



# PLANNING GIVES MORE WITH LAND CLASS FENCING

► **Location**

Molesworth

► **Property size**

510 ha (1260 acres)

► **Landscape**

Steep and undulating hills with incised gullies and granite tor hilltop

► **Soils**

Mostly Kandosols with some Tenosols

► **Rainfall**

710 mm av/yr, effective March to November

► **Enterprise**

Poll Hereford beef cattle

► **Owners**

Cath and Paul O'Malley,  
Manager: John Waterhouse  
(pictured)

Cath and Paul O'Malley's 510 ha property at Molesworth is a classic example of how understanding your natural resource base and working to a whole farm plan can add value to an enterprise.

Formerly the 'back country' of a 1000 ha farm, the very large paddocks were used to run Merino sheep. A single paddock could enclose a range of features such as exposed granite, steep drainage gullies and sections of remnant native vegetation.

The O'Malleys, along with their farm manager John Waterhouse, mapped out a land class fencing plan suited to their property and Poll Hereford beef enterprise. Starting in 2012 with a land class fencing grant, one paddock that was 70 ha was divided into three paddocks.

Another that was 40 ha became two paddocks, and a 35 ha paddock became three with a 4 ha steep rocky face completely fenced off. Reducing paddock sizes also meant reviewing stock water sources. The O'Malleys had one new dam built, three others cleaned out and troughs added to two of the new paddocks.

"Land class fencing has meant better management of pastures by more strategic grazing," said John. "Native grasses comprise about one third of the property – essentially *Microlaena* (weeping grass) and some wallaby grasses and kangaroo grass. Our introduced pastures are primarily an Australian cultivar (for low pH) of perennial phalaris last sown in about 1994, a clover base, and some cocksfoot."



The O'Malleys have a herd of 320 cattle and work to a spring calving. "We try to match feed availability with the requirements of lactating animals," said John. "Last spring we were able to rotate stock every 2 to 3 weeks and we weren't able to do that before land class fencing the 70 ha paddock."

"We then carry the steer portion of the drop through a second winter and sell between 12 to 15 months of age. The weaners – our growing stock – are rotated with ideally 1500-2000 kg dry matter/ha ahead of them, and last year (2014) we achieved that and better. The growth rate is quite phenomenal with the very mild start to winter and the early autumn break."

Across a seasonal range the weeping and wallaby grasses have protein and digestibility levels comparable to introduced phalaris and cocksfoot grasses. Weeping grass grows well through cool to warm temperatures, remains green throughout the year, and is both frost and drought tolerant. However, native pastures can be potentially light on over winter with volume of production (tonnes/ha) a limiting factor. Land class fencing and the O'Malleys'

attentive grazing management will give their native pastures the best chance through less favourable winters.

Land class fencing is also a major pasture management tool through summer. The O'Malley's are well aware of the erosive potential of their soils and the need to maintain a minimum of 70% perennial ground cover on their hill country.

"Maintaining minimum cover is especially challenging on the north-facing paddocks, although the land class fencing is allowing us to time stock access to let the natives seed out," Cath said. "We would never consider replacing the perennial natives with introduced species on the steeper paddocks as it would leave soil exposed during the establishment phase and you don't get many chances with this soil ... once it's gone, it's gone."

As members of the Yea SoilCare group, both Cath and John keep informed of different approaches to soil health and pasture management. "Soil testing is essentially our driver," said John, "to determine stocking rate to some extent, give us a baseline of where we are starting

from especially on our native country and from there what we need to do to build it up, being mindful of keeping grass cover over summer."

The great paradox with land class fencing, based on whole farm planning, is that even after grazing area is reduced by excluding stock from steeper or remnant areas there are still production benefits.

"Being able to move stock on rotation means saving pastures and creating a feed wedge elsewhere – and we have done no more than fence and ensure water access," said John.

- **For more information about improving soil health and the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority's Australian Government funded SoilCare program visit the Land Health page at [www.gbcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au)**
- **For more information on sustainable farm management visit the Agriculture page of the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources at [www.economicdevelopment.vic.gov.au](http://www.economicdevelopment.vic.gov.au)**

*In 2010-13 the GB CMA received funding from the Australian Government for the Sustainable Farming Practices Project, which included grants for land class fencing. The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources worked with farmers to deliver the grants on-ground.*