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## Is Pasture Renovation Necessary?

“Nothing lasts forever” or so the old saying goes. This is as true of pasture as it is of fertiliser or anything else. The time will eventually come when either the grasses or the legumes or both are no longer performing at an optimal level. However, before hooking up the plough and “ripping into it” the thinking farmer may want to ask some questions to determine whether cultivation is really the best course of action.

The obvious question to ask is: “Why is the pasture no longer performing?” This may quickly lead to other questions such as “Has it ever performed?” or “Is this just a seasonal factor?” Pasture management must also be looked at: “Has the pasture been overgrazed or overstocked?” “Are suitable cultivars being grown with respect to climate or end use?” Many times, the pasture is not performing as it should simply because there is a problem with soil nutrient supply or soil physical properties (structure, porosity) and/or soil biological properties (organic matter, living biota).

If, as they say, “time is money”, then clearly it is a waste of both time and money cultivating and re-sowing if something other than old age is impacting pasture performance.

Soil properties should neither be ignored nor guessed at, for they are what ultimately determine how well the pasture will perform, regardless of whether it is newly sown or has been established for several years. Why waste money on fertiliser nutrients if levels are already adequate and additional fertiliser is not actually required.

This does of course presume that the farmer has good information about the soil beneath his pasture. Without this data, a decision to establish new pasture or apply fertiliser is foolishness. Yet that is how many farmers operate i.e. they only order a soil test when a problem develops, by which time the damage has already been done. The smarter option is to get a good comprehensive test undertaken and then, on the basis of the information it provides, make decisions as to whether pasture renovation is necessary at all and/or what fertiliser nutrients are actually required.

Rather than waste money on cultivation, re-sowing or fertiliser applications, invest first in a good soil test. This small initial upfront cost may save you \$1000's in the long term.

