

Company: Nalda Park Pastoral Company

1. Enterprise description and goals:

Nalda Park boasts a productive fine wool flock with ewes that on average cut 6kg/hd of 19 micron wool. The cull ewes are utilized for prime lamb production to maximize profit. These sheep are run under intensive grazing systems to maximize pasture production while achieving our environmental goals.

2. Labour efficiency and profitability

Labour efficiency is a key profit driver for our business. With my parents we aim to run our livestock enterprise at 7000DSE/labour unit. While in the past we have been above this, currently we are at 5500DSE/labour unit due to drier years. Labour is divided between the sheep and cropping enterprises to ensure a year-round workload. All enterprises are designed to work in synergy, with little overlap of major operations. This means that we can focus on doing the best job at the time.

Achieving high labour use efficiency allows us to maximize profit from each enterprise. We focus on achieving our goals and do not have time to get distracted.

While overall farm profitability has faded in recent years due to drought conditions, lower stock numbers have allowed us to use surplus labour to diversify into other more profitable enterprises. Crop production has proved successful in improving farm returns and provided opportunities for the livestock and crop enterprises to achieve a very profitable synergy. The net benefit is that our cost of production (particularly supplementary feeding) is significantly reduced when right proportions of enterprises are met.

3. Production systems:

The goal of our pasture system is to be low cost and efficient. Our farm is laid out with large permanently fenced paddocks of 15-25 hectares. These paddocks are fenced down to smaller 6-8 hectare cells with temporary (and relocatable) electric fencing using 2-3 wires. This enables us to manage sheep feed intake throughout the year. Central laneways feed the sheep into shepyards located throughout the farm, and on each block. We design and build our bugle shaped yards to work 1200 head with only one person and two dogs.

The sheep are grazed in a rotational system and moved according to available feed and the growth stage of the pasture. Ewes are set stocked at lambing.

With the integration of the sheep and crop enterprises, we can take advantage of grazing cereals by sowing early and fertilizing well. This fills the feed gap in late winter and allows us to lamb down in August on cereals and rest pastures.

A key to integrating both sheep and crop enterprises is the use of a Critical Control Point planner that identifies what tasks need to be done and when. This is clearly spelled out to all partners in the business.

4. Enterprise development:

Enterprise development has focused on building a highly productive grazing system that is cost effective. Pasture renovation has transformed the rundown pastures to a highly productive pasture base. Perennials are utilized where available, and Lucerne, Chicory, Plantain, Phalaris, and fescues are used to provide the longest pasture growth possible.

Cereal crops in the cropping enterprise also help to provide feed in winter and in summer with the stubbles. An emphasis has been on utilizing any rainfall that falls throughout the year to produce feed and reduce supplementary feed costs.

A suitable fertilizer and weed control program has also accompanied the pasture renovation program to double the carrying capacity of the farm.

The sheep have also been under heavy selection criteria to improve structure and wool quality, and also lambing percentage. At present, we are gaining 4% per year in lambing percentage. This is a combination of breeding, selection, and the adoption of the lifetime wool program basic principles to better manage the condition of the ewes.

We have also started to set up an alliance with a lamb finisher as we plan to move to a store lamb production system to increase the kg/ha of prime lamb produced.

5. Environmental impacts and benefits:

Environmental management is an important part of our farming system. We have fenced off all of our remnant vegetation to protect against overgrazing. This enhances its value as shelter for stock by reducing wind speed in paddocks. Where there is no remnant vegetation, shelterbelts are established to provide these benefits.

A recent major goal for the farm is to maintain groundcover over the entire soil surface to protect from wind erosion and to maintain soil fertility. Grazing management will be modified to grow more feed, utilize more feed, and leave more feed for soil cover.

6. Your farming life:

A major goal at present in light of the dry times is to increase the amount of time spent off-farm. While we already have 4 weeks annual paid leave, as well as the opportunity for flexible working hours to attend personal events, a particular emphasis has been on finding interests outside of farming. As drought can trigger depression among farmers, outside interests can maintain a sense of achievement and fulfillment and help to buffer any downturns on the farm.

7. Your international study tour:

I would go on a study tour to New Zealand. this would allow me to study specialist fine wool growers and how they select and breed their sheep to improve genetic gain. The marketing of NZ wool is also of interest.

There is also the opportunity to study more intensive grazing systems to better run our rotational grazing system.