

# BUILDING GRASS CASTLES

**Owners:** Kate and John Scott

**Location:** "Allandale", Roma

**Area:** 2830ha

**Enterprise:** Backgrounding cattle for feedlot

**Livestock:** Crossbreed Santa Gertrudis, Brahman, Charolais, Droughtmaster, Hereford

**Pasture:** Progardes, Buffel, creeping bluegrass, premier digit, Reclaimer Rhodes, Bambatsi.

**Soil:** red and black Brigalow Belah soils going into lighter box country



*Kate and John Scott focus on quality at every stage of their pasture improvement program, from seed germination quality, species mix, decision support, cattle selection and timing of grazing rotations.*

**"We are pasture farmers who specialise in beef cattle weight gain."**

John and Kate Scott bring an intense focus on quality to every stage of their pasture improvement program.

When the Scotts purchased the 7000-acre property three years ago, the majority had considerable pasture run down, and dingoes, pigs and kangaroos were rife. The first thing they did was to erect exclusion fencing.

"If we wanted to develop improved pastures, we had to give it the best chance by fencing vermin out," John says.

Their quality philosophy starts with cattle selection. They choose only crossbred with 50 per cent Brahman content or less, and temperament plays a big role, preferring cattle that have been properly weaned and handled.

"Depending on the season we run 400 cattle in each mob, and we rotationally graze them," Kate says. "We don't leave them in each paddock for too long."

They supplement with Bentobite during the green season and sulphur and mineral licks year round for rumen health and buffalo fly.

Their improved pasture grasses consist of buffel, creeping bluegrass, Premier digit, Reclaimer Rhodes and Bambatsi, and pasture legume Progardes desmanthus chosen for its protein levels and nitrogen-fixing soil improvement qualities.

John says it was important to choose pastures that gave them a head start.



*John and Kate Scott's improved pasture species include Progardes and Premier digit (pictured), Reclaimer Rhodes, Bambatsi and creeping bluegrass.*

“We wanted pastures that come away earlier than everything else. The Premier digit and creeping bluegrass is green a month and a half earlier than other species. When our buffel is frosted and dormant, our improved pastures are up and away, and two months is a lot of time for weight gain. We’ve also learned to buy seed on germination quality rather than price.”

They introduced Progardes three years ago after considering a number of legume options, including lucerne and leucaena. They ultimately chose Progardes for its outstanding feed quality and ease of management: it is non-weedy, non-toxic and does not require rumen inoculants or plant height management.

Progardes is key to our strategy of avoiding pasture run down. We like the fact that it is a high protein cattle feed and a fabulous soil improver for our country,” Kate says.

Their choice of pasture species is determined by the species’ suitability for their land type and conditions, which can range from -5° to 45°C.

“I think we’ve got a good mix now, and it’s working well,” John says.

The Scotts use FutureBeef Stocktake Plus, developed by Queensland DAF, to measure and manage their grass. It has allowed them to work out exactly the stocking rate and how many kilograms of pasture and protein is available in each paddock.

They have experimented with a range of paddock preparations, including deep ripping, cutter bar and offsetting. They are currently using offsets but John is open to other methods.



*John Scott pictured between two trial paddock preparation sites, cutter bar (left) and offset (right).*



*John and Kate Scott’s improved pasture species include Progardes and Premier digit (pictured), Reclaimer Rhodes, Bambatsi and creeping bluegrass.*

Their next project is to make winters more productive. They are experimenting with nitrogen fertiliser in the form of urea on 1000 acres, to allow them to spell a lot of their country in the growing season. They are also considering feeding grain in the paddock as a low-cost alternative to feedlotting.

Their medium-term plans are to get the home farm fully productive, which they hope to achieve in three years, before looking to expand again.

“Instead of getting more land and going into more debt, we want to improve the land we’ve got and make it productive. Our running costs are absolutely minimal,” Kate says. “We think the productivity in this country is only just starting.”

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