

Leading Sheep

A proactive network and progressive producers

In this issue of *FlockTalk*, we focus on exclusion fencing tips from a producer in western Queensland, and a young producer advocates for other young people to get involved in the industry as well as being part of local groups and organisations to stay up-to-date with information and network with industry.

If you are after more sheep and wool information, there are a variety of resources on the Leading Sheep website (leadingsheep.com.au) ranging from fact sheets and recorded webinars to YouTube videos and case studies.

If you would like to keep up-to-date with Queensland-specific sheep information and hear about relevant events, please join our mailing list and like our Facebook page. You can subscribe to the mailing list on our website and click on 'members' at the top of the page.

Leading Sheep has been driving improved practices on Queensland sheep and wool properties. Survey results show that 99 per cent of attendees gained new knowledge as a result of participating in Leading Sheep events and 64 per cent had made a change to their business. Impressively, almost two-thirds reported that this change was influenced or supported by Leading Sheep, highlighting the impact of the project. In the last three years, Leading Sheep attracted more than 1700 participants to one or more of their 42 events.

A proposal has been submitted to Australian Wool Innovation for a new Leading Sheep project focusing on pest animal management, drought planning, ewe and lamb survival, beneficial technology and business performance. The vision for the new project remains the same as previously: *A proactive network, progressive producers and sheep and wool businesses leading the way.* Watch this space for more details!

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



Effective water crossings vital to exclusion fencing success

Western Queensland woolgrower Will Roberts is the first to admit exclusion fencing has helped restore his faith in the future of the sheep industry.

But he said the quality and integrity of the fence itself plays a critical part in bringing producers peace of mind and ensuring exclusion fences remain an effective weapon in the war against wild dogs.

Mr Roberts is principal of Victoria Downs, a 13 000 hectare grazing property he runs with his wife Narda at Morven.

Today the property, which is a mix of 6100 hectares of natural open downs and 6900 hectares of timbered country, is running 5000 Merino sheep, including 2000 breeding ewes, along with 600 head of female cattle.

While the Roberts continue to battle dry conditions, they remain adamant that the introduction of exclusion fencing has paid dividends for their operation, reducing the pressure from wild dogs and allowing them to implement a more effective rotational grazing system.

"We have done about 14 km of exclusion fencing on our own on the northern boundary, 12 km with our neighbours on the southern side and 9 km on the western side of the property," Mr Roberts said.

"It has made a significant difference to our sheep and wool operation. For example, prior to fencing there were years when we lost 1000 head to wild dog attacks between August and February, from shearing to crutching.

"This situation has completely turned around since we erected the fences."

Mr Roberts acknowledged the on-property gains from exclusion fencing were increasingly well-documented, but at a practical level producers were often still experimenting with best fencing approaches.

He said the key to a well-built exclusion fence was fence-line preparation.



Western Queensland wool grower Will Roberts says the key to a successful exclusion fence starts with site selection and ground preparation.

"My advice is to avoid the temptation to do a flat grade ahead of erecting your fence and instead, where possible, sit the fence on higher ground," he said.

"You want to design the fence so the natural camber of the land allows water to drain away from the fence and reduces the potential for erosion in years to come."

He said structural integrity of the fence was critical, especially across waterways.

"In the case of flood fencing we have driven drill stem into the ground at least 1.7 m and then screwed the fence post into the top of the stem.

"With flood fencing or floodgates you need to keep the fence-line as straight as possible to reduce the pressure you put on the posts.

"From there we have hung three sections of fence on top of each other, allowing for an apron on the bottom that is about 1 m. This still gives the fence integrity as far as the movement of animals goes.

"We also make sure we swing the fence as freely as possible so when large volumes of water come down it has the capacity to move."

Mr Roberts's other advice for those erecting exclusion fences was to ensure the netting

was rolled out over the top of the coil so it effectively planted on the ground, and was less inclined to roll back up on itself.

"In our case we have set things up so we can roll the netting out from the back of a truck, rather than a trailer," he said.

"We have also extended the tray of the truck so the netting can be rolled off with a round pipe so it's effectively a one-person job."

Mr Roberts said exclusion fencing involved an investment of time, money and energy, especially when it came to creating a structure that had integrity and would be long-lasting.

"From a sheep and wool grower's perspective it does represent a significant investment, but it is also an investment in the future and enables us to leave both our businesses, the industry and our environment in better condition for future generations."

To watch a video of Mr Roberts's exclusion fencing and advice on fencing water crossings visit: <http://bit.ly/2HbubhE>.

For more information and tips for effective exclusion fencing visit leadingsheep.com.au



Next gen key to future of sheep and wool sector

When it comes to starting out in the rural sector Nick Hill knows most young people's first thought is a station job in the Top End.

But the 29-year-old property manager from Thallon in south-western Queensland is urging those keen to gain agricultural experience to consider work on one of the sheep and wool enterprises found in regions stretching across southern Australia.

"The opportunities in agriculture at the moment are huge, so I guess what I am saying is don't limit yourself; a large, labour intensive sheep property in the south or west of the country can be a valuable stepping stone into the industry too," he said.

Mr Hill manages Dunkerry, a 3200 hectare mixed farming property between Thallon and St George, with his parents Stuart and Christina and wife Allie.

A fifth-generation producer, he came home to the family property in 2013 and has since become an integral part of day-to-day property operations, the local community and the industry body, Leading Sheep.

For the young producer, being part of Leading Sheep is as much about staying in touch with information and technology advances as networking with industry.

"When I finished school, I did a Bachelor of Applied Science majoring in animal production and biosecurity before heading to Western Australia to work in the live export industry," he said.

"My plan was to come home eventually, but I needed my parents to agree that was a good idea and they were always keen for me to get some outside experience before I came back."

He said working in other areas of the agricultural sector was one way to broaden your skills and develop an understanding of operations beyond the farm gate.

"Being part of an organisation like Leading Sheep is really about continuing to improve and build on my skills. As young people in agriculture we need to keep learning and embracing change because we are part of an industry with so much potential and opportunity for growth," Mr Hill said.

The Hill family operates a mixed operation targeting winter cereal grain production, alongside a sheep enterprise where they run 2500 Merino breeders first cross prime lamb operation focused on producing large-frame, high growth-rate animals for meat production.

"I've been involved with the live export sector operating predominantly within the sheep industry from Australia to the Middle East and I think there are more market opportunities around the world for the quality product we are well-known for here in Australia," Mr Hill said.

"But to meet these market goals we need more young people in the industry and the skillsets agriculture needs now and will need into the future are continuing to evolve so there are more and more varying opportunities."

On the home front too he said it was a matter of continuing to use technology, through the on-property adoption of infrastructure developments like electronic drafts and controlled watering points.

"At Dunkerry we also have plans to develop at an operational level by improving our infrastructure, specifically exclusion fencing and shearing sheds, so building up our flock for a



Sheep and wool producer Nick Hill believes agriculture needs more young people with increasingly varied skillsets as the industry grows and evolves.

future in the sheep and wool industry is very much a part of our plan."

"My advice to other young people weighing up whether to get involve in agriculture is: if you are prepared to work hard, and understand things don't happen overnight it can be a place with incredible rewards.

"It is such a primary role—we're feeding and clothing people and there is something really rewarding about taking care of and seeing your product through that process."

To see Mr Hill talk about young producers in the sheep and wool industry go to: <http://bit.ly/2D6nmeO>.

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