Barossa Improved Grazing Group (BIGG)

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Lifting Stocking Rate to the Next Level using Strip Grazing

November 2012

Joe Keynes has been focusing on his stocking rates and livestock production for many years. Joe understands that stocking rate is one of the main profit driver of his livestock enterprise and the biggest driver of feed utilisation. The challenge Joe is faced with is how to increase the use of the pasture he already grows, and how far to push his stocking rate to remain profitable and sustainable.

Farm Facts

Producer: Joe Keynes
Location: Keyneton
Property Area: 6800 Ha
Enterprise: Wool/ Lamb/ Beef Cattle/ Cropping
Annual Rainfall: 500mm

Background

In 2012 Joe focused on strip grazing a 10ha second year perennial pasture of phalaris, cocksfoot and sub clover. The aim was to increase the amount of feed utilised and reduce the amount of feed wasted through stock trampling and spoiling.

In November 2012 at the end of a very poor growing season due to a lack of rain, the paddock was subdivided into three cells using temporary electric fencing.

The Rappa™ machine was used to roll out 800m of two wire temporary electric fence. The Rappa™ machine reduced the time required for erecting and dismantling the fence. However, Rappa reels only hold 500m, so when putting out these long stretches a number of reels were required and the wire needed to be joined using a figure eight knot.

To enable water access a laneway was established when the stock were grazing Cell 2. This was easily achieved by manually moving 50m of the tredins and wire.

A portable battery operated energiser was used to power the fence. Towards the end of each graze period some sheep were jumping through but this was as a result of the battery going flat and the volts dropping in the fence. Ideally over 5000 volts should be maintained in the fence.

The Rappa temporary electric fence machine

Grazing Management

In October the paddock was grazed with 300 six month old merino ewe lambs (Table 1). A lamb at 40kg and growing at 50 grams per day is rated at 1DSE. The paddock was grazed with larger mobs of sheep during the winter months however, as a result of the season, this was the final graze for the year.

The stock were moved according to food on offer. When the pasture reached 500kg DM/Ha, they were moved to the next cell. Ideally Joe's targets are much higher at 1000 kg/DM/ha, however in the dry season he needed to balance the production and pasture benefits. This was the final graze for the season which would allow the pasture to rest and recover over the summer months prior to the autumn break.

According to Joe the high stocking density of over 120DSE/ha with a short graze period of 5 days reduced feed wastage and improved ground cover compared with running a small mob in the paddock for 2-3 months which can results in tracking and camping.

It is critical, particularly in a dry season to maintain 70% groundcover at all times. This will reduce the risk of soil erosion in the form of wind and water events which can remove large amount of important top soil which will lead to decreased pasture performance and management issues.

Key Messages

- *High stocking densities results in an even graze, less selective grazing, more feed utilised and even ground cover levels*
- *At higher stocking densities monitoring pasture is critical as damage to pasture and soil can occur quickly compared to set stocking*
- *Have written plans including pasture and livestock condition targets in place to deal with seasonal variation*

Risk Management

Joe has managed high stocking rates on his property by monitoring pastures, understanding pasture growth and regularly condition scoring stock. Every year's pasture production is different and there are risks associated with running more stock and increasing pasture utilisation. Over stocking can cause poor pasture persistence, barer paddocks especially in late summer/autumn, and more supplementary feeding.

These risks can be managed by having a plan in place to cope with the seasonal variation. There are a number of options to deal with the poor season and one option Joe uses is a confinement feeding area to feed stock in rather than out in the paddock when his surface cover target of 70% is reached.

Table 1: Grazing Details for the Cells Grazing 300 Ewes Lambs (DSE 1)

Cell	Cell Size Ha	Date in	Date out	Days Graze	Before Grazing kg DM/ha	After Grazing kg DM/ha	Stocking Pressure DSE/ha	*Pasture Utilised kg DM/DSE/day
1	2	4 /11/12	9/11/12	5	1500	500	150	1.33
2	2.5	9/11/12	15/11/12	6	1500	500	120	1.38
3	5.5 #	15/11/12	26/11/12	11	1200	400	30#	1.48

*This is estimated and includes intake and wastage
Note the last graze was the whole paddock (10ha) as the fences were taken down so the stock could have access to water.

Further Information

Prior to grazing Cell 3 (Left) 1500kg DM/Ha and Cell 2 displaying 500kg DM/Ha

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