

99/N05



Producer Research Support

Enhanced Prime Lamb Production

Gurrundah Prime Lamb Group



The project

The Gurrundah Prime Lamb Group, comprising prime lamb producers from an area between Gunning and Crookwell in New South Wales, formed because of a collective difficulty finishing lambs to changing market requirements.

Changes in seasons dictate that there is usually only one chance in the year to finish lambs. A good spring followed by a late autumn break with late growth retarded by early frosts, doesn't allow time to finish store lambs before they become hoggets. The presence of OJD, both within the group and on adjacent properties, also impacts enterprise income.

Objectives

1. consistently produce clean, lean lamb of more than 22kg dwt, to export specifications;
2. take a 35kg liveweight lamb to 55kg in 45 to 60 days;
3. learn to produce silage of 16 percent crude protein and 75 percent ME;
4. identify the most suitable feeding regime in this area to achieve these objectives;
5. become familiar with, and use, alternative marketing methods such as forward selling; and
6. realistically assess methods for measuring cost of production.

What was done

Commercial numbers of lambs, at a minimum weight of 35kg, were weighed at the start of the project. The group started comparing chicory and lucerne fed lambs against a control group that were ration fed silage. Group members were also interested in producing high quality silage, because hay production is difficult during a wet spring season.

During the second year of the trial, weather conditions prohibited silage production and additional feed costs to finish lambs were so high that very few group members produced finished lambs.

Group members made private trips to see other lamb operations, including NSW Agriculture's silage research work at Cowra, and John Milton of Independent Lab Services WA.

In the third year, the ration feeding was varied. Lucerne hay grown by one group member was made into chaff on farm, and mixed with triticale, molasses and feed.

The Gurrundah Prime Lamb Group wished to identify an optimal feeding regime to finish lambs, and consistently produce clean, lean lamb of more than 22kg dwt, to export specifications.

Contact details

Stephen Friend
Ashwell
GURRUNDAH 2581 NSW
Tel (02) 4844 3139

Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to \$15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

These activities include:

- Producer Initiated Research and Development
- More Beef from Pastures demonstration trials
- Prime Time Wean More Lambs demonstration trials
- Sustainable and productive grazing grants.

Contact Stephen Feighan - MLA Project Manager, Producer Delivery and Adoption.

Tel (02) 9463 9245 or
sfeighan@mla.com.au

MLA also recommends EDGENetwork

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Meat and Livestock Australia

Level 1, 165 Walker Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
Tel (02) 9463 9333
Fax (02) 9463 9393
Free Phone 1800 023 100 (Australia only)
www.mla.com.au

Discussion

The results of this project were inconclusive. The Gurrundah Prime Lamb Group began this project with ambitious targets. Too many variables were identified, but progress wasn't properly measured and control conditions were not maintained. While group members made significant progress in their individual understanding of enterprise profitability drivers, robust quantitative data was not reported.

The group spent only half the Producer Research Support grant received. The innovative feeding systems developed (feeding silage in continuous Amco troughing and construction of self feeders to handle easy-bridging mixes of chaff and grain) were capital items and therefore outside the project scope.