



Focus Farm Summaries

In 2009 the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board, with funding from Woolworths, joined with SheepConnect SA to establish 5 focus farms across Eyre Peninsula.

Over the past two years land managers have focused on the key areas of;

- Risk management and seasonal strategies
- Key profit drivers, cost of production and benchmarking
- Potential to change or improve infrastructure and pasture production.

This Newsletter features two of the Focus Farms and the March edition will feature the remaining three.

In 2011, the EP Woolworths SheepConnect project will continue to expand demonstrations and trials with existing properties and establish a new focus farm at Buckleboo.

Sheep > Less Hassle - More Profit Farmer Forums

Four forums will be held across Eyre Peninsula in late February and early March (see back page for more details).

Dealing with seasonal variability and taking the hassle out of working with sheep using labour saving devices will be two topics key note speaker Bob Hall will address at the forums.

Bob is a principle partner in JRL Hall and Co based at Darkan, WA. Together, with three business partners they are consultants to 80 owner-occupied farms, who together run over 1 million sheep, predominantly merino self replacing flocks with 40% mated to prime lamb sires.

Labour efficiencies have become paramount to his clients. The development of modern handling facilities, shearing sheds and sheep machinery has aligned with farming systems enabling typical family farms to run 15-20,000 DSE along with the cropping program.

Livestock > Taking the pressure off cropping

Focus Farm Facts

Land Managers: *Damien and Eileen Lynch*

Location: *Poochera*

Property: *'Craday Pastoral'*

Average annual rainfall: *300 mm*

Soils: *Predominantly grey loams*

Enterprises: *cropping (wheat and barley - 1600 ha) and sheep (900 Merino and Dohne ewes - producing wool and meat)*

The Lynch family have been farming on Eyre Peninsula for three generations. As a result of a series of dry years (2005-08) Damien has been implementing some major changes to improve his business and property. This has included:

- Fencing to land class
- Introduction of Dohnes
- Controlling of wards weed
- Use of Zn fertiliser
- Use of electric fencing and
- Improved watering systems.

Damien was inspired to continue improving his business following a bus trip to visit Neil Sleep's property at Peterborough in 2008, where he saw 'a different way of doing things'.

The trip also allowed the opportunity to interact with other farmers and discuss common issues and see how others were dealing with them.

Damien used to crop 2,200 hectares but has reduced this to 1,600 hectares. Introducing more sheep, together with good livestock prices has taken the pressure off cropping and gives greater flexibility. Like most properties in the region paddock size and watering points have been major issues to address.



Damien and Eileen Lynch with the Rappa™ mounted on a two wheeled trailer.

Damien had always used permanent fencing but with capital costs increasing and the management of smaller grazing sections beginning to create problems with frequent stock movements, he decided to investigate the suitability of temporary electric fencing.

Through the Woolworths and SheepConnect project Damien has been trialling electric fencing. Temporary electric fencing has increased paddock flexibility. Electric fencing was an attractive option for Damien, particularly as it allowed paddocks to be quickly divided and stock to be moved regularly on to fresh feed without having to be shifted over long distances. While he had no prior experience with electric fencing the project provided a great opportunity to give it a trial run.

Paddock subdivision

He first used electric fencing in November 2008 to graze 50 ha of standing barley and oats (un-reapt). The paddock was grazed in 6 blocks of approximately 8-9 ha each, with stock being moved onto new feed every eight to ten days. A single 3 line fence was erected and was shifted 5 times creating the six grazing sections. The total area provided 47 days of grazing for 360 crossbred lambs with a stocking pressure of 60 DSE/ha.

The fence consisted of 1 km long runs of two electric wires and one earth wire, supported by steel "tread-ins" spaced 15 m apart. The fence was later changed to only two electric wires and no earth wire without any problems. Stock water was provided in a 600 litre poly dish trough, which required cleaning out every 2 to 3 days.

Temporary electric fencing made easy

Damien did not have a 4 wheel motor bike and so he built a two-wheeled trailer to assist with the rollout and shifting of fence lines. It takes two people about one hour to take down and re-erect a 600-700 m length, with all the equipment required now fitted onto his vehicle-towed fencing cart. Damien is very happy with the Rappa™ system and even made his own reels to reduce the costs.

Feed utilisation

By using the temporary electric fencing, Damien is now aware of how much feed has been wasted in previous years through stock trampling and selective grazing in bigger paddocks. His sheep now graze to within 1 m of the fence lines and, provided there is adequate feed retained within the paddock, they do not put pressure on the electric fence. However, kangaroos and emus can occasionally flatten fences as two wires can be difficult for them to see.

Based on his past experience with using these temporary fences, Damien now intends to increase his breeding ewe numbers from 900 to around 1200. He is confident in the fact that his property will now provide sufficient feed to be able to carry that number throughout the year.

Portable watering system

The issue of providing adequate clean water for stock in these smaller paddocks was addressed by making a portable watering system. A 9,000 litre tank has been mounted on a 4 wheel trailer. A poly trough at the rear can be easily emptied and lifted to allow movement of the system between paddocks.



Damien's portable water truck provides clean water for stock.

LESSONS LEARNT

Using temporary electric fencing to graze cereals provides management flexibility depending on the season and allows maximum grazing days to be achieved.

Cereals can either be grazed green and then harvested, cut for hay or grazed as a standing crop.

Simple strategies to provide adequate stock water have aided in increasing pasture utilisation and the ability to graze smaller paddocks.

Maximising Sheep Potential on Cowell Flats

Focus Farm Facts

Land Manager: *Scott Williams*

Location: *Elbow Hill 10 km south of Cowell*

Average Annual Rainfall: *325 mm*

Soils: *Grey calcareous sandy loam to red sandy loam in hills country (630 ha) and red sodic sandy loam to sandy clay loam on Cowell Flats (2,000 ha)*

Enterprises: *Cropping (wheat and barley - 1,000 ha) and sheep (1,800 Merino ewes) for wool and meat.*

The Cowell Flats have challenged land managers in poor seasons to maintain stock numbers, stock condition and soil cover with the limitations of financial constraints. Good quality pasture regeneration is largely non-existent on these "Cowell Flats" and mainly consists of barley grass, ice plant, onion weed, blanket weed, turnip and warden weed in these poorer seasons.

Scott Williams has farmed the Cowell Flats for many years. In seeking some answers to manage his sheep and cropping enterprise more sustainably he became involved with the SheepConnect Project. Using Rural Solutions SA Consultants as a sounding board it was identified that key management actions needed to focus on;

- Grazing management
- Understanding feed available
- Livestock demands and requirements
- Maintaining ground cover.

A key grazing management problem was wastage of crops and pastures by stock trampling. A strategy of intensively grazing paddocks was a potential solution. In 2009 Scott instigated a demonstration which involved subdividing paddocks with temporary electric fences, installing a portable water system and rotationally grazing sheep on;

- Self generating failed oat crop in spring
- Failed wheat crop over summer.

Results showed that there was better utilisation of low Dry Matter (DM) on offer and available grazing days were extended whilst managing ground cover.

"After positive results from the 2009 demonstration, Scott recognised that there were increased potential and opportunities with his sheep enterprise. Scott shifted his focus to concentrate more on stock feed management and opportunistic cropping on the Cowell Flats and concentrate his cropping enterprise on the better soils"

In 2010, barley, the traditional crop grown in this area, was compared with two alternative cereals to assess how they may fit in this low rainfall environment.

Four sites were direct drilled using a conventional air seeder fitted with Lucerne points on 31 May following 25 mm of rain. There was no pre or post-weed control undertaken and 40 kg/ha DAP was applied at seeding. Dry matter (DM) cuts were taken at intervals during the season to determine possible grazing days and growth rates of the varieties.

	Area	Variety sowing rate	Aug 16th DM	Aug 30th DM
Paddock 1	3 ha	25 kg/ha cereal rye @ \$10/ha	1,300 kg/ha	1,800 kg/ha
Paddock 2	3.6 ha	50 kg/ha triticale @ \$6.50/ha 3 kg/ha canola @ \$35/ha	1,400 kg/ha	2,100 kg/ha
Paddock 3	16 ha	40 kg/ha Barque barley @ \$5/ha	1,000 kg/ha	2,700 kg/ha
Paddock 4	17 ha	50 kg/ha triticale @ \$6.50/ha 3 kg/ha canola @ \$35/ha	1,400 kg/ha	2,100 kg/ha

The early break and favourable growing season resulted in ample early sheep feed across the property. Grazing of the trial paddocks occurred over a 4 week period in Sept/Oct with a high grazing pressure of up to 100 DSE/ha on cereal rye (paddock 1) and the triticale/canola (paddock 2).

Total DSE grazing days were much higher in the triticale/canola than the cereal rye, however, this may have been due to a much higher barley grass infestation in the cereal rye paddock.

	Production results
Paddock 1	1260 DSE grazing days/ha
Paddock 2	2300 DSE grazing days/ha
Paddock 3 - barley	2.5 t/ha plus grazing of stubble
Paddock 4 - hay	4.5 t/ha plus grazing of regrowth



High yielding triticale / canola hay at Scott William's property.



The barley was harvested and valued at gross margin of \$517/ha with grain valued at \$230/t (feed). Triticale/canola cut for hay returned gross margin of \$462/ha with hay valued at \$150/t.

Both paddocks still had an estimated summer grazing value left with the triticale regrowth @ 2200 kg/ha DM and barley stubble @ 3400 kg/ha DM.

LESSONS LEARNT

Scott has been encouraged by this trial, seeing the advantages of sowing paddock feed at the earliest opportunity with only minimal inputs. It has shown that it can yield benefits on the Cowell Flats. Despite the 2010 season Scott is confident that in a different lower rainfall year the opportunities still exist.

The use of electric fencing allows poorer crop performing areas to be fenced off for grazing.

The flexibility to shift a fence where it is required is extremely valuable when it comes to farming in this environment with the soil constraints and changing seasonal conditions.

Eyre Peninsula Grain and Graze 2 - What is it about?

The aim of this project is to develop and promote the adoption of production practices in mixed farming systems on Eyre Peninsula (EP) that will improve whole farm profitability and sustainability and increase the efficient use of water and nutrients.

This will be achieved by assisting farmers with decision making skills, identifying profit drivers, and providing tools such as farm practice 'balance sheets' to determine the best practice for their farming systems. Participating in farmer forums will also enable farmers to learn from the experiences of each other and be better equipped to make more informed decisions.

What's in store for 2011?

Our new Grain and Graze Research Officer, Jessica Crettenden, started work at Minnipa Ag Centre in January 2011. Jessica grew up on a farm just north of Lock, and so has an understanding of low rainfall farming systems on Eyre Peninsula. Roy Latta will provide support to the research component of the project.

Research will focus on getting the most from grazing cereals; finding more suitable perennial species for EP and determining how we can establish these species more easily and cheaply; and clarifying the impact of livestock on soil health in both low input and high input systems.

In 2011, we will escalate extension efforts with the farmer forums in conjunction with SheepConnect SA. Grain and Graze 2 will be officially launched at these forums.

Other events include an Enrich forum to be held on 5 th April at Minnipa Agricultural Centre, looking at the grazing perennial shrub trials on EP and discussing the next steps in trying to reduce the autumn feed gap.

For more information please contact Naomi Scholz (Project Coordinator) on 8680 6233.

Sheep > Less Hassle, More Profit Farmer Forums

Key Note Speaker - Bob Hall

- Dealing with seasonal variability - optimise profits from your sheep enterprise
- Are sheep more profitable than crop?
- Taking the hassle out of working with sheep - saving on labour

Also: How stock water can change grazing habits.
Launch of Grain and Graze 2.
SheepConnect SA update.
Focus farm presentations by local farmers

Monday February 28th

Cummins Bowling Club 1.00 pm - 5.00 pm

Tuesday March 1st

Buckleboo Sporting Complex 9.00 am - 1.00 pm

Wednesday March 2nd

Poochera Hotel 9.00 am - 1.00 pm

Thursday March 3rd

Penong Hotel 9.00 am - 1.00 pm

To register your interest and for further information on these free forums contact:

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