



The following article was written by Soiltech
Soil Scientist, Dave McKie MAgSc (Hons)

IMPROVING HILL COUNTRY PRODUCTION

Are you blind to the potential of your hill country?

Many farms are a mixture of flats and hill country. Generally the flats are more fertile and thus get most of the attention and expenditure, while the poorer producing hill country is overlooked. Rather than trying to “squeeze the last drop” from the flats, what if we started thinking differently and looked for more return from the hill country?

Consider the following scenario: a 1000 hectare property with 200 hectares of flats and 800 hectares of hills (roughly split between sunny north facing and darker southerly faces). The flats are well developed, producing 15 tonnes of dry matter/ha/yr. The hilly areas only produce about 5 tonnes of DM/ha/yr. Hence, the flats, which comprise only 20% of the farm, are producing 3000 tonnes of dry matter (43% of the total dry matter produced on the property). The hill country, which comprises 80% of the farm, is only producing 4000 tonnes of dry matter (57% of total production).

When it comes to lifting productivity, the farmer usually looks to push the flats even harder, since these are the most fertile and easiest areas to work. However, to increase production by 1 tonne/ha on the flats may cost as much or more than it costs to increase productivity on the hills by the same amount. Consider the following table:

AREA (ha)	DM/ha (T/yr)	Total DM (T/yr)	Increase DM by 1T/ha/yr	New Total DM (T/yr)	Production Increase (T/yr)	Production Increase (%)
Flats 200	15	3000	16	3200	200	6.7
Hill 800	5	4000	6	4800	800	20

Increasing production on the hills by 1T/ha/yr lifts overall productivity from this sector by 20% or 800T/yr! Pushing the flats to produce an additional 1T/ha/yr only results in a 6.7% increase or 200 extra T/ha.

For many years now, Mainland Minerals have been assisting farmers to get more production from their hill country, and particularly from the dark, south faces. Innovative fertiliser technology has led to increased productivity from these often disregarded areas by increasing palatability and quality of the dry mater grown, opening up previously ungrazed or poorly grazed areas, improving nutrient cycling and also creating an improved environment to establish new grasses.

If you've been blind to the potential of your hill country, why not give Mainland Minerals a call on 0800 433 787. A small increase in productivity on your hills can make a big increase in your overall productivity and economic bottom line.