

Showcasing sheep

Leading Sheep is a partnership between Australian Wool Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

We strive to deliver the best information to help with management decisions

HOW exciting to see the inclusion of Flock talk in *Queensland Country Life* and I am thrilled that Leading Sheep can be part of the first edition. Flock talk aims to showcase the latest news and information for sheep and wool growers statewide.

My name is Kylie Rutledge and I am the current chairwoman of Leading Sheep. Hailing from the Quilpie district in the south-west, I understand well the difficulties in accessing expertise and innovation from remote regions.

Leading Sheep is a partnership between Australian Wool Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, with the support of AgForce, and covers the three main wool-growing regions of the state: south, south-west and north/central west.

The project is now in its third round of funding and has established strong links between growers and innovation.

The regions are represented by grower committees, allowing Leading Sheep to be proactive as well as reactive when necessary in delivering relevant information direct to the producer.

It has been interesting to observe over the life of the project the ever-changing challenges that we face as producers. Some of these have been market driven, others are environmental and welfare issues.

While we cannot provide a crystal ball, we can strive to deliver the best information to help with management decisions. The project's adoption of, and the grower adaption to, webinars has revolutionised our delivery method and the content and presenters we can now access have enhanced our ability to react quickly with good, relevant expertise.

In one year alone we covered drought supplements, flood recovery and bush fire management. Welcome to farming in Australia!



Kylie and Brian Rutledge manage Moble, a sheep and cattle property in the Quilpie district. Kylie is also the chairwoman of Leading Sheep.

If you would like more information on Leading Sheep or would like to become involved, please visit www.leadingsheep.com.au for a list of contacts in your region or contact DAFF's sheep extension officers, Nicole Sallur or Alex Stirton, on (07) 4654 4200.

You will also find upcoming events listed on the website as well as overviews of past presentations and a wealth of information gathered over the years in

response to the challenges of the day. Much of this has come from our own producers so has been road-tested.

Where else can you devise a drought feeding regime, check your worm counts, scan for lambs, organise your breech strike management while tossing up your wool marketing options and catching a wild dog all in the one spot? Leading Sheep and Flock talk, of course.



What is Leading Sheep?



Designed to help producers increase their productivity and profitability

LEADING the way for a more profitable Queensland sheep and wool industry through new technologies, knowledge and skills, the Leading Sheep program is designed to help Queensland's sheep and wool producers increase their long-term productivity and profitability.

It aims to do this by maintaining a high level of engagement with sheep producers in three regions across the state – south, south-west and north/central west.

In each region, an extension officer and a regional co-ordinator work with a regional committee of producers to determine local priorities. This ensures producers receive the latest information on industry issues, as well as advice on new practices and technologies that will lead to long-term sustainability for the industry.

Leading Sheep is an important partnership between the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Australian Wool Innovation and is supported by AgForce.

LEADING SHEEP PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- predation
- nutrition
- health
- business optimisation
- marketing and selling wool and sheepmeat

A whole suite of information on these priorities can be found on the Leading Sheep website, ranging from recorded webinars (on-line seminars), eBooks, fact sheets and case studies.

Keeping with the nutrition and predation theme for our first edition of Flock talk, some of the resources on our website you might find useful are:

- electric fencing – the ins and outs (webinar)
- exclusion fencing (case studies)
- drought survival stories (eBook)
- controlling feral pigs (webinar)
- nutritional management of spring lambing merinos to rear more lambs (webinar)
- donkeys as guard animals (fact sheet).

Also on our website you can sign up to our monthly newsletter, keeping you informed of sheep industry information and events – more than 1000 industry members and stakeholders have already subscribed. Plus you can also check out what sheep events are coming up in your area or on line in our events calendar.

Check out www.leadingsheep.com.au now!

Alex Stirton DAFF Sheep Extension Officer
alex.stirton@daff.qld.gov.au

Testimonials:

● "Very pleased with the information offered and am fairly confident that we can make changes to our enterprise based on the information given today."

● "Webinars allow me to access experts in their field and technical advice without leaving home."

● "Fantastic to have the opportunity to listen to such a knowledgeable and respected nutritionist. Great day, don't think you could have done anything better. Thank you."

● "I believe these webinars are an excellent means of getting information out to producers. It seems there is never enough time to be able to research or seek out relevant information/providers and the webinars bring to us access to real people with real knowledge where you can have an opportunity to put your queries/concerns out there. Please continue with them."



Welcome to Flock talk Spring 2014

Aim is to provide Queensland lamb, sheep and wool producers with a regular source of information

THIS is our very first edition of Flock talk. The aim of Flock talk is to provide Queensland lamb, sheep and wool producers with a regular source of information relating specifically to the Queensland industry.

You can also find a wealth of other great sheep information on the Leading Sheep website www.leadingsheep.com.au. On this site you can also subscribe to receive e-newsletters direct to your inbox and keep up-to-date with the sheep industry activities going on in your area.

This issue of Flock talk covers the two main topics currently affecting Queensland's sheep producers (and the majority of livestock producers in general) – nutrition and predation.

We hope you enjoy our inaugural edition of Flock talk and we'd welcome any feedback or suggestions on how to improve the next edition, due in November.

Nicole Sallur, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry sheep extension officer, Leading Sheep project manager, Flock talk editor
nicole.sallur@daff.qld.gov.au



Queensland's two sheep extension officers with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Nicole Sallur and Alex Stirton, both based in Charleville.

Maximising lambs weaned

Nutrition plays a vital role

ABOUT 70 percent of lamb mortality that occurs between birth and weaning happens within the first 48 hours of a lamb's life. Lamb survival is related to lamb birthweight and this is strongly related to the nutrition of the ewe.

Careful management of ewe nutrition is critical throughout joining, lambing and lactation to boost the number of lambs weaned.

WA-based nutrition consultant and Associate Professor at the University of Western Australia, Dr John Milton (pictured), said nutrition played a vital role in ensuring more ewes went in lamb and weaned them successfully.

"Planning for better lambing percentages is a process that starts when preparing ewes and rams for joining and goes right through to the nutrition of lactating ewes once the lambs are on the ground," Dr Milton said.

"The season for the past two years in many parts of Queensland has been very poor, which means there needs to be a strong focus for many producers on keeping core breeding ewes in good condition to rear lambs and prepare them for the next joining.

"But it's important when implementing a strategy there is not a 'one size fits all' approach for all sheep operations and it's very important to get good advice to develop an appropriate, comprehensive plan that fits your circumstances."

To start with, Dr Milton said pregnancy scanning was a 'no brainer' that every sheep breeder should do as part of their normal management.

"I tell my clients to just do it. You need to scan for dries, singles and multiples and then manage the ewes accordingly," he said.

"Scanning informs you of what you have to manage so you can plan accordingly. No one wants to waste extra feed on dry ewes, especially in a tough season."

Dr Milton said condition scoring was also one of the most valuable skills for managing ewes, and recommended that producers learn to do it properly and use it on a regular basis.

"The gold standard to aim for is condition score



The condition score of the ewe impacts on lamb survival and growth. Inset: WA-based consultant Dr John Milton.

(CS) of three, or a minimum score of 2.5," he said.

"Ewes should be around CS three throughout joining and pregnancy to conceive and rear plenty of lambs.

"The condition score of the ewe impacts on lamb birthweight and the ability of the ewe to produce colostrum and then milk, and thus lamb survival and growth.

"Condition scoring also allows you to manage the feed requirements of ewes throughout the process – you can increase or decrease supplements as required, depending on pasture availability and quality."

Dr Milton emphasised that a lactating ewe needed about three times the energy of a dry ewe to maintain her body and to produce enough milk to raise healthy, well-grown lambs.

"You want to grow the lambs to reach their genetic potential, and for the first three or four weeks this is completely up to the ewe and how well she is fed," he said.

Most importantly, Dr Milton said, ewes needed a good supply of high-quality water, given it made up about 85pc of the ewe's milk.

● For advice on ewe nutrition, there are a number of consultants working in the field in Queensland, including Dr John Milton (Independent Lab Services (08) 95257085, WA time) and Desiree Jackson (Desiree Jackson Livestock Management (07) 4658 3254).

● Listen to webinars about sheep nutrition from both Dr Milton and livestock consultant Desiree Jackson on the Leading Sheep website at www.leading-sheep.com.au

NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF LACTATING EWES

- A 65kg ewe needs about 8.0 megajoules (MJ) of metabolisable energy (ME) per day just to live, 12-14 MJ/day in the last week of pregnancy and above 20 MJ/day when lactating with twins.
- Ewes will mobilise fat to meet some of their energy needs – another reason to have them in condition score three at lambing.
- 11-12pc protein is sufficient, along with essential minerals, in order for ewes to synthesise plenty of milk.
- Roughage is needed to keep lactating ewes full and

contented to produce high-quality milk, which for a Merino can be up to 9pc fat.

- Once the lambs are on the ground ewes can get a portion of the energy and protein they need from quality pasture but, due to their large energy requirements, they may need to be supplemented with a concentrated source of energy, along with some extra protein.
- Phosphorus is essential for milk production and all energy transformations in the body, and is sometimes overlooked in favour of calcium – albeit it is also an essential mineral for lactation.

Correct bonding is essential for successful guard donkeys

Predator control top-of-mind in Qld

WITH predator control top-of-mind for Queensland sheep and wool producers, many have been looking to donkeys as guard animals to protect sheep against wild dogs. Experienced users emphasise that guard donkeys are not the silver bullet in dog control and must be bonded with sheep properly and used in conjunction with other control methods for success.

Bruce and Angela McLeish have been using guard donkeys for the past seven years on their south-east Queensland property, Warahgai.

"We have no formal training in guard animals but, since we started using guard donkeys, I have observed that our stock losses have been reduced," Mr McLeish said. "While we have had success with our donkeys, it's important to remember that donkeys do not kill or

eradicate wild dogs or prevent 100 per cent of losses – they need to be used as a tool in conjunction with other control measures like baiting, trapping and fencing."

Mr McLeish said it was essential guard donkeys were properly bonded with their sheep mobs as soon as the donkeys were weaned, not as adults.

"Don't expect any donkey to immediately start guarding – there is a process and there are no short cuts," he said.

"We wean the donkey and normally place it in a small yard with the sheep for a couple of weeks to allow it to bond. Then we move them all into a small paddock for another few weeks.

"It is important that the donkey is bonded at around 10 months of age. Mature donkeys will live and camp with the sheep and this may be enough to deter a dog, but I wouldn't rely on it."

Mr McLeish said it could be difficult to source donkeys and they did not come trained.

"We got our first donkeys from Warwick in 2007 and now we breed them on-farm to ensure they are bonded properly before we put them out," he said.

A key advantage of donkeys over other guard animals is their hardiness. They don't need to be drenched or shorn and they live from 20 to 40 years. They can handle more than one dog at a time and they stay in their paddocks.

"There doesn't seem to be a difference between jennys (females), jacks (males) or geldings as they all seem to have the instinct to guard and protect the sheep," Mr McLeish said.

"Bonded donkeys live with the mob and come to the front of the mob when something approaches.

"When mustering, the donkey travels at the front of

the mob and may try to block it, but once the mob is moving they will travel along with no problems.

"In the yards, don't place too much pressure on the donkeys by standing too close to them or try to force them. Also take care with sheep dogs, as the donkey will chase them and try to stomp on them.

"Always remember that donkeys are like any animal from sheep dogs to racehorses – some will be very good at their job and some not so good."



Bruce McLeish with one of his bonded donkeys on Warahgai.



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