

Drought-hardy shrub is being adopted across Australia to support farmers ahead of dry times

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Hayley discovered that Anameka Saltbush is more palatable for sheep. Credit: Damien Smith Photography

On Australia's desert plains in the west, Old Man Saltbush (*Atriplex*

nummularia), a salt-loving, native shrub, thrives and is often the only vegetation in sight.

But it's in the paddock where the devouring of this humble shrub is most important. Saltbush's drought-tolerant qualities make it the ideal fodder for [sheep](#) and cattle to graze on during feed gaps when there's little else available.

Recognizing an opportunity to improve shrub systems, we worked with partners in government and industry to select and develop a special variety for farmers to use as a supplementary feed. It's called Anameka Saltbush (Anameka).

It's preferred by sheep, has a higher nutritional value than standard saltbushes, and can help regenerate the land. It also thrives on soils that are challenging to grow crops.

A taste for saltbush

Anameka was selected from 60,000 saltbush plants collected from across Australia, each with different qualities.

In coming up with the ideal saltbush to improve farm profit, our team was keen to find a higher energy variety that sheep and cattle loved eating.

Our agricultural scientist, Dr. Hayley Norman, said sheep are surprisingly fussy eaters.

"We followed their lead by observing which plants the sheep preferred in the paddock," Hayley said.

"We found stark differences between shrub varieties with some picked

bare while others were left untouched.

"Season after season, the sheep kept going back to the same plants. Our analysis found these to have higher energy values, ticking the box for what we were looking for."

Anameka Saltbush has 20% higher energy than other plants assessed. It contains high levels of crude protein, sulfur, minerals and Vitamin E. It also offers higher feeding value and profitability when compared to standard saltbushes.

Branching out east to support farmers

About 6 million Anameka shrubs have been planted to date, mostly in WA to utilize land impacted by dryland salinity.

And now they're heading east, with hundreds of thousands of Anameka Saltbush currently being planted in new regions across Australia's southeast.

Our Drought Resilience Mission is driving the adoption of the shrub to support farmers and lower the impacts of droughts.

Hayley said modeling and farmer feedback indicates the productivity benefits are greatest during dry years or particular seasons.

"Livestock producers face annual feed gaps over summer and autumn when there is low rainfall and this period can be extended or exacerbated during a drought," Hayley said.

"Farmers often need feed supplements to meet energy, protein, vitamin and mineral requirements during this time. Planting Anameka offers farmers a long-term solution to meet feed gaps, as they can grow for

over 20 years if managed well."

Our research in WA has found Anameka offers 20% higher economic returns compared to standard saltbushes, particularly in relatively dry years. This includes greater wool and meat production, and reduced supplementary feed.

Shelter and fodder on the plains

Marcus Hooke, a merino sheep farmer in Boooroban, southern New South Wales, is hoping to capture some of these benefits.

This winter, he is doubling the number of Anameka in his paddocks with lamb survivability a key driver.

"It's early days but we believe the benefits of Saltbush will be long-term," Mr. Hooke said.

"For us the benefits will be two-sided in providing crucial shelter to lambs to improve their survivability out on the plains during colder months, and for [feed](#) to provide energy during dry seasons."

Marcus is one of 325 farmers who have adopted Anameka Saltbush across Australia.

Sharing tips for success

A key aspect is ensuring farmers have the tools they need to realize long term benefits.

"We're running a series of field days to share tips and knowledge with

[farmers](#) in eastern Australia so they can effectively grow Anameka and make the most of it," Hayley said.

"Success will see Anameka Saltbush adopted more widely across the country."

Provided by CSIRO

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