lablab plant.

Lablab and Lucerne pastures can reduce the reliance on a protein source such as canola meal in a diet. However, always check your diet is nutritionally balanced, as protein from forage may not be able to meet all of the animal's protein requirements. From an economic perspective lablab and Lucerne pastures represent extraordinarily good value when compared to purchased protein meals and grains.

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