

# Lucyvale Dung Beetle Project

## Dung Beetle Project

by Sharon Roberts

Lucyvale is a geographically isolated valley in the mountains of north east Victoria, in the Upper Murray region and is populated by beef cattle farmers. Most properties start in the valley floor beside Cudgewa Creek and sweep up into rugged timbered ridges, where views of the snow-capped Kosciusko Range can be admired on crisp, clear winter days. Mustering these steep, rocky hillsides on horseback is one of the highlights of being a cattle producer, and many farmers in the valley are horse owners.

December 2005 and January 2006 saw unprecedented dung beetle activity in the entire Upper Murray region. Beetles zoomed in to slurp and bury manure as soon as it hit the ground. Not even dog droppings were safe. They literally got up, rumbled amongst the beetles, then dived underground.

The question being asked now is "Was this extreme dung beetle activity caused by seasonal conditions or management practice?"

Last year, the Lucyvale Better Beef Group hosted a forum run by Dr. John Feehan, a former CSIRO scientist with 30 years experience in the original dung beetle release project. The single, most important fact the group learned, was to avoid drenching animals with any product that kills the young adult beetles during the 10 day period when they first emerge from their underground tunnels.

If their first meal is a toxic one, they die without procreating!

Dr. Feehan's observations lead him to believe that dung beetles are confused by something like an artificial pheromone (odour) given off by chemical compounds in drench contaminated manure, which strongly attracts the beetles ..... like moths to a flame.

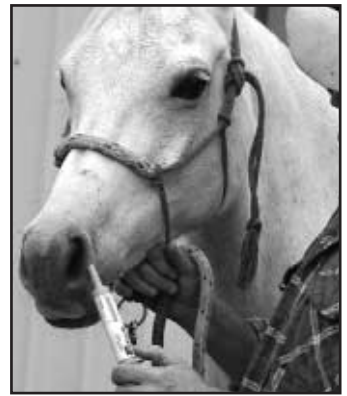
Could the extreme beetle activity be a result of farmers being more cautious with the timing of their drenching? Or was it related to the weather pattern?

One farmer from another region, who had attended the group's forum

a couple of years ago, had bought a breeding colony of winter-active dung beetles and introduced them to his pasture. Although still able to find evidence of these beetles, he was disappointed at their scarcity and felt that if he had the co-operation of his neighbours regarding a drenching regime, his colony would be better established.

The Lucyvale Valley is isolated from other farming districts by timbered mountains and they quickly realised they had the ideal opportunity to establish new species of dung beetles on their farms if the whole community was 'in it together'. Every one would benefit, and the entire community was prepared to be involved and learn how to care for their new beetle colonies.

After the Group learned about the benefits of dung beetles, it became obvious to them that the optimum scenario would be to have year round burial of dung. As different species of these dung beetles are active for six to eight weeks per



Avoid drenching or worming animals during the 10 day period when the dung beetles first emerge from their underground tunnels.

year, depending on seasonal variations, Dr. Feehan has now offered to climate match 10 new species for the area and make them available for purchase by the landholders in the valley.

The Better Beef Group applied for and received a National Landcare Program grant to help it achieve this. Through this series of articles, they will share their findings with Hoofbeats readers to enable others to learn how to care for dung beetles and to establish new colonies. 🌱

## PVC Fencing - a new alternative

To increase your fencing options, a new type of fencing has recently become available in Australia from Paramount PVC Fencing.

If you asked your timber or steel fencing erector for a 50 year warranty, you may find the answer will be "no". Timber fencing carries with it many disadvantages, it may rot, split or crack and can become infested with termites, ants and other pests. Upkeep is another negative factor, with most timber fencing requiring painting or sealing at least every five years.

Yet the PVC fencing manufacturers are offering a 50 year Lifetime Warranty as this fencing is impervious to all of these problems and is unaffected by termites or weather.

While the initial cost of a PVC fence may be slightly higher, it will continue to look great well after your wooden fence has been replaced. In fact, in 50 years, you will likely have replaced your wooden fence four or more times over, showing how cost effective PVC can be.

### Weather tested:

This fencing is weather tested - UV stabilised, ambient heat stabilised and cold climate tested which means it won't snap in freezing conditions, or melt, warp or bend in extreme heat!

It is also mould and mildew resistant, non organic and non porous.

### Environmental benefits:

Unlike many timber products, this PVC product is non-toxic to children and inoffensive to humans or animals. It does not leach noxious elements into the soil or water system and is recyclable and reusable, making it very eco-friendly. PVC fencing also has very good structural properties - unlike timber fencing, and once it is in place, that's where it will stay - maintenance free!!

Timber, while a popular and attractive option selected by many horse property owners, has to be logged from somewhere, maintained/painted once erected and invariably, is replaced every 15 years or so due to termite infestation, rotting etc.

### Ignition or fire:

In Australia, the question most often asked about fencing is, will it withstand fire? The PVC used for this fencing does not release enough heat to support its own combustion - when the source of the flame is removed or extinguished, rigid PVC can no longer burn and has very low flame spreading properties. It will not ignite without the presence of other already burning organic materials like wood, fabric or rubber. Rigid PVC's ignition temperature (736°F) is nearly



An alternative to traditional fencing products, PVC stays looking good for longer, with no maintenance required.

twice the ignition point of Pine, perhaps the most commonly used timber fencing product. PVC has comparatively low smoke volumes and toxicity, which is comparable to that released by other organic material. Carbon monoxide generated is often far less than that from other materials.

Perhaps the best thing about PVC fencing is how it looks - neat, clean and classy. Scratches are not apparent and the product can be sanded and buffed if necessary, It contains non chalking UV inhibitors

to protect the fence and help retain shine.

A further advantage is the safety factor for your animals, which is due to its strength and durability.

Whatever building material you decide to use for your horse establishment, make sure your decision is made with your property and specific needs in mind, is based on correct information and takes into account maintenance and replacement costs. See the ad on page 48 for further details. 🌱