

GROMOR MAY 2016 NEWSLETTER

It was Charles Darwin who coined the phrase: “It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive, but those who can best manage change.”

Wise words, very applicable to our younger generation - especially the farmers, who face short and long term water shortages, rising labour costs and supplying markets controlled by big conglomerates, amongst many other difficulties.

Agriculture accounts for approximately 70% of the water used in the world, and WATER USE is growing at twice the rate of the population. Going forward, this is unsustainable! The UN estimates that 1 in 9 people in the world currently lack clean drinking water and that this causes the death of an estimated 3.5 million people per annum.

ORGANIC OR INORGANIC?? HOW ABOUT BOTH?

One cannot but be astounded at how many agricultural “experts” there are living in the cities, ranging from animal welfare and anti-GM activists, to bodies that blame global warming on agriculture’s carbon and water footprint etc. etc. To top it all, there is the ever-recurring call for farmers to “save” the planet by going “organic”. This is fine when catering for the “upper” end of the market that can afford to pay more, but not when producing quality food for the masses.

It’s not to say that “organic” principles don’t have their place in conventional agriculture. Applying minimum tillage, maintaining soil organic matter, planting leys etc are strongly advised; but not without coupling these with fertilising **IN**organically (chemically) according to soil analysis recommendation and applying herbicides and pesticides, carefully following recommendations. (Incidentally, the rumour that glyphosphate (the active ingredient in Roundup) never breaks down in the soil, is simply not true, unless the soil is devoid of life. In normal soil, it is rapidly broken down by soil microbes)

Man has populated our planet to the extent where subsistence “organic” agriculture will no longer feed the masses – particularly in the developing countries!

WINTER – LIVESTOCK

Whilst livestock in most of KZN is currently in reasonable condition, water shortages for irrigation and a paucity of veld are staring livestock farmers in the face. The grass is still green, but it is short. Sheep, who graze with a “biting” action, have teeth on both their upper and lower jaws, enabling them to graze lower, will probably manage well into the winter. Cattle however, who only have teeth on their lower jaws, graze with a “shearing” action, battle on the short grass which faces them as winter progresses.

For beef farmers, culling unproductive animals is advised ASAP if not already done, and for the remaining stock, apply a sound “lick” strategy, using NPN (non-protein-nitrogen) to best effect in order to stimulate appetite so that the stock consume unpalatable grasses like Ngongoni, Thatch, Mtjiki etc. (The Durban Corporation Conservationists are now protecting Ngongoni, the invasive sourveld grass in the industrial areas! Why?)

I really feel sorry for dairy farmers, being faced with water shortages for irrigating rye-grass pastures, which, coupled with poor maize yields, have pushed prices up to levels that do not warrant purchasing maize for dairy rations with the low price farmers are getting for milk.

FERTILISING – LAWNS

Nitrogen, (the first number in a compound fertiliser) enhances the green colour. Don't overdo it though, as nitrogen not taken up by the grass will get leached down and acidify the subsoil. It also burns if over-applied. Subsoil acidity is extremely difficult to remedy, as lime (used to counter soil acidity) does not move down to the subsoil. The result is that plant roots will not penetrate into the acid subsoil, depriving them of nutrients and water in the lower soil reaches.

As a general recommendation, do not exceed a maximum of two dressings of 30g/m² of LAN or urea; or 50g/m² of a compound fertiliser like GROMOR 4.1.1 (21) or 5.1.5 (28) /m² per annum and don't apply it on a scorching hot, dry day.

Phosphate (the middle number in a compound fertiliser) should be applied close to where the roots are. On lawns, this is really only applicable when "banding" the fertiliser when planting in rows. I have always been very aware of the necessity of applying potassium fertiliser (the last number in a compound fertiliser) to grass, because of its predominance in leaves and stems. Hence my general recommendation to use 3.1.5 or GROMOR 5.1.5 when removing clippings, whilst the normal lawn fertiliser, GROMOR 4.1.1 is fine where clippings are not removed. Interestingly, it has recently been found that one gets a particularly good response from potassium under drier conditions. With this having been an exceptionally dry growing season, an application of GROMOR 5.1.5 (28) now, is probably a good idea.

BARE SOIL

Nature did not plan for soil to lie bare. Being exposed to blistering hot sun will push soil temperatures up to ± 60°C and kill off most of the life in the top centimetre of soil, which will affect the growth of subsequent crops and expose the soil to wind and water erosion.

On the farm, intercrop with leys and in the garden use a mulch.

Regards

GROMOR (PTY) LTD

R. Hagen

PS: A girl brings her boyfriend home for the first time. Her father uses the opportunity to take him aside for a few words. *"I hope you are going to respect my daughter. I want her to know the difference between right and wrong!"*

The boy responds: *"I presume that you've brought her up to know what's right, Sir."* To this the father replies: *"I certainly have". "Good" replies the boy, "I'll take care of the other side then!"*

PPS: *"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which need not be done at all".*

Peter Drucker, American management consultant, educator and author (1909-2005)