



Livestock - taking the pressure off cropping

SITE INFORMATION

Landholder: Damien and Eileen Lynch

Location: Poochera

Property Size: 1,200 ha

Annual Rainfall: 300 mm

Site Description

The Lynch family has been farming on Eyre Peninsula for three generations. After purchasing neighbouring properties and being involved in the EPNRM / Woolworths "Improving Feed Utilization" program, Damien has been implementing some major changes to improve his business and property.

With predominantly grey loam soils, coupled with a run of dry years in 2005 to 2008 and a subsequent bus trip to Neil Sleep's property at Peterborough in 2008, where he saw 'a different way of doing things', Damien has been inspired to continue improving his business focussing on his livestock.

Working with technical assistance through the Board's "SheepConnect" focus farms program, Damien has implemented strategies to manage risk in his farming enterprise by:

- fencing to land class;
- introduction of Dohnes;
- controlling Wards Weed;
- using fertilisers containing added zinc;
- using electric fencing; and
- improving watering systems.

Aims and Objectives

Uneven grazing, including selective grazing of the pastures allowing weed set, and poorly performing cropping paddocks has led Damien to aim for a more productive and a less risky farming enterprise mix.

Key management issues for regional landholders looking to change to a more intensive livestock system with improved feed utilisation are reducing paddock size and changing watering points.

Damien had always used permanent fencing, however, with capital costs increasing, the need to change from set stocking to rotational grazing and the implementation of smaller paddocks for better feed utilisation; he decided to investigate the suitability of temporary electric fencing.

Approach/Methodology

How and what was done?

Through the Woolworths and SheepConnect project Damien has been trialling and using electric fencing since 2008. Electric fencing is an attractive option as it allows paddocks to be quickly subdivided, enabling stock to be moved regularly on to fresh feed without having to be shifted over long distances. As Damien had no prior experience with electric fencing, this project provided him with an opportunity to trial the technology and to build his confidence.

Paddock subdivision

Damien decided to graze 50 ha of a poorly performing barley and oats crop instead of harvesting it in 2008. The paddock was grazed in six blocks of approximately 8-9 ha each. Damien used temporary electric fencing and erected a single three line fence that was shifted five times to create the six grazing sections. The fence consisted of 1km long runs of two electric wires and one earth wire, supported by steel "tread-ins" that were spaced 15 metres apart. The fence was later changed to only two electric wires and no earth wire without causing any issues for livestock management.

Stock water was provided in a 600 litre poly dish trough, which required cleaning out every two to three days.

Stock were moved onto new feed every eight to ten days and the total area provided 47 days of grazing for 360 crossbred lambs at a stocking pressure of 60 DSE/ha.

Temporary electric fencing made easy

For ease of management in erecting and rolling up electric fencing there are systems available to attach to four wheel motor bikes. Through the EPNRM/ Woolworths project, four Rappa™ systems were purchased and made available for landholders to trial.

Damien did not have a four wheel motor bike. So he has built a two-wheeled trailer to mount the Rappa system to, along with all the equipment required. He towed this with his farm ute to make the rollout and shifting of these temporary fence lines a lot less time consuming.

It takes two people about one hour to take down and re-erect a 600-700m length of fence. 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 over his larger paddocks. His sheep now graze to within one metre of the fence lines. Provided there is adequate feed in the paddock, livestock are retained and do not put pressure on the electric fence. However, Damien has had a few issues with kangaroos and emus, occasionally flattening the fences, as two wires can be difficult for them to see.

Damien has now been using electric fencing for four years and has been continually increasing his breeding ewe numbers due to better feed utilisation.

Portable watering system

Using electric fencing to subdivide larger paddocks for better feed utilisation can create issues around watering points. Damien overcame these issues through constructing a mobile system consisting of a 9,000 litre tank mounted on a four wheel trailer. A poly trough is also attached to the rear of the trailer. It is connected via a 50 mm hose providing good flow rates. This system facilitates a cost effective means of shifting watering points between and within different locations within a paddock to influence grazing habits. Damien said that “as these mobile watering tankers worked so well, I now have three of these portable systems, to an extra trailer and an old truck mount, both constructed under the same system”.



Damien's trailer mounted mobile watering system.

Conclusions/Recommendations

What was achieved?

Damien previously cropped about 2,200 hectares; however, after switching his focus to livestock after the Peterborough visit, a decision was made to split the family partnership and the property in 2012 and run his property solely as a livestock enterprise. Currently,

Damien's cropping activities are very small (about 100 ha of oats and barley) dedicated to livestock fodder. This shift to a livestock enterprise running more sheep, together with good livestock prices, has taken the pressure off the farm finances and provides greater flexibility with less risk.

Damien said “Depending on how the season is progressing, I now plan to let these oat/barley crops run up to head and hay freeze the paddock to eliminate any weed seed set in those crop/feed paddocks”

Controlling weeds such as wards weed and turnip has become one of Damien's priorities in his pasture paddocks. Stock will usually only consume these weeds when plants are young and they are often left ungrazed once they hay off. This issue compounds as they then out compete the quality livestock feed such as annual medics.

Damien said “I am now using either Tigrex® and/or diuron early in the season to target these weeds and it appears to be reducing the weed numbers allowing medics to get away”.

Note: The tolerance of medic varieties to Tigrex® and diuron can vary (rates are very important) Seek agronomic advice prior to use!

Planting of cereals gives flexibility by allowing either grazing when green and then harvesting, cutting for hay or being grazed as a standing crop, this practice allows maximum grazing days to be achieved.

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

“Temporary electric fencing has increased paddock flexibility and provided management flexibility to graze cereals depending on the season,” Damien said.

Damien is also going to construct a permanent feedlot/ confined feeding area, he said “Although this season (2013) looks like we not be requiring one, it will be there for the long term, when it's required either at the break of the season to spell paddocks while they get away, or during the next dry season which is sure to come again particularly in this district”.

References/Acknowledgements

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