

# Katanning feed plan a real cow pleaser

The cows on a Katanning property have taken to an innovative diet of sprouted barley, as SALLY HINCKS reports.



WHEN the cows at Peter and Judy Cameron's Katanning farm eat, it's like they're eating manna from heaven.

They close their eyes in sheer delight as they munch their way through a quite remarkable product of sprouted barley, which is grown in a climate-controlled plastic shed, where 100kg of barley grows to between 700 to 900kg in a week. It grows eight to nine inches in seven days.

The phenomenon is grown in The Fodder Factory on the Camerons' property. Both Peter and Judy work at the WAMMCO abattoir at Katanning, Peter as an electrical mechanic in the maintenance division and Judy as administration manager.

The Camerons also run 126 cattle on their 158ha (390ac) farm and said that without the Fodder Factory product, they would only be able to run between 50 to 70 cows.

"And you'd be buying in a lot of feed. As it is, the shed carries an extra 50 cows for us," Peter said.

It costs \$23/day to feed the 126 cattle using bought-in barley, but this year the Camerons will grow their own barley for the shed.

"Using our own barley, the cost will be reduced to \$5/day," Judy said.

The Camerons have 73 cows due to calve and, assuming half of those to be females, it will bring their female numbers to 135.

The cattle graze the paddocks, though tucker is a bit light-on at the moment, with no decent break to speak of.

However, come late afternoon each day, and using their trusty red and black wheelbarrow, the Camerons empty the trays of seven-day sprouted barley — one for each beast — into the back of their ute and feed out.

Each sprouted trayful weighs about eight kilos, with plenty of root development.

"In the beginning, they only went for the green, but now they eat the lot, roots and all," Peter said.

And no wonder — there's 19pc protein.

The process starts with Peter getting barley (it has to be good quality malting barley) from the silo with the wheelbarrow.

The grain is then put into trays and automatically watered for 60 seconds every three hours. The water has nutrient added (one kilo into the 25,000 litre water tank every day).

The tiers of trays rest on galvanised steel frames, each tier having its own sprayed-on water supply.

The temperature is kept at 22° all the time

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The cattle — in good store condition — have had no supplement except hay since November.

Anyway, when cows are on the point of calving, Peter says he doesn't want the cattle to be overfat.

Any spillage barley goes to the four pigs that are being run for the specific purpose of cleaning up that spillage.

The pigs all get a couple of squares of barley each day — and it's not only the pigs and cattle which love their protein-rich fodder. The crossbred sheep do, too.

From one of the youngsters in the flock, the Camerons have made their own prime lamb sausages from a 27kg (dressed), frame

score 3, seven-month old lamb.

"And the sheep meat is not fat," Peter observed.

In such a confined space and with perfect conditions for growth, is there not a threat of disease?

"No, because the turnover is so quick. The only thing I do to prevent algae from developing on the structure is to squirt some chlorine on any growth," said Peter, who gives the shed a thorough clean every two weeks.

The water — off the scheme — is not recycled, but it's not wasted; it goes onto the Camerons' vegetable garden.

They also have 100 Merlot vines under irrigation and, when they start getting a good crop, will take them to a Mt Barker winery to, hopefully, make into a top drop.



The bull contingent on Peter and Judy Cameron's Katanning farm tuck into their Fodder Factory seven-day-old sprouted barley which has a 19pc protein content. Each square weighs 8kg.



Judy and Peter with the Fodder Factory-sprouted barley product they feed to their 126 cattle — 100kg of barley weighs between 700 and 900kg after seven days of watering