

## **Adoption of direct drilling for sowing pastures in South–West Victoria**

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A modified form of direct drilling (1) for sowing pastures has been strongly promoted in the Hamilton District of south–west Victoria since autumn 1986. To successfully adopt this technology, farmers need to understand new concepts, develop new skills and buy or gain access to new equipment.

The cornerstone of the extension programme was the sowing of 14 demonstration areas in autumn 1986. The co–operating farmers made the paddock (4 to 10 ha) available, supplied and applied the herbicides and supplied and sowed the seed and fertiliser. I supplied the technical knowledge and management expertise and arranged for a Connor Shea Napier coil–tynd drill, fitted with Baker Points, to be available for sowing. A field day was held at each site at sowing. A total of 347 people attended these days. The concept and achievements have been publicised extensively through local and state mass media outlets, farmer meetings and by making a video widely available.

Estimates of the area of pasture sown by direct drilling (based on local herbicide sales) are: 1986 – 1,000 ha, 1987 – 6,000 ha and 1988 – 15,000 ha. The total area of pasture resown in 1988 was about 30,000 ha. A mail survey of 80 farmers in one parish north of Hamilton found that 45% had used a drill fitted with Baker Points (an important part of the Method), to sow pastures (2).

Some of the reasons for the success of this extension programme are:

1. One clear simple message was presented through appropriate communication channels.
2. The availability of a locally designed and manufactured direct drill conversion kit (3) enables Baker Points to be fitted to virtually any combine or drill for about \$1,000. This provides a relatively low cost but effective way of gaining some experience with the technology package.
3. Early experiences were generally very favourable and encouraged wider and more extensive use.
4. The opportunity to improve pasture production by introducing new cultivars was substantial. As an example see (4).
5. Many district farmers had learnt skills in selecting and using herbicides when growing crops in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Sowing pastures by direct drilling involves only 20-30% of the tractor hours required when using conventional Methods. Farmers taking full advantage of this have reduced their pasture resowing cycle from 25-35 years to 8 – 10 years, a point which has very substantial implications for farm productivity and the returns from herbage plant improvement programmes.

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