

Brassica and white clover mix wins place in Western Victoria pastures

Producer case study: The Midfield Group

Location	Warrnambool, Victoria
Area	16,000 ha
Enterprise	Beef and lamb production and dairy farming, calf rearing
Livestock	Variety of cattle breeds sourced nationally, Friesian cows
Pastures	Perennial ryegrass/clovers with speciality finishing pastures
Soils	Basalt loams and clay loams over heavy clay subsoil
Rainfall	850mm

The Midfield Group has unlocked a pasture system that's delivering both productivity and sustainability across its 16,000 hectares of farmland near Warrnambool.

By pairing brassicas with white clover, the group has overcome challenges in establishing clover under ryegrass, while boosting feed quality and livestock performance.

Clover establishment challenge solved

For years, white clover struggled to establish when sown alongside ryegrass in autumn. Agronomy lead Tony Donovan, encouraged and supported by owners Dean and the late Col McKenna, trialled sowing clover with brassicas in spring – a winning move that now supports their beef, sheep and dairy enterprises.

“Putting clover in at the same time as ryegrass meant it never got a good go,” Tony said. “With brassicas, it works. If it ain’t broke, we don’t fix it.”

“Getting the clover established helps bulk up the brassica, fills in the voids, delivers high-quality feed over dry summers, pumps nitrogen into the soil and provides a base for sowing ryegrass into the following autumn.”

Economic advantage

Their preference for brassicas and white clover is based on economics.

“It comes back to the cost. It is a cheap quality feed, with the cost to produce a tonne of feed being \$80 to \$120/t.

“We might grow 10-12 tonnes of dry matter per hectare with the ryegrass during the first half of the year, but then add brassica in spring and summer, producing 6 t/ha and it works economically.”



Image 1 Shannon Taylor and Tony Donovan from the Midfield Group with white clover sown at the base of their brassica crop. Photo taken November 19th, 2025. Lisa Miller, Southern Farming Systems.

“You can’t naturally produce high-quality feeds over summer with ryegrass that has the same protein levels which are needed to grow out livestock.”

Their steers regularly achieve liveweight gains of 1.5 kg/ha/day to 1.8 kg/ha/day.

This system enables Midfields to finish most steers by January – a key advantage in reducing stock numbers during dry summers. Lighter steers can also be carried through winter and targeted for the fodder mix.

Adjusting stock onto feed

Paddocks close to infrastructure have livestock managed onto brassica with controlled feeding of cereal hay. By managing the allocation of area grazed, Midfields control the potential Brassica intake. They supplement with hay to meet nutritional requirements and gradually adjust intake and access of brassicas over 10, 14 and 21 days.

For paddocks located further from infrastructure, they sow millet in the mix, which is higher in fibre and reduces the amount of cereal hay feeding.

Grazing management

Midfields control clover content with stock numbers and the height they allow brassicas to reach.

“Our grazing management is about maximising utilisation, which we call ‘Hoof and Tooth’ and keeps pastures down enough to keep clover in the system. The brassica keeps the clover in check, so there are no bloat issues.”

Temporary tapes are used to back fence areas to avoid trampling.

Sowing program

The Midfield group is comprised of 13 farms and pasture renovation is high on their agenda, with land expensive to buy. About 1000 ha of pasture are re-sown to perennial ryegrass each year to maximise productivity.

The fodder mix typically consists of 3 kg/ha of Mainstar forage rape and 3 kg/ha of white clover, with cultivars Tribute and Brace, and an optional 8 to 10 kg/ha of millet.

They experimented with increasing the brassica rate to 4 kg/ha, knowing they had moisture to support growth and to see if they could get canopy closure to reduce weeds.

Tony figured for the cost of an extra \$14 for one kilogram of seed, they did not need to grow much more for payback.

With a brilliant spring, they achieved this with crops of about 5t DM/ha grown by November 22 and clover surviving under the canopy.

“We don’t worry about the clover. It comes from nowhere. You have to peel back the brassica leaves to find the clover plants. They are small but there and will be right once grazing starts.”

Time of sowing

Union Station manager Shannon Taylor trialled earlier sowing in September after drought reduced ryegrass survival. What is normally an 850mm rainfall environment received less than half of that over 2024 and the first half of 2025.

“We weren’t competing with silage, so we took the time to establish it. We sprayed out paddocks in August. Once temperatures reached above 16°C, we sowed on September 22 and it has given excellent results. I’ll be doing this from now on.”

Long-term soil health

Tony explains that while white clover provides good year-round growth and they get three years plus with the clover, it is more than just feed.

“It’s not really about providing bulk but it’s giving us nitrogen so our synthetic nitrogen inputs are reduced. We are nurturing the land and the soil health is apparent.”

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