FarmLink Research Limited

Member Communication

Merry Christmas to our FarmLink members, I hope that your harvest is going smoothly, or maybe it's already in the silo. Either way, I hope you can spend some quality time with your loved ones this Christmas and New Year.

The following information is about our Long-Term Drought Resilience Field Trials project in partnership with Charles Sturt University. As well as providing some feedback about what we have done this year, we are inviting you to provide input into the direction of the project for the next 2 years.

If you can find time, please read the short research summary below, and use the link at the bottom of the report to provide us with your thoughts.

Winter feed options in a tough season

The dry autumn of 2025 challenged many mixed farmers to rethink their winter feed strategies. To provide some information under these challenging seasonal conditions, FarmLink conducted a crop grazing trial as part of our Future Drought Fund project, Long Term Trials of Drought Resilient Farming Practices. The trial aimed to provide insights for quick winter feed options, whilst also evaluating the trade-offs between late and repeated grazing on subsequent grain recovery.

The study focussed on four accessible quick-feed cereal options:

- Illabo Wheat – winter wheat benchmark for early sowing, dual purpose systems;

- Scepter Wheat - mid spring type suited to later sowing window;
- Neo CL Barley – mid-quick spring type with semi-prostrate early growth habit;
- Goldie Oats – mid spring dual purpose (hay/grain) type.

Four grazing strategies were applied to these cereals:

- No grazing, grain only
- Single graze (29/8/25) then locked up for grain recovery
- Extended graze, grazed twice (29/8/25 & 18/9/25) then locked up for grain recovery
- Sacrifice graze, grazed three times (29/8/25, 18/9/25 & 29/10/25), focus on feed with no grain recovery.

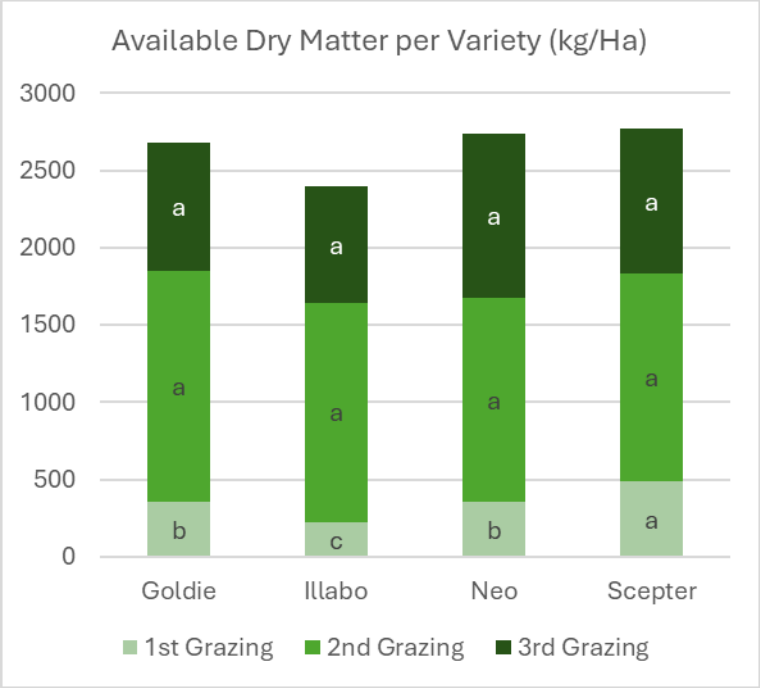

Figure 1. Dry matter yield across three grazing events

Key findings so far:

- Scepter wheat produced the highest early dry matter yield at first grazing (29 August), significantly outperforming other cereal treatments.
- Illabo wheat produced the lowest early biomass, reflecting its slower early development as a winter type.
- The differences between species and varieties were no longer significant by the second and third grazing events (18th of September & 29th of October), although Illabo still lagged behind the other cereals in total dry matter across the season.
- Initial results highlight contrasting growth patterns of quick-developing spring cereals compared to traditional winter wheat in a late, dry start and the subsequent influence on feed availability.

Grain is being harvested from the trial plots, to evaluate the impact of one or two grazing events on final grain yield. The economic value of both feed and grain across the management treatments will be compared to quantify trade-offs.

Why is this important?

The late break this season created pressure for early feed, forcing many growers to push grazing cereals harder than usual. This trial was instigated in response to grower experience this year and provides some data to determine which different cereal types deliver quick early feed in a late autumn break and the trade-offs with duration and timing of grazing on grain recovery. These learnings are critical to help improve drought resilience, helping growers match crop type and grazing strategy with challenging seasonal conditions.

Planning for the future – we need your input!

Over the final two years of this project, we want to ensure our research targets the most relevant aspects of drought resilience for our members. FarmLink are keen to hear from you about your priorities.

- If you had this year over again, what would you do differently?
- How will this season influence what you do going forward?
- What key drought- related issues, risks or questions should FarmLink investigate next?

You can respond through a very short online survey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MY6BKTZ.

Alternatively, you can provide feedback direct to Mark Skewes at FarmLink (0408 800 681, mark@farmlink.com.au).

Your feedback will help shape the next stage of the project and ensure our work delivers practical value for mixed farmers facing increasingly variable seasons.

Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry | Future Drought Fund | SOUTHERN NSW Innovation Hub SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES | Charles Sturt University Gulbali Institute Agriculture Water Environment | FarmLink

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