

Company: Talbragar PL

1. Enterprise description and goals: Talbragar's livestock grazing business has focussed on flexible management that achieves productivity and profitability through our personal interest in livestock breeding and fattening. A core merino ewe breeding flock produces both merino wool lambs and first cross prime lambs in a livestock system that ranges from 5000-15000 DSE, pending seasons.

2. Labour efficiency and profitability A refocus towards a livestock breeding and fattening business in 2002 arose from a review of benchmark data in combination with our personal interests. Having benchmarked since 1998, sheep breeding for meat and wool had consistently been the highest returning enterprise. A change in seasonal conditions towards shorter pasture growth cycles has created the need for a production system that can still perform consistently, regardless of an inconsistent feed growth pattern. The merino ewe has continued to achieve high lambing rates of over 100%, equating to consistent business turnover each year.

Our first goal was to increase labour use efficiency in combination with lowering COP. Over the past three years our COP has reduced by 50% - from 65c to 33c for meat, and \$2.45 to \$1.82 for wool per DSE. Similarly, my wife and I provide around 1.5 labour units. Our DSE/labour unit has reduced from the current 10000DSE from 3500DSE in 2002 under a mixed farming operation.

These results have been achieved through engaging subcontractors for all major flock management activities in combination with ensuring lambing rates continue to be above 100%. High turnover with lower costs has been a winner.

3. Production systems: My wife refers to our new sheep yards as divorce-savers, meaning a bugle design with a dual race has reduced stress on both animals and ourselves. The new yards can handle adult sheep mobs of over a 1000 head with one labour unit quite easily, and has a laneway feeding into the yards, which are centrally located on the property. My wife and I usually muster our 600 acre paddocks on horseback, where sheep are moved into the central laneway within the hour and are then walked at the

mob's pace towards the yards. Upon completion of yard activities, the sheep are able to walk back to their paddock along the laneway at their pace, without great stress. "Talbragar" is hilly country, with changes in elevation of over 250m within the one paddock, so it is essential to consider animal exertion when walking to or from the yards. The current 600acre hill paddocks are being subdivided to assist grazing and mob management, so we expect improvements in animal productivity upon completion of fencing and water points.

Ram selection is based on EBVs in discussion with the stud ram breeder, ewe classer, woolbroker and agent.

4. Enterprise development: The merino ewe breeding flock provides the core DSEs carried on "Talbragar". Fluctuating seasons and feed supply means that DSEs can range from 5000 to 15000 in any year. This is achieved by turning off prime lambs at domestic weights from 6-10 months of age, taking advantage of the more reliable spring pasture feed supply. When pasture growth allows, the DSEs carried are increased through agistment or trade stock (both cattle and sheep). This has provided a flexible business that accomodates seasonal challenges, yet continues to produce a consistent product for the domestic market. Marketing has ranged from direct to processors through to saleyards, however we find the most effective has been through developing a trusted relationship with a stock agent. We may not achieve the highest market price, but we do achieve a consistent price for a consistent article.

New yards and a redeveloped paddock layout including laneway and electric fencing systems have all led to improved OH&S management. In particular, all activities account for minimising stress on animals and labour.

We have referred often to the NSW DPI research projects on genetics and sheep management, adopting the purchase of twining rams.

5. Environmental impacts and benefits: Since 2000, we have utilised the network of Landcare and more recently the central west Catchment Management Authority to assist with the design and financial assistance of our fencing subdivision and new water system. Such assistance has enabled us to adopt management practices at a faster rate than anticipated, enabling our business to reap the benefits. Upon recently completing a new stock water system, enabling us to remove stock from natural waterways, we are now embarking on electric fence subdivision to facilitate rotational grazing management. We have already achieved improved groundcover and feed utilisation with the watering system.

6. Your farming life: A husband and wife team working together in business has challenges yet huge rewards. Incorporating a family of three children, we are able to manage our work load to enjoy family life and pursue our hobbies, in particular horse breeding and sports. Throughout our benchmarking, we have consistently rated in the top

group for holidays - an achievement we have been proud of, although often joke about. My parents are now retired, but retain an active involvement with their grandchildren - a relationship that we all highly value - which is unique to family farm operations.

7. Your international study tour: A visit to Europe to visit the Institute for Grassland and Environmental Research in the UK and UBIFRANCE in France will provide the opportunity to meet researchers and livestock producers on grassland systems.

Admittedly, these environments are in stark contrast to our dryland agriculture, however production systems can be adapted to any business, regardless of the environmental challenges it faces. The concept of identifying opportunities in other systems different to ours will assist our management plans for combining family, production, profit and the environment.