

# Positive experience in sowing a summer crop

**Location:** Tuckey, eastern Eyre Peninsula

**Operators:** Matt and Mignon Dunn

**Industry:** Grain and sheep production

**Issue:** Lack of soil cover and sheep feed in 2017 with a late start.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Out of season sheep feed in a poor season, reduced need for containment feeding.
- Establishing the summer crop will provide a two year grass free break for cropping.
- Summer crop reduces grazing pressure on rest of property and helped maintain cover.

## Background

Matthew and Mignon Dunn of Tuckey, eastern Eyre Peninsula, South Australia; used the poor season of 2017 to sow a summer crop of millet, providing soil cover and outstanding sheep feed.

The Dunn's had never sown millet before so there were several questions to be considered before outlaying cash in a poor season including: Would it work? Would it rain? What type of summer crop, what variety? Would the sheep like it? What chemicals or insecticides are needed? What seeding rate, fertiliser, soil temperature is best? Following the research Matt felt that the idea of sowing a summer crop in September had merit.

"The sandy paddock was to be sown to crop in 2107 but with little rain until mid July, grass weeds would be a problem if cropped and the sandy top soil was prone to erosion. I decided to leave it out of production however the bareness of this paddock was a concern" said Matt.

No spring feed grew on his property resulting in an overall lack of feed for his 1000 ewes.

"I could use this summer crop for a rotational advantage, giving me a two year break from grasses, by sowing vetch in 2018 and wheat in the third year," said Matt.



One hundred and twenty hectare paddock divided into four paddocks using a shuttle as the strainer.



Grazed millet in March 2018.



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## Project

Following a knock down spray in July, Matt planted 120 ha of Millet using a disc seeder with 7.5 kg/ha of Rebound Millet; 80 kg of 18:20 fertiliser on the 20 September 2017 after a rain event when the soil temp was 14 C.

The millet germinated on that rain event and stored soil moisture. Further rain fell in late November (37 mm) and mid-December (17 mm). Over January and February a further 42 mm fell with no rain in March.

The paddock was 'lightening fenced' into four 30 ha paddocks using six line cyclone and star droppers with a 1000 litre shuttles providing good strainer posts! This allowed Matt rotate the sheep through the four paddocks with increased stocking pressure on the millet.

Matt used an old truck with shuttles as a water tanker with a portable trough allowed him to shift the water point to each paddock with the sheep.

Lambs were introduced onto the millet first, however the feed was too rich and photosensitisation was observed so the lambs were removed.

Matt introduced 1000 pregnant ewes to the millet in November. He fed the ewes on 120 ha for 100 days shifting them every 10 days. Eight hundred of the ewes were grazing the millet on 20 March 2018. The sheep did not require any supplementary feeding for five months which saved time, money and worry about getting the rations right for pregnant ewes.

Matt moved the ewes to fresh stubble paddocks where the ewes, who were in excellent condition, were able to lamb down with 100% lambing across the flock.

"Using the millet gave me the option of a fresh stubble paddock to lamb down on which was trouble free" he said.

The millet senesced in early April and Vetch was direct drilled into the paddock in autumn. Matt is pleased with the germination even though there has been little rain.



Millet reshooting after grazing.



Millet growing well over summer.



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One thousand ewes grazed 120 Ha for 100 days.



Ewes grazing millet.

## The future

Matt commented "Sowing this feed was a game changer for me. This is a chance to set up a potential a previously grass weedy paddock for future cropping and best of all I did not have to put ewes in a containment feedlot, saving time and money".

He had excellent feed for his pregnant ewes when his usual spring medic pastures had no bulk feed and was able to provide cover on this 120 ha paddock, while still maintaining cover on the rest of his property.

Matt is looking at incorporating a summer grazing crop each year into his farming system.

"With a poor season again in 2018 and a late start I may drop off some poorer paddocks and if we get a wet winter I will sow even more millet. Several other farmers have indicated they will give it a go this year and has created a lot of interest," Matt commented.



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