

Rethinking African Lovegrass: Transforming an “Unstoppable” Species Through Better Management

Pioneering research and collaborative field trials guide national strategies for invasive grass control and ecosystem recovery

African Lovegrass (ALG) is a highly invasive species that threatens agricultural productivity and biodiversity by reducing pasture quality and hindering grazing. Farmers like Vivian Mawhinney faced severe risks to their livelihood, describing ALG as so aggressive that “you end up with no farm at the end”.

Professor Jennifer Firn’s pioneering research, including her PhD work, fundamentally reframed the problem. Her crucial insight showed that ALG is often a symptom of management regimes that favour stress-tolerant grasses, rather than being an unconquerable species. This understanding directed management strategies towards achieving ecosystem balance.

Professor Firn, along with her students and colleagues, developed a collaborative, farmer-driven approach, using field trials on properties in regions like the Bega Valley, a key dairy-producing area, to test locally generated hypotheses. Practical and cost-effective strategies emerged, including applying small quantities of fertiliser to enhance ALG palatability, which allows native pastures to recover. Bega Valley farmers successfully adopted cost-effective methods, such as the roller-wiper technique for managing lighter infestations, and reported significant improvements in controlling ALG. The outcomes benefited multiple sectors, including farmers, the dairy and beef industries, and conservation managers.



Impact highlights

- Research reframed African Lovegrass as a symptom of management regimes, rather than an unconquerable species
- The findings informed practical and cost-effective solutions, such as using the roller-wiper technique for lighter infestations
- The research catalysed wider community adoption through field days, evidenced by more than 60 people attending a session hosted by a participating farmer
- The findings informed national invasive grass management plans and policy integration

