

## GOATS FOR CHEMICAL FREE WEED CONTROL

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### BACKGROUND

Goats are more flexible, adaptable and selective feeders than sheep. Their ability to browse allows them to use a wider variety of plants than sheep and cattle.

Weeds directly cost landowners \$100 million annually by a) reducing pasture growth and animal health b) preventing large areas of land being grazed c) contaminating wool, skins and meat d) harbouring vermin, pests and diseases e) increasing labour and chemical costs

Society demands sustainable chemical free methods of weed control to protect farmers health and ensure chemical free produce.

### METHODS

On-farm demonstrations and experiments have been conducted in south eastern Australia (Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales) to evaluate the effect of using goats to control

Blackberries (*Rubus* spp)  
 Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)  
 Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)  
 Thistles (various spp)  
 Tussocks (*Nasella trichotoma*)  
 Briars (*Rosa rubiginosa*)

Goats have been grazed adjacent to water supply reservoirs and in public and private forests. The nutritive value of weeds has also been evaluated.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Goats have proven to be effective, reliable and cheap weed control agents (Holst 1980, Harradine and Jones 1985, McGregor et al. 1990). Chemical use to control these weeds has been eliminated.

Goats prevent many weeds from setting seeds by eating the flowers.

Weed infested land has been returned to pasture and controlled grazing. Access has been provided to previously inaccessible areas and reduced costs of forestry programs (Browne 1990). By removing weed infested areas, harbours for rabbits and foxes have been eliminated.

Introduced weeds had high nutritive value (McGregor 1992) making these weeds suitable for pregnant, lactating and growing goats. Heavily grazed weeds were useful for drought feeding.

Goats can be incorporated into wool and beef farming systems for pasture improvement and to control bush and weed invasion.

### References

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