A cheaper way to boost winter pasture growth

Producer case study: Peter Wettenhall

Location	Coojar, Victoria
Area	1,000 ha
Enterprise	Prime lamb production, Merino fine wool
Livestock	7000 sheep, 160 steers for fattening
Pastures	Mix of phalaris, perennial ryegrass & sub clover pastures
Soils	Sandy loam
Rainfall	700mm

Gibberellic acid is a naturally occurring plant hormone that stimulates cell expansion, resulting in leaves and stems becoming longer. It becomes depleted in plants during cold temperatures and as such, growth responses can occur in winter when applied foliarly.

Applications work best when soil fertility is adequate and the paddock is spelled for two to three weeks post-application. To get the most out of the extra growth, apply in late June–early July. The maximum response from the application will occur after three to four weeks but may continue to have an effect for another four weeks.

In 2024, after a late autumn break, Peter Wettenhall, who farms at Coojar in the Western District of Victoria, decided to use gibberellic acid on some of his phalaris pastures.

"There was a visual result after two weeks", Peter said. "You could see exactly where I turned the sprayer at the end of the paddock, with the unsprayed area considerably shorter.

"The colour of the leaf also changed to a lighter green colour," Peter said, "But I've been assured there is no change to feed quality from this."

In 2025, after another late break, Peter ended up spraying "nearly half the farm" with the product to boost growth in winter lambing paddocks after the success of the previous year.

"I was able to put it out when spraying for grubs or capeweed as well. It mixes in just fine with the other products in the spray tank", he said.

This added growth meant he didn't have to feed his ewes while they were lambing and could leave them undisturbed. Pasture cages in one phalaris paddock showed 1120kg DM/ha in the gibberellic acid-treated areas, and 500 kg in the untreated. That was a response of 620kg DM/ha.

"Spraying our paddocks with gibb acid took away the stress and excessive cost of having to feed ewes whilst lambing like we did in 2024. It was a no-brainer", Peter says.

Image 1 *Peter heading off to spray*

Trials by Southern Farming Systems in 2024 compared applying gibberellic acid versus buying in grain (Table 1). The phalaris pasture had a response of 234kg DM/ha to gibberellic acid, costing 8¢/kg of DM. In comparison, grain bought at $400/t costed 40¢/kg/DM/ha.

Using the same calculations as the table but with the measured response at Peter's property, the gibberellic acid cost 3¢/kg of DM. Producers can access the tool here on the Evergraze website for free to estimate the profitability of applying urea vs gibberellic acid vs buying in grain.

"After spending tens of thousands of dollars on supplementary feed for lambing last year [2024], the decision was easy to apply gibberellic acid", Peter said.

Image 2 *Gibberellic acid treated pasture 24 August 2025*

Table 1. Cost of measured responses to gibberellic acid at four in kilograms of dry matter and cents per megajoule of energy (MJ) and the equivalent grain cost at 100% and 80% utilisation.

Costs of responses	Gibberellic acid at four weeks	Equivalent purchased grain
Assumptions for costs	$170 for 400g/kg product, costing $6.80/ha product and $12/ha to spray	$400/t at 90% DM and 13 MJ of ME/kg
Measured responses (kg DM/ha)	234	-
Cost per kg DM	8¢	44¢
Equivalent cost per tonne of DM	$80/t	$444/t
Cost at 100% utilisation (¢/MJ)	0.7¢	44¢
Cost at 80% utilisation (¢/MJ)	0.9¢	56¢

Resources

Boosting phalaris growth using nitrogen fertiliser and gibberellic acid 2023 SFS Trial Results

Boosting winter phalaris growth using nitrogen and gibberellic acid 2024 SFS Trial Results

Video Boosting winter pasture growth with gibberellic acid

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