

PROACTIVE DECISION MAKING

“The quicker you can make decisions, the better you feel, the better your farm is, the more options you’ve got at the end of the dry season”.



Background

In 1997, Todd and Anne Woodard, together with Todd's Parents and Sister, purchased a 940ha block in Wrattenbully and started their grazing business “Peel Pastoral”. Since then the property has expanded to 2500 ha with two full time employees, as well as Todd and Anne.

The 2005/2006 drought was a struggle for Peel Pastoral as they retained all their stock and fed them through the dry season. Following that experience they began putting processes in place to ensure that they were never in that position again.

Initially they worked with a private consultant who encouraged matching carrying capacity to stocking rate using grazing charts based on rainfall. Over time, their strategy evolved to become more accurate and eventually made up part of their whole farm policies and procedures. The “Farm Blueprint” includes all farm operational procedures (ie. drought procedure), and allows management strategies to be replicated in absence of experienced staff if ever required.

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Producers Todd and Anne Woodard

Location Wrattenbully, South Australia

Rainfall 500ml

Enterprise 1000 Angus breeders, 3200 self-replacing ewes

Farm Area 2,500 ha



Decision Making Process

The decision making process adopted by Peel Pastoral uses feed budgeting at a specified trigger date to allow for early decision making.

The trigger date is set at the end of the winter. The specific date changes yearly and is determined by assessing when the significant rainfall events have finished at the end of winter.

At the trigger date, the 7 and 14 day forecast is looked at and if no significant rainfall is forecast a feed budget is undertaken. By completing a feed budget, the carrying capacity can be determined to ensure there is 80-90% ground cover at the start of the next rainfall season in April or May. The aim is to have about 500-1000 kg of dry matter left prior to the break of the season.

Based on the feed budget, carrying capacity and the procedures already in place, decisions are made on the season ahead and action taken.

“To be informed and have that knowledge is to be empowered and give you better confidence to sell or buy!”

In a dry season, the purpose of the procedures is to minimise the effects of dry conditions on the land, stock and profit. In this scenario, Peel Pastoral strategies may include:

- Weaning calves and lambs early
- Selling stock early starting with dry and older stock
- Buying in fodder where no further stock can be sold
- Looking into leasing opportunities

“From a mental health point of view, once the decisions have been made, right or wrong you have more clarity about what you’re doing and it feels like a weight has been lifted. If you get two inches of rain a week later it doesn’t matter, it can be used as an opportunity”

In a wet season, the procedures are less vital but allow for the business to recognise opportunities to capitalise on the excess fodder. In this scenario Peel Pastoral strategies may include:

- Buying in more stock
- Selling stock and replacing with a different class

Regardless of the season the two employees, Todd and Anne, go through this process every year. The process is also reviewed once a year to discuss the summer just been and any learnings that can be applied in the future.

“The process takes a good day but it’s probably the most valuable time spent on the farm”

BENEFITS OF THIS APPROACH

In a dry year...

- Sustains ground cover and general soil health
- Improves mental health
- Sell stock before others are to get a higher price
- Buy fodder before others when the price is lower

And in a good year identifies opportunities with excess food on offer!

Training and Tools Recommended

- Grazing for Profit School- provides a holistic insight into the many factors that affect your business including the impact of climate variability and market fluctuations and ways of taking control of your business by working in-sync with your resources.
- Feed Budget Spreadsheet to calculate carrying capacity. There are many different versions that can be used. Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) have information on Feed Budgeting on their website.

Other Key Strategies

- Maintain a sacrifice mob that equates to 20-25% of the total DSE that can be sold quickly to decrease pressure on pastures if required.
- Have perennials in the system to set the farm up to grow grass whenever it rains- summer or winter.

For further information contact your Regional Landcare Facilitators



“Set your goals, start measuring and training yourself - the only way you’re going to learn is to do it!”