

Wonders of water 'bugs'

By NEIL LYON

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WITH water now in plentiful supply after years of drought, landholders have the chance to ensure their troughs, dams and water storages remain clean and fresh with an eco-friendly product, Waterbac.

Developed in Australia 10 years ago by Agresearch's Andrew Kennett, Toowoomba, Waterbac is based on a unique blend of *Bacillus subtilis* microbes that digest excess nutrients, organic matter and noxious microbes in the water.

Mr Kennett said it was based on a natural treatment that had its origins in an age-old technique where farmers would toss an old bale of hay or cut-grass swath into their water holes and dams to clean them up.

"The *Bacillus subtilis* microbes are naturally occurring in some soil types so they would feed on the hay or cut-grass swath that was lying on the ground," he said. "When the hay or cut grass went into the water, the microbes would start further feeding on the nutrient, organic matter and water pathogens which can contribute to green, smelly water, thereby resulting in cleaner water in days.

"Some farmers to this day still practise this method, but it is hit and miss and they have the straw to clean up.

"The difference with Waterbac is we use a unique concentrated culture of the microbes in a carbon base without the mess to clean up."

Mr Kennett said the product came in pack sizes from 50 grams to 10 kilograms in water-soluble sachets, with comprehensive use details on the label.

The domestic line of 50g, 100g and 200g containers is designed for fish tanks and ponds, while the commercial range of 250g, 1kg, 2.5kg, 6kg and 10kg packs is for use by farmers, councils and water authorities.

A treatment starts with an initial dose that works like a shock treatment and takes a few days to a week to clear the surface water, depending on water conditions. This should be followed by maintenance doses, depending on how much water replenishment has happened through fresh water coming into troughs and run-off into dams diluting the initial dose, and possibly adding more nutrient and organic matter.

Mr Kennett said Waterbac would take



Fair Ace Square Meaters Stud principal Jeff Weil and Agresearch's Andrew Kennett at a trough treated with Waterbac on Mr Weil's Ravensbourne farm.

ACCESS to a natural, microbial-based water-cleaning agent has given Ravensbourne cattle producer, Jeff Weil, a way to keep his troughs clean without compromising his principles of running a chemical-free enterprise.

Mr Weil has applied Waterbac to one of the water systems on his farm where it has proved particularly effective at dealing with an algal problem in an old concrete trough.

"Being lined with concrete, it is quite conducive to having algae grow on the concrete. It eventually spread completely over the trough," he said.

"I have given it two doses of Waterbac and it has made a big difference.

"All the algae along the sides is disappearing and there is none on the surface.

"Cattle don't like drinking dirty water any more than humans like drinking dirty water."

Mr Weil said he was very keen to use natural techniques to keep the water clean for the herd of Square Meater cattle he runs at his Fair Ace Square Meaters Stud.

"I am trying to produce beef that is completely chemical free," he said.

"If we are not using chemicals on our pastures and are not using fertilisers, we don't want to use chemicals to purify water."

Mr Weil is in the process of developing an intensive cell-grazing system that requires a major fencing project and the installation of key watering points.

"I am setting up a system where the cattle eat out an area completely in a day and we move them to another area the very next day," he said.

"A part of the holistic farming approach is that you take the water to your cattle.

"That's why we are fencing around our creeks and dams and bringing water to the cattle through troughs.

"In doing so we have to come up with a system that makes sure the water remains as clear as possible for the cattle.

Mr Weil said he was passionate about running Square Meater cattle because they were very quiet and matured very early.

"You can get a young steer around 350 kilograms in weight at the age of 12 months," he said.

"You have a much better turnover of cattle.

"Because they are not as large as some of the bigger breeds, they are easier on your pastures and you can produce more beef per acre."

Management key to great beef

MAINTAINING a profitable red-meat industry comes down to producing beef of a consistent eating quality that encourages consumers to want more.

The preparation of livestock for slaughter, involving all aspects of animal management such as genetic selection, animal-health provision, and handling, feeding and finishing, are critical links in the eating quality chain.

All beef producers should be mindful of how these stock-management systems, from the moment the calf hits the ground to the time it leaves the farm gate, have the potential to maximise eating quality if performed well.

If animals are handled poorly, it may not only reflect negatively on beef

producers' bottom lines, but may also reflect negatively on the whole industry.

Animal health, welfare and biosecurity are important at all stages of the livestock production chain.

Each can have potentially adverse impacts on productivity if managed poorly and because producers have a duty of care to their livestock.

Producers must consider the five freedoms for animals and the need to incorporate these into property management plans and procedures:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst.
- Freedom from discomfort.
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease.
- Freedom to express normal behaviour.
- Freedom from fear and distress.

Attention to health, welfare and biosecurity is easier during good seasons like our state is currently experiencing, but is equally important during poor seasons or during unforeseen circumstances like floods, drought, fires and other adverse events.

Queensland Country Life is once again proud to present its annual 'Stock Management' feature to help producers make decisions in relation to how they manage their animals.

Our next livestock feature is 'Top Yards', profiling the very latest in cattle yard design.

The 'Top Yards' feature will be published on May 26. Inquiries to Rachel Smith on (07) 3826 8256 or email rachel.smith@ruralpress.com

longer to work in extreme water conditions, including very dirty water or water with high pH levels.

"As the product is a natural living microbe, attention must be given to any biocide applied to the water that kills bacteria, such as copper, chlorine or other pesticides," he said. "If in doubt, either get

a water test done, or flush out the water storage and refill and start the treatment process with less Waterbac required."

Mr Kennett said great care should be taken if chemical treatments had been used in farm water storages, including copper sulphate which was no longer recommended due to potential toxic and

residue withholding issues.

With fish tanks and ponds and some commercial water-treatment facilities that use UV lights as part of the filtration process, these need to be turned off, as UV kills the microbes.

● Waterbac is now available from Landmark stores across Australia. Phone 1800 888 642.

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