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## **NEW HIGH ENERGY PASTURE GOES ON TRIAL**

The Brumby Government has announced the first Australian field trials of high-energy pasture grasses are set to start in Victoria soon.

Minister for Innovation Gavin Jennings and Minister for Agriculture Joe Helper made the announcement today to coincide with Ausbiotech 2008 which is underway in Melbourne.

“These new grasses have a reduced non-digestible content which, depending on the field trials, could mean farmers will be able to reduce the amount of feed they require for their stock,” Mr Jennings said.

“This would be a critical breakthrough for dairy, beef and sheep industries which have less pasture available for stock because of climate change and the prolonged drought.”

Mr Helper said the trials will focus on pasture based on perennial ryegrass and tall fescue that have been developed by Victorian scientists at the Department of Primary Industries.

“The Federal Gene Technology Regulator has granted a licence to plant up to 500 GM lines of these pasture varieties as part of a small field trial to be undertaken at the DPI Hamilton site.”

“The trials are for proof-of-concept research and not for commercial release. But this research may give farmers access to new pasture plant genetics with improved quality and energy content for livestock production.

“The development and adoption of new pasture plant genetics with increased nutritive value could lead to increased on-farm productivity, and may also help reduce the amount of feed farmers need to buy-in when they have feed shortages.

These trials are the latest in a series of research breakthroughs from the DPI that are providing on-the-ground benefits and helping ensure Victorian farmers remain competitive in both domestic and international markets.

DPI Biosciences Research Division Executive Director Professor German Spangenberg said the new technologies allowed for a targeted modification of lignin and fructan production in perennial ryegrass and tall fescue.

“Lignin provides the water proofing of fibrous parts of pasture that can’t be easily digested by livestock and therefore can’t be converted to energy for grazing animals. Fructans are soluble carbohydrates that provide a readily available energy source to livestock,” Prof Spangenberg said.

“By modifying lignification and enhancing fructan production in these plants, the herbage nutritive value is increased and stock can gain more energy from less pasture.

“Laboratory and glasshouse trials have been carried out on the pastures by the research team working within the Molecular Plant Breeding Cooperative Research Centre.

“The experimental GM grasses to be tested will not be used for animal feed.”

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