

MEDIA RELEASE

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Attention: News Editor

Trial plan for native plant fodder

Environmentally friendly native plants could help to nourish Australian livestock if experiments by last year's GSDC Medal for Excellence winner bear fruit.

Dr Geoff Woodall, winner of the 2010 Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC) Medal for Excellence in NRM, is modifying a seeder that could help to establish viable native fodder crops for agricultural land.

By this time next year, a trial plot in a paddock on a Woodanilling farm will give some indication of the potential to use Kennedia species and other native legumes, to provide nutritious fodder for livestock.

These deep rooted plants could also play a valuable role in recycling nutrients that have leached beyond the root zone of traditional annual crops and pastures.

Dr Woodall said the trial will be partly funded by the \$10,000 grant he received on winning the 2010 GSDC Medal for Excellence.

"It is quite a speculative project that will provide some baseline information, potentially for a much larger trial," Dr Woodall said.

"Modifying a native plant seeder is also an important part of this project and will enable me to sow the seed, and to strategically place fertiliser and other additives nearby but not touching the seed.

"The aim is to partially mimic the nutritional conditions that these plants encounter after a fire, when seeds in the ground gain nutrients from the ash left by the fire.

"Kennedia and other native legumes show good germination and strong growth after a bushfire, but experience shows that germination can be limited if the seed comes into direct contact with fertiliser.

"If we can reproduce or improve on the fire effect in the paddock trial, we could gain the benefit of a stock food that is better adapted to the environment, tolerates poor soils and needs less insecticide," Dr Woodall said.

Fodder produced by the Kennedia trial will be compared with a plot of lucerne sown at the same location, and current annual pasture.



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Sowing will take place in autumn next year, emergence and early growth will be checked in winter, and the productivity of the plots will be assessed in late spring or early summer.

GSDC Chief Executive Officer Bruce Manning said Dr Woodall's work held promise for better management of farmland in the Great Southern and beyond.

"This is intriguing work by a leader in native plant agronomy," Mr Manning said.

"It has the potential to help farmers maintain stock production while they minimise inputs and environmental impacts."

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