



Forage for Emus

According to the *Emu Farmer's Handbook*, emus need between 15 to 20 pounds of forage per day, if no supplemental feed is used. In the wild, emus exist on forage. Forage in the wild would include small animals like mice, lizards, snakes in addition to any plant material and insects.

Studies in Australia and New Zealand indicate that feed consumption can be cut in half, if the right kinds of forage are used. Chicory, clover, kale, rape, timothy, alfalfa and other grasses have been used with varying degrees of success. In any grow out pen the vegetation will quickly be depleted. Careful management and rotation of the birds to new pastures is necessary.

Rotational Grazing

Under rotational grazing one section of pasture is used while the remainder rests. The pasture is divided into sections (paddocks) and the emu are moved from one paddock to another.

- **Advantages:** A permanent pasture mix can be utilized, even manure distribution means less need for fertilizers and pesticides along with a decrease in waste material runoff. Increase in amount of forage harvested over continuous grazing can be as much as 2,000 pounds per acre.
- **Disadvantages:** More intensive management needed, rotations must be timed to the growth stage of the forage. Depending on how intensive the rotational grazing is done, the farmer must have knowledge of forage types, growth rates, livestock nutritional needs, proper soil management techniques Added expense of additional fencing, cost of labor and time in moving the livestock. (see herding emus)

Continual Grazing

Using this method, you seed the pasture, allow the grasses to reach 6 to 9 inches and release the emu into the pen. They stay in the pen until processed.

- **Advantages:** Requires less pasture management than rotational grazing and is usually cheaper to implement.
- **Disadvantages:** Care must be taken to prevent overgrazing. Lower yields because forage is not allowed "rest" between grazing.

Continual Grazing with Feed Supplementation

At Red Oak Farm we utilize a permanent pasture mix that includes Timothy, clover, millet and other grasses suitable for our area. This is sowed in breeder pens as well as the grow out pens. We

mow weekly and the birds eat what we mow before they eat their feed. We do not rotate pastures but find that we are able to reduce feed consumption by 1/3 during the summer months.

Other things to consider:

- emus need access to **fresh clean water**
- if pasture includes **alfalfa, blister beetles**, which are attracted to the blooms, may be ingested by the emus. The **blister beetles produce a chemical known as cantharidin** which causes severe pain and, in the case of emu chicks, death. Mowing the pasture regularly will combat this.
- **some weeds, such as pigweed, can kill an emu chick.**