

Climate Smart Pilots Project supports a destocking drought module to be included in the online tool, farmingforecaster.com.au

The Farming Forecaster application (farmingforecaster.com.au), a pasture and livestock management tool has added capability now to strengthen producers' preparedness for drought. The online tool developed by a partnership of farming groups: Tablelands Farming Systems, Monaro Farming Systems and Bookham Agriculture Bureau, the Southeast Local Land Services and the CSIRO's Agriculture and Food is expanding further thanks to funding from the Department of Primary Industries, [Climate Smart Pilots](#) Project. The Farming Forecaster is the first of its kind to combine weather, soil moisture, pasture production and livestock performance information at farmers' fingertips allowing them to make timely and informed decisions during increasingly volatile and variable conditions.

This project is building on the very successful development and launch of Farming Forecaster back in 2020. The GrassGro model which is being used to provide pasture forecasting data to the Farming Forecaster website, will have the capacity to deal with destocking into drought containments/lots during dry times or drought.

Over the years, grazing producers have recognised the multitude of benefits of using drought containment areas (droughtlots) to destock and completely rest paddocks during drought, a strategy that results in improved pasture recovery, faster response to rainfall, better management of ground cover, protection of topsoil, as well as improved management of stock and improved mental health of producers because they are not having to drive into bare paddocks every day to feed stock.

The destocking drought module will be a valuable tool in drought preparedness and will give producers an improved understanding of timely drought decision making and the consequences for groundcover and pasture availability. Setting up and using drought containment areas (droughtlots) has become a critical part of the landscape with many producers using this strategy as part of managing pastures and stock during drought. The key improvements to the forecasts in Farming Forecaster are the development of new rules that account for destocking. This addition to the pasture-livestock models will allow comparisons between destocking into droughtlots with supplementary feeding versus leaving stock in the paddock with supplementary feeding.

Early decision making is critical during dry and times of drought, the longer you leave it, the less choices you have. The Farming Forecaster website currently provides producers with a tool to assist in making timely and informed decisions about pasture growth rates and stock management. The destocking drought module will be an important addition to farmingforecaster.com.au as it will provide measured data around destocking paddocks into droughtlots and provide producers with forecasts of how the use of droughtlots might affect pasture availability and ground cover. It will help to demonstrate the value of protecting the soil and maintaining groundcover during periods that can potentially have long-term damage on farm's natural capital. Previous experience/research has shown that resting pasture may increase demand for supplementary feeding in the short-term but enable faster recovery and improved profitability in the longer term.

One of the most important issues for any farm business emerging from drought is the need to restore the business to optimum productivity and profitability as quickly as possible, as well as looking after the natural resource by being better prepared to cope with drought. Training will be made available on how the module improves Farming Forecaster with its use of scientific data to compare pasture outlooks and pasture availability in drought. The Farming Forecaster tool now has the capability to get producers on the front foot when it comes to drought and help build resilient ecosystems that will recover from drought quickly.

This destocking drought module is being produced as part of Climate Smart Pilots and the NSW Primary Industries Climate Change Research Strategy backed by the NSW Climate Change Fund.



Department of
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The project is managed by a consortium made up of Monaro Farming Systems, Tablelands Farming Systems, Bookham Ag Bureau, SE Local Land Services with funding provided by the Australian Government's NLP Program. Contact Andrea Mitchell, Project Officer andreangf@monarofs.com.au or visit <https://farmingforecaster.com.au> if you would like to become involved.



The addition of the new drought lot graph to farmingforecaster.com will further assist producers and land managers to make timely decisions when dealing with drought

