



Peter Ryan and daughter, Rebecca, with a tray of grain seedlings.

# Fodder factory for all seasons

PRODUCING fat lambs or beef with a guaranteed supply of high protein feed minus the concern about seasonal conditions may seem a tad far-fetched. However, that's the case for a growing number of graziers investing in a fodder factory.

Despite initial reservations, they have mustered \$45,000 to establish a fodder factory which produces up to a tonne a day of high protein grain, enough to fatten 100 head of steers or 700 fat lambs.

The aim is to finish their stock off early at a good weight, with confidence they can continually meet market requirements. It also gives them added confidence to buy more stock, said Peter Ryan, managing director of The Fodder Factory.

Mr Ryan — himself a frustrated cattle producer at Wingham on the mid north coast — first discovered the concept of a

fodder factory 10 years ago by growing oat and barley seedlings undercover in cotton wool, with the right temperature and water requirements.

He has since refined the technique by placing 112 trays of grain seedlings in the factory daily, which, within eight days, produces a tonne of wet feed. The time needed to prepare the seedlings and feed out the fodder is just two hours.

"The beauty of it is that you're not reliant upon seasonal conditions to grow feed for the stock," he said.

Running costs of the factory average \$20.70 to produce a tonne of feed a day. While the producer should still provide roughage in their herd's diet — be it grass or hay — the cost of feeding stock is still low compared to buying grain at up to \$100 a tonne.

Mr Ryan recommends that malt-ing barley be grown in the factory

because of its higher protein content (22 per cent for 9.6 kilograms) compared to oats (12.9pc per 6.5kg).

Studies commissioned by Mr Ryan show the fodder factory to be 88.8 times more water efficient using 960 litres of water a day, compared to irrigating lasered lucerne flats. And because of the eight-day cycle, grain can tolerate salt levels in bore water.

A significant boost to the property's DSE by producing grain in the factory is another benefit, Mr Ryan said.

"The fact that (farming) land is becoming scarcer, the increased DSE is certainly an advantage, particularly for smaller holdings," Mr Ryan said.

"We're running out of land and running out of water, so we have got to farm smarter. And I think this will become farming of the future."

— NICKY DEITZ