



ISSUE 30 WINTER 2017

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Information for rural business in Central Queensland



Dry season feeding strategies

IN THIS ISSUE

- All about botulism
- Getting started with BREEDPLAN
- Get ready for CalfAlive



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Welcome to CQ Beef 30

Welcome to the winter issue of the CQ Beef feature for 2017.

Hi everyone,

It's August already and many of you will now be managing poor quality pastures. To help you out, in this issue we have some hints on how to use supplements more efficiently and economically. If you have a nutrition enquiry, we have staff to help. Please see the list below.

We have other great reads for you in this issue including articles on botulism, BREEDPLAN and the Fitzroy Basin Association's recent livestock handling courses.

Bull buying season is upon us, so remember you want morphology (per cent of normal sperm) and scrotal circumference estimated breeding values (EBVs) amongst your other breeding objectives. If you need a refresher on EBVs our BREEDPLAN article is a great place to start.

If you want to calculate your gross margin and compare it to other scenarios, look at capital investment options, or even a new block you'll be pleased to hear the Breedcow Dynama software have been updated.

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We hope you find this issue valuable. Please contact me with story ideas, or feedback on how to improve future editions of CQ Beef.

Byrony Daniels, editor
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Botulism

Botulism is a disease which can affect a wide variety of animals. People can rarely be affected by botulism and usually as a result of food poisoning through poor food preparation. Botulism is caused by the bacteria Clostridium botulinum. This bacteria survives well in the environment as it forms a hardy spore (with a shell-like coating). The spore makes it more resistant to drying, heat, UV light, breakdown in the environment and some chemical agents. The bacteria will come out of its spore form and multiply in decaying organic matter such as rotting vegetation and carcasses. The bacteria produces a powerful toxin as it multiplies and if the toxin or bacteria is ingested poisoning results. Cases of botulism are common in many areas of Queensland.

The poisoning effect of the bacteria is a flaccid paralysis, meaning the muscles become floppy. Typically the animal is found down on its side

with no evidence of struggling. If the tongue is pulled out of the mouth the animal will typically not be able to pull it back in. From the time of ingestion of the toxin, the paralysing effects are evident within hours. The severity of the poisoning depends on how much toxin was ingested and if viable bacteria continue to grow and produce toxin in the animals gut. There may be weakness and staggering at first. This will generally progress over 24 hours to the animal going down.

The source of the bacteria can be any area where there is rotten organic matter. This could be a dam with rotting vegetation, a dead bird or another dead animal. Contaminated feeds, such as hay and silage, can also be a source. Once an animal dies of botulism it becomes a source of infection for other animals, so carcass disposal via burning is important.

Botulism is usually diagnosed on the clinical signs, feeding and vaccination history and ruling out other possible causes. A laboratory diagnosis is often difficult to obtain as the amount of toxin is very small and difficult to find.

There is generally no treatment for livestock affected by botulism except supportive care. Cattle, sheep and horses are especially sensitive to the toxin and will often die once they go down. Farm dogs are more resistant and often respond well, but slowly, to veterinary treatment.

As it is a widespread, environmentally stable bacteria there is no way of eliminating botulism completely. Vaccination is the best way of preventing botulism in your herd. In the event of a suspect outbreak immediate vaccination of the herd from the affected paddock or feed is important to prevent widespread losses. The vaccine will take up to four weeks to be fully effective and may require a booster. Consult your veterinarian or farm supplies wholesaler for information on the appropriate vaccination strategy.

If you notice unusual signs of disease, abnormal behaviour or unexpected deaths in your livestock, call the Animal Disease Emergency Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Derek Lunau, Senior veterinary officer,
 Biosecurity Queensland
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Advanced livestock movement workshops a hit!

Fortifying the relationship between livestock and land management, a series of Advanced Livestock Movement workshops supported by Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) experienced enormous success throughout May in Central Queensland.

The workshops, held in Clermont, Wandoan and Gracemere, were led by Neil McDonald, from Keith in South Australia and were fully booked out at all three locations.

Promoting the harmonious and regular transition of livestock, Mr McDonald's method endorses the rest and recovery of pastures, improving soil quality and holistic land management techniques.

Empowering landholders is central to Mr McDonald's training, enabling an agricultural enterprise to expel less energy units into moving stock, while also improving livestock welfare.

Ellie Carter, land management officer at FBA, said the core message of workshops such as these was sustainability.

"Looking after the land ensures viability and longevity," she said.

"Everything comes down to sustainability of the industry and the environment. FBA are proud

to support courses that align with the long term vision of sustainability and positive land management."

Mr McDonald, who has been delivering training to landholders for almost three decades, said the sooner behavioural training begins, the safer the operation.

"Occupational health and safety, profitability, animal welfare, enjoyment and staff or family retention should be the key drivers in a business's decision making," he said.

"By handling weaners correctly, weight gains will increase, bruising and dark cutting will decrease and the safety of staff will increase," he said.

Key focus points for the two day courses included the sustainability of the agricultural industry, weaner training and movement, creating a trainer mob, getting the most out of your current dogs, the importance of passing knowledge on, mob structure and mentality, six key points to moving livestock effectively.



Course participants at Hillview in Clermont, learning from trainer Neil McDonald.

The Advanced Livestock Movement management courses were delivered by FBA with funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and Reef Trust.

If there is a course you would like delivered to your area within the Fitzroy Basin, express your interest by contacting the FBA's grazing team on (07) 4999 2800.

"We thoroughly enjoyed it and thought it was a fantastic initiative by the Fitzroy Basin Association to run a course like this."

- Nikki Mahony from Gyrranda Pastoral.

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Dry season feeding: What you need to know to make better decisions

If you are going to supplement, make sure you have enough pasture to carry your cattle through to when the seasonal break can be expected. Dry season protein supplements work by enabling cattle to eat more grass (up to 30 per cent more) so the extra pasture consumption needs to be considered. It is rarely economical to feed hay. If you don't have pasture in the paddock you need to offload cattle.

Effective supplementation depends on identifying what deficiencies are present and providing enough of the required nutrients. An assessment of diet quality is valuable for determining what nutrients are required and what supplementation can achieve. Faecal near-infrared reflectance spectroscopy (NIRS) testing can be used to assess the protein content and digestibility of the diet. Analysis of pasture samples is of limited value in the extensive grazing situation because of the ability of cattle to select a higher quality diet from the pasture on offer.

The biggest dry season deficiency problems are protein and energy, with protein becoming limiting first. On phosphorus deficient country, lactating and heavily pregnant breeders will benefit from phosphorus in a dry season supplement. Dry cattle have much lower phosphorus requirements if they are growing slowly or at maintenance, and phosphorus is usually not a problem in the dry season. Other mineral deficiencies are possible but are very uncommon.

It is critical to know the composition of supplements and their nutrient content. Your feed merchant should be able to supply information on nutritional analysis. Many supplements have low levels of protein and energy and may not supply what cattle require, or high intakes are needed to supply the required nutrients. If you are not aware of what is in the supplements it is impossible to assess their value.

Knowledge of supplement intakes is critical for determining whether the supplementation program is meeting animal requirements for particular nutrients. Record how much is going out to particular paddocks then divide it by



how many cattle are in the paddock and how many days it lasts to determine the daily intake per animal. You can then calculate how much protein and energy the cattle are receiving from the supplement. Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) staff have access to FeedCalc spreadsheets, a great tool for comparing the efficiency and economics of supplements, but intake information is required to make useful comparisons.

With dry season protein supplementation, the aim is to give a breeder 150 grams of protein a day and a dry animal 75 grams. A 30 per cent urea lick (with total protein content of 103 per cent) will supply 150 grams of protein at a lick intake of 145 grams per day. A 10 per cent urea lick (with total protein content of 48 per cent) will supply 150 grams of protein with a lick intake of 313 grams per day and is usually the more expensive option.

This leads to the question of what options are available to slow or increase intake. In many situations high intakes are due to the supplement having a low urea content and significant amounts of palatable ingredients such as protein meal, grain or molasses. Increasing the urea content and reducing the amount of palatable ingredients will reduce supplement intake. If lick intakes are too low the addition of protein meal will usually increase intake. Salt can either be an attractant

or a deterrent depending on the land type and the water type. Seek advice if you are having difficulty optimising intake.

Sometimes there is a concern that high urea licks could affect fertility. There is no evidence of this occurring in extensive grazing situations. Analysis of nutrient intakes shows that cattle grazing dry season pastures and being fed a urea lick have far lower protein intakes than dairy or beef cattle on improved pastures.

Roller drums can be an effective means of supplying a dry season protein supplement if the appropriate mixing and delivery infrastructure is available to reduce the workload associated with mixing and delivery.

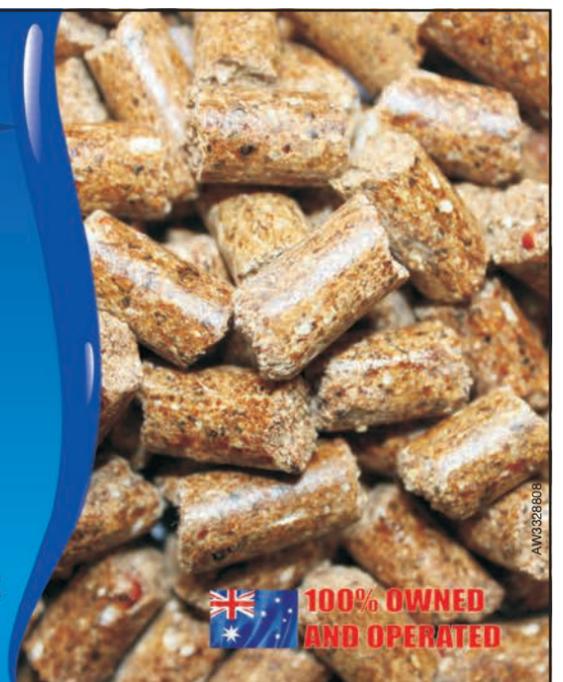
When cattle require energy supplementation, high energy products such as molasses, whole cotton seed or grain are needed. Most dry licks, roller mixes and commercial liquid supplements have low energy contents (0–5MJ of metabolisable energy (ME) per kg of dry matter). By contrast, molasses contains 8.7MJ of ME per kg of dry matter and whole cottonseed 13.1MJ of ME per kg of dry matter.

The recommended M8U intake of 2kg per day provides 18MJ of ME. A 450kg lactating cow requires 80MJ of ME per day, this means that on low quality dry season pasture when energy intake may be only 45MJ of ME a day the cow has an ME deficiency of 35MJ. Consequently, even with 2kg of M8U per day the animal will still have an energy deficiency of 17MJ of ME per day. This is why body condition reserves are so critical for breeders.

The best way to manage supplementation costs is to reduce requirements by managing breeders so they have the best opportunity to maintain body condition. The key strategies are matching stock numbers to the available feed, joining cows so they are lactating when feed quality is likely to be at its best and timely weaning to prevent excessive loss of body condition. If you would like a hand evaluating climate data to determine joining dates please contact your local DAF FutureBeef extension officer.

Organic protein meals can be used to provide protein and energy for cattle in organic production systems, but managing intake is a challenge because of their palatability. Salt may help limit intake in some situations. Organic phosphorous supplements are also available.

Byrony Daniels, DAF FutureBeef team
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Breedcow and Dynama: Software updates assist beef cattle management



Version 6.02 of Breedcow and Dynama is now available from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) website.

The Breedcow and Dynama package of software programs are available free, and are used to assess choices for the management of beef cattle herds run under extensive conditions. The package applies four budgeting processes:

Deciding what to sell when the plan goes sour or what to buy when there is an opportunity (Bullocks and Cowtrade programs)

Comparing the likely profitability of the herd under different management or turnover systems (Breedcowplus program)

Making forward projections of stock numbers, sales, cash flow, net income, debt and net worth (Dynamaplus program)

Evaluating long term investments in herd or property improvement to determine the rate of return on extra capital (Investan program).

This version provides a revised and expanded user manual with additional examples and explanations. A new component, 'Improving the performance of beef enterprises in northern Australia', has also been added and combines Breedcowplus, Dynamaplus and Investan files to undertake scenario analyses for three regions of the northern beef industry. Table 1 shows the results for example scenarios analysed to date for the Fitzroy catchment region of Queensland. Scenarios for the Katherine region and part of North Queensland are also available. A further four regions and relevant scenarios will be added as they are compiled.

The example files and document guide users through the scenario analysis process and show how alternative investments in beef enterprises can be compared using the framework provided by the Breedcow and Dynama software package.

The herd models (and associated beef enterprises) incorporate research and trial data where possible and are seen as representative of localised production systems relevant to the scenarios being evaluated. All models are provided with version 6.02 and are only compatible with version 6.02. For more information visit www.daf.qld.gov.au and search 'Breedcow and Dynama'.

Fred Chudleigh, DAF economist
(07) 4529 4186

Table 1. Fitzroy catchment example scenarios.

Scenario	NPV @ 5%	Annualised return	Peak deficit	Years to peak deficit	Payback period (years)
Feeding to improve reproduction	-\$488,300	-\$39,182	-\$1,295,604	infinity	never
Genetics to improve reproduction(one decade)	-\$32,369	-\$4,192	-\$77,482	10	never
Genetics to improve reproduction (two decades)	-\$7,711	-\$619	-\$77,482	8	never
Reducing calf loss (by 50% at \$7.50 per head)	\$16,516	\$1,235	-\$7,999	5	9
Reducing calf loss (by 50% at \$30,000 up front)	\$13,333	\$1,070	-\$31,850	5	13
Forage oats	-\$55,412	-\$4,446	-\$147,024	infinity	never
100% reliable forage oats	\$47,568	\$3,817	-\$12,995	5	8
Forage oats with a contractor	-\$101,602	-\$8,153	-\$269,580	infinity	never
Leucaena	\$1,204	\$97	-\$189,095	10	17
Leucaena with asset revaluation	\$180,603	\$14,492	-\$189,095	10	17
Feedlotting	-\$682,774	-\$54,788	-\$1,963,051	infinity	never

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Getting started with BREEDPLAN

What is BREEDPLAN? A genetic evaluation system for beef cattle, providing estimated breeding values (EBVs) for a range of economically important traits (i.e. fertility, weight and carcass).

What is an EBV? An EBV describes the genetics of an animal independent of the environment, so it's a measure of genetic merit for each trait. EBVs are calculated using pedigree and performance data supplied by beef producers using BREEDPLAN technology. EBVs are expressed as the difference between an individual animal's genetics compared to a historic benchmark group of animals (the base). EBVs can only be compared **within a breed**, as each breed is genetically evaluated separately and each evaluation compares animals to a separate base.

EBVs are reported in the actual units in which the measurements are taken (e.g. kilograms for weight). The current BREEDPLAN EBVs available are:

- Fertility and calving traits – scrotal size, days to calving, gestation length and calving ease
- Weight traits – birth weight, 200 day milk, 200 / 400 / 600 day growth and mature cow weight
- Carcass traits – eye muscle area, rib and rump fat depth, intramuscular fat, carcass weight and retail beef yield
- Other traits – docility, flight time, structural soundness and net feed intake.

BREEDPLAN evaluations are conducted by 27 Australian breed societies. However not all EBV traits are available for every breed, so check with your breed society on the EBVs they have available.

To performance record your animals with BREEDPLAN you must be a member of a breed society, the society must be running BREEDPLAN analysis and the calves you wish to submit for performance information must be registered with your breed society. As a new member you will also need to record all



of your sires and dams. Membership costs for BREEDPLAN vary for each breed society. You should also consider the additional costs of performance recording your animals (e.g. labour and equipment) depending on the performance traits you wish to record.

Producers commonly ask which performance traits they should record. This is up to you and is best guided by what is important to your breeding and marketing program. There are no minimum or maximum requirements. However, to receive an EBV an animal must have either its own performance data or the performance data of its progeny recorded with BREEDPLAN.

So why join BREEDPLAN? Some potential benefits include:

- Make accurate genetic selection decisions for your herd, by the following ways:
 - EBVs adjust for non-genetic effects that can mask your ability to see an animal's genotype (genetics).

- EBVs provide an indication of genetics for traits such as fertility which you cannot see just by looking at an animal
- EBVs take into account the trait heritability and correlations between traits. Heritability is the extent to which the trait can be passed onto offspring. Correlation describes the interaction between traits (e.g. high growth is correlated with high birth weights, therefore 600 day weight EBVs feed back into birth weight EBVs based on their correlation. Traits can be positively or negatively correlated).

- EBVs allow you to directly compare animals in different herds and environments
- Access EBVs on all of your animals once performance data is submitted
- Benchmark the genetics of your animals against the entire breed

- Assess the genetic improvement being made in your herd over time for each economically important production trait
- Provide a marketing tool for your business by using EBVs.

For detailed information on BREEDPLAN and performance recording go to <http://breedplan.une.edu.au>. A helpful booklet to download is BREEDPLAN: A guide to getting started.

Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) <http://tbts.une.edu.au> provide free advice and have webinars explaining BREEDPLAN on YouTube. Visit www.youtube.com and search for 'sbtstbts'.

Tracy Longhurst, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, senior technical officer
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In our own backyard: National symposium on calf loss

Calf wastage, or losses from pregnancy to weaning, is often a bigger problem than you might think.

Project leader of Meat and Livestock Australia-funded CashCow project, Professor Michael McGowan from The University of Queensland said high numbers of beef producers in northern Australia experienced calf wastage above the achievable level of 10 per cent on a regular basis.

“The magnitude of the problem was shown in the recent CashCow project where 25 per cent of breeding mobs in the northern forested areas had calf wastage of above 19 per cent,” he said.

Professor McGowan said the apparent causes highlighted the massive opportunity to develop and implement practical solutions that mostly

have not been systematically evaluated in northern Australia.

“The value of addressing this issue shouldn’t be underestimated.

“A 5 per cent calf loss reduction in a 3,000 adult equivalent herd, including through reducing pregnant cow mortality, would at least increase annual live weight production by 20 tonnes and earnings before tax and interest by \$25,000,” he said.

In a proposed project, Reducing Calf Wastage, a team of beef producers and scientists will assess the herd and business impacts of selected interventions on a network of commercial properties. An important strategy in this project will be an annual symposium for producers to keep up to date with findings and discuss practical solutions to minimise losses.

The inaugural CalfAlive symposium will be held on 24–25 November 2017 in Capella.



The forum will allow ample time for both listening and discussion. Highlights will be hearing speakers from the USA and Asia, as well as well-credentialed Australian producers and researchers.

Organising committee chairman Dave Smith from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries’ FutureBeef team said this event was already gaining a lot of industry interest.

“Offering producers a better understanding of how losses may be occurring, as well as

solutions, will be the drawcard for the event,” Mr Smith said.

“An organising committee of beef producers, researchers and a specialist event manager will ensure the program is both relevant and well run.”

For more information contact Dave Smith, DAF FutureBeef extension officer on (07) 4761 5160 or Jackie Kyte, event manager, on 0409 564 729.

A NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE CAUSES OF CALF LOSS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MINIMISE THEM



Where: Capella Cultural Centre,
89 Peak Downs St, Capella, Qld

When: Fri 24th & Sat 25th November 2017
(from 12 midday Friday to 1.00 pm Saturday)

Australian and International specialists discussing:

- What causes calf loss and practical strategies to minimise losses
- Research update testing options for reducing calf loss

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FLOCK TALK



Leading Sheep

What ewe need to know

The Leading Sheep program recently held a series of successful remote monitoring days across Queensland. Around 150 producers attended the events in St George, Morven, Isisford and Longreach.

In other news, two extension officers recently joined Leading Sheep. Kiri Broad is based in Longreach, while Jed Sommerfield is based in Charleville. Kiri and Jed will be managing events and activities to engage and support sheep and wool producers. Welcome Kiri and Jed!

This edition of *Flock Talk* is all about promoting wool and encouraging producers to get more involved in the sheep industry. In this edition, a central west wool producer explains how they run their enterprise and shares their experience building a successful business. Also in this edition, if you're considering getting into wool sheep or have been out of the industry for a while, be sure to check out the top tips from an experienced agent on how to make the most out of sheep and wool.

You can connect with Leading Sheep on Facebook and join our mailing list at www.leadingsheep.com.au.

Nicole Sallur, editor, Leading Sheep project manager and senior extension officer, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

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Time is right for wool industry

Top tips from Blackall wool producer

- Buy the best rams you can afford
- Use genetic data and visual appraisal to aid selection
- Use contractors, but be prepared to learn skills and do a lot of the work yourself
- Join groups, like Leading Sheep, to build your knowledge.

After 23 years as a wool producer, Alison Krieg believes there's no better time for newcomers to join the industry, and offers some sage advice for those contemplating a move into Merino sheep.

"Buy the best rams you can afford, learn as much as you can about producing wool, and don't follow fads or you'll go backwards," Ms Krieg said.

With the Eastern Market Indicator setting new records of more than 1500c/kg, she said optimism in the wool industry was at an all-time high, and only the lack of feed on the ground in much of western Queensland was delaying a move back into sheep.

"The timing is exquisite. Wool and carcass prices are excellent and the potential with wild dog exclusion fences is huge," Ms Krieg said.

"I grew up on a sheep property at Blackall and I believe you can always make money out of sheep.

"There's never been a time when it cost more to run them than I've earned."

Ms Krieg admits that her 7300 hectare property Benalla, 85km west of Blackall, is better suited to sheep than cattle, with its mix of country.

In a normal season she runs about 4200 sheep comprising 1800 ewes and their progeny and about 1200 wethers, which cut on average 7.6kg of sub-19 micron wool.



Blackall sheep and wool producer Alison Krieg with her kelpie offshoots.

According to Ms Krieg, wool growing is not rocket science, but relies mainly on good nutrition and genetics. The better you feed your sheep, the more wool, lambs and meat they will produce.

"Genetics are a no brainer – you buy the best you can afford," she said.

She pays an average of \$1800 for her rams and said it was important to look at measurements and match the information with visual appraisal to buy the best you can.

"The best cattle producers don't breed their own bulls and the best wool growers don't buy C-grade rams," she said.

"Rams are sold with figures available for fibre diameter, body weight, fleece weights etc. and your agent should be able to assist in ram selection."

Ms Krieg is a passionate advocate of learning, whether from her peers, at Leading Sheep forums or through reading Australian Wool Innovation's *Beyond the Bale*.

"Groups such as Leading Sheep are constantly holding information days and forums, so you can choose what you go to, and most wool growers are only too happy to impart knowledge," she said.

Ms Krieg saw her first wild dog on Benalla in 2005 and new lambs started to gradually disappear. She started building a dog proof

fence in 2009 and in the following years her two neighbours joined in.

The exclusion fence was finished this year and encloses the three properties in a cluster covering about 52,000 hectares. Lambs are dropping now and she's confident she'll mark about 80 per cent, which is a massive turnaround.

"The difference is palpable," she said.

"I can go out now confident that I won't see sheep which have been attacked by wild dogs.

"It's still a work in progress. We have a dog trapper inside the fence who caught three in the past week and we are continually shooting and baiting to hopefully get the remaining seven or so, but these exclusion fences will save the wool industry."

Despite predicting this purple patch in the wool industry would eventuate quite a few years earlier, she said she'd confidently recommend entering the industry now.

"We bought Benalla in 1994 when the memory of the collapse of the wool market was still pretty fresh and I remember saying to my then husband that I thought the wool industry was just on the verge of a major rebound," she recalled.

"I was wrong then but I think I might be on the money this time when I make the same prediction." 

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FLOCK TALK



Wool: Get the basics right and reap the rewards

Top tips for newcomers to wool

- Choose the right sheep type to suit your country and assess potential returns
- Communicate effectively with your staff, especially the shearing team
- Work out how to share infrastructure, like shearing sheds and yards, rather than build new ones
- Continue to learn through programs like Leading Sheep.

Having worked in the wool industry for 30 years as a shearer, wool classer and broker, Bruce Lines has two pieces of advice for those who want to make the most of today's exceptional sheep and wool prices – get the basics right and plan for the next 50 years.

That applies to the long-term producers, who have ridden out the lulls in the wool market, as well as newcomers looking to make a profit in Merinos.

As the Queensland wool manager for Rodwells, Mr Lines is confident there is plenty of upside for both types of operators in a market that's breaking records.

According to Mr Lines the basics include: finding the right type of sheep to suit your country and cover your costs, communicating with your staff – especially those in the shearing shed, and working out ways to share infrastructure rather than building new yards and sheds.

"It is evident in the tough times some wool producers changed enterprises to cattle and more farming, and this upswing in prices will give them the security to bring sheep back," he said.

"Others who've been in sheep for the long haul have been prepared to pay for exclusion fences, and trapping and baiting to control wild dogs, as well as feeding sheep through the drought, and now they're making some great returns.

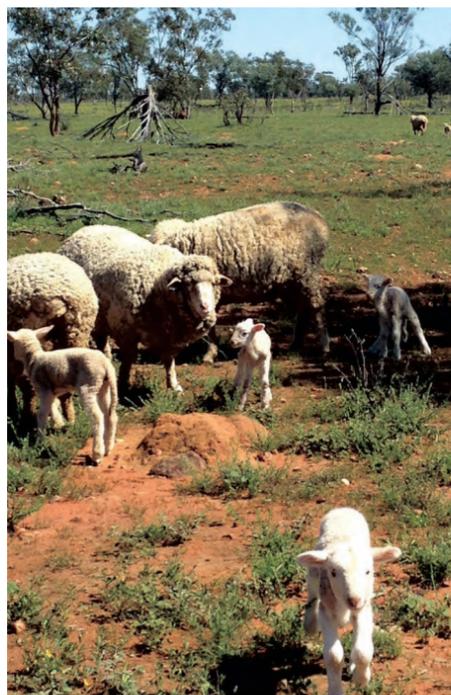
"People just need to be sure they're getting into a business that's financially sound for the long term."

The key to starting out is to find the right animal to suit your conditions, said Mr Lines, and that comes through education, logistics and assessing what's worked in the past.

"How many kilos of wool do you need, how many kilos of meat, how much feed are the sheep taking in to get that? Assess the risks and have a viable option that presents profitable returns before you start," he advised.

"A lot of people got into shedding breeds to get away from shearing and employing staff, but moving from a Merino enterprise to a solely meat sheep enterprise presents different management issues that many had not planned for.

"These include the feed intake, growth rate and carrying capacity of shedding breeds, and many of them still need shearing, so in some cases if they aren't getting better returns they may as well have stayed with Merinos."



Top tip from Bruce Lines is to find the right sort of sheep for your country.



Bruce Lines believes producers need to keep a close check on fleece quality.

He believes wethers are a strategic way to get back into sheep, producing both meat and wool.

"Producers in the west and north of the state could also turn off forward store animals for the feedlots and southern wool growers.

"If the purchaser is paying \$60-\$70 and feeds the sheep for a viable length of time and gets \$100, everyone's happy."

One factor that can make a big difference to the quality of the wool and meat produced is the relationship between the grower and the workforce, especially in the shearing shed.

Mr Lines is concerned that there's not enough communication between producers and their workers, whether they're shearing contractors, wool harvesting staff or station employees, such as jackaroos.

"It is vital people are clear on what their role involves, especially in the shearing shed, because if their job isn't done properly it can affect the whole wool clip and the return," he said.

"A lot more emphasis is needed on duty roles, especially the classer and wool handlers, and the grower and contractor.

"Talk to the contractor and get them on-property before shearing. Don't expect them to turn up and know how you want things done. Take them to the yards, explain the job required, what sheep will be shorn first – lambs, ewes, rams – and find out their expectations of the job."

The same advice applies when deciding whether to build yards or a shearing shed. Mr Lines recommends talking to your neighbours.

"It's a fairly big cost outlay to build new infrastructure and properties are much smaller

now, so it might be just a case of asking your neighbor if you can use their shed or yards," he said.

"There are contract shearing boards and portable yards that can be utilised too."

Mr Lines is passionate about the fact that Merinos helped build communities and towns across the state and would like to see improved awareness of the employment and financial benefits that can be generated by the industry.

According to him, one of the keys is bringing growers together to form networks and continue learning through programs such as Leading Sheep.

"The best advice comes from peer group conversations about issues of interest or common to all producers. How much wool are their sheep cutting? How many lambs are on the ground? What are you feeding your sheep? How are you controlling predators?"

"It's a little bit scary that people don't think they have the time, because when it comes to Leading Sheep forums and field days the industry is paying, so growers should be involved to get something in return.

"And in this sense, growers always have the chance to ask what they want, too. They can fill out a survey or ask organisers saying 'We want to talk about how much wool is on a sheep' or 'What's a viable option for us - to run wethers or breed lambs?' for example."

Mr Lines is confident that Queensland's Merino numbers can build from 1.8 million sheep to three or four million, which will help regenerate business in the small towns that have traditionally relied on the sector. 

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