



Bruce & Josie Gower

520 HECTARES

"Ten years ago we bought a block of land off the neighbours, and although I've never really been one for soil tests, we decided to have one done. We knew for a fact that it hadn't had any fertiliser for 10-12 years and we wanted to get an idea of where to start. At the same time, we thought we'd might as well get a test taken off our own farm to compare the results, as our original property had a very good fertiliser history of straight superphosphate," remembers Bruce.

"When the results came back, we were absolutely mystified to find that they were almost identical, telling us that our farm had the same low "P" level as the new block! During this period, we were contemplating putting superphosphate on at 1cwt, but according to the fertiliser rep, there wouldn't be enough "P" in such a small application rate.

That advice went against what we were trying to achieve. Our first priority on this steep hill country was to be able to manage our grass without it getting away, plus 1cwt fitted our budget a lot better. We're on marginal country with a mostly clay soil base and a moderate climate. We guessed, looking at the farm at that time, even putting on 2cwt of super wasn't going to be economical.

After reading a Hatuma Update and noting the farmers' positive comments made in it, we thought that dicalcic

phosphate sounded like it suited what we were trying to achieve. Also, it was reasonably priced compared to superphosphate.

We decided to try an area of the farm with straight dicalcic in the first year, and got pleasing results almost immediately. Since then, we have done the whole farm at 2cwt on the hills and 3cwt on rolling flats

The farm is a fattening unit with set stock and the only thing we sell as stores are some steers, otherwise we fatten everything else. The dicalcic is doing two things a. good grass rates on the hills that we can manage; and b. boosting the rolling flat land so that we can fatten the Romney wether lambs.

After using the dicalcic, we took the initial draft of lambs off the ewes at 14 - 15kgs. Using the fattening paddocks, the next draft of wether lambs grew 7kgs in 30 days (250gms per day). This was on original pasture rejuvenated with dicalcic. Experts would say that results such as this would normally come from using a brassica crop. These flat paddocks are only getting 3cwt of dicalcic, yet we have continued fattening between 16 - 17kg lambs off this same country. At times through winter there doesn't look to be much grass, yet the stock continue to get "mud fat" on it.



Variation of steep & rolling country on the new block



We were once warned that we were going to over-lime, but you simply can't by putting it on at this rate. There is a better bone structure now, with bigger framed sheep. We are striving for better than average genetics in growth rate and animal size, and the dicalcic has helped maintain those characteristics. The animal health has definitely improved, as our sheep are a lot healthier - and that's the aspect we're aiming for. We want good average stock, and are easily sustaining that, with no downers in the growth rate.

All the property is still in its original pasture. **"When we took over the new block, the flats had no clover, and we were seriously thinking about turning it over, but the dicalcic has brought back a solid clover base allowing us to fatten everything on it. There is a substantial increase in earthworms in the soil as well, and they're doing a great job of recycling the litter on the top."**

We are now maintaining the pasture quality on the steep hill country. All the grass has become palatable, and now the stock graze the grass evenly in the sunny and shady areas - previously, when we were using the superphosphate, we'd only see them grazing the sunny areas. That's certainly the key to dicalcic - it's ability to make everything palatable.

The lambing percentage 5 years ago was 95%. In 2000, we went through a really bad dry spell resulting in the stock having very little grass. When it came to tupping time, we hoped for the best, but expected the worst. Obviously, we were very happy when they scanned 150%. We ended up getting 119%, but for this country that's really pleasing, especially as we originally had a target of 120% prior to the dry spell.

After the dry spell the pasture recovered very quickly. As mentioned, during that time we had very little grass, but the stock still must have been getting the right nutrients out of it. We managed the grass through visual assessment, and although it didn't look great at that stage, we didn't have to de-stock to keep it going.

The thing about dicalcic is that it's a management tool - it provides a constant growth of grass, so there's no risk of foul pasture management. All over the farm, even right to the trig, there's a sward of clover that the stock seem to thrive on.

Hatuma's dicalcic phosphate really is a catalyst for pasture management as far as we're concerned. It has suited us both financially and the way we wanted the farm to progress, and obviously the results haven't let us down - it is doing exactly what we would hope it would do."

