**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.

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**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 knowledgeable and respected livestock experts. 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 us to access real people with real knowledge where you can have an opportunity to put your questions/concerns out there. Please continue with them.
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 (picture), 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.

NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF LACTATING EWES

- A 65kg ewe needs about 8.0 megajoules (MJ) of metabolisable energy (ME) per day or 12-14 MJ/day in the last week of pregnancy and about 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.
- Fougurage is needed to keep lactating ewes full and contented to produce high-quality milk, which for a Merino can be up to 6pc 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 eradication of wild dogs or prevent 100 per cent of losses – 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 its important to remember that donkeys do not kill or 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 stamp 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."

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

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) 92577226, WA time) and Denise Jackson (Denise Jackson Livestock Management (07) 4658 3254).
- Listen to webinars on sheep nutrition from both Dr Milton and livestock consultant Desiree Jackson on the Leading Sheep website at www.leading-sheep.com.au

The gold standard to aim for is condition score (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 healthy well-grown lambs.

Mr McLeish said it was essential guard donkeys were not bonded with their sheep mates as soon as the donkeys were weaned, or as an adult.

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

"Don’t 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."

"We rear 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 McLish 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 bred them on-farm to ensure they were 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 vaccinated and they will 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 stamp 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.