



PDS: Lotsa Lambs

2nd Workshop – Implementing eID's on farm and improving reproductive success

Since the announcement of mandatory eID's in Australia, sheep producers have been looking for information and options for hassle free implementation of an electronic system on farm. 40 Upper North Farming Systems (UNFS) farmers came together and braved the heat at Caleb Girdham's family property near Melrose to learn more about "Implementing eID's on farm and improving reproductive success". Farmers were treated to a sticky beak at Girdham's containment feeding pen set up, newly built shearing shed and yards as well as a demonstration of the BreedElite autodrafter. A wealth of knowledge and experience was shared throughout the morning amongst participants and with guest presenters Deb Scammell (Talking Livestock), Nathan Scott (Achieve Ag) and Mary Rowe (Zoetis).

Girdham's usually contain pregnant ewes for a couple of months and then release into paddocks just before lambing. The best lambing results are consistently achieved in scrub paddocks with mob size around 100. Caleb says he's happy with lambing results, especially through the drought and he considers containing ewes worth the effort to maintain ewe condition and preserve ground cover on paddocks during a time of feed deficit in the autumn months. Deb Scammell talked through Caleb's containment set up and shared the advice "you can save money on set-up, but it might cost you in labour later so that's something to consider when planning your containment feeding infrastructure".

Good rainfall in late spring/summer in the Upper North has seen feed abundances in paddocks, but Deb still sees containment feeding in 2023 a good fit in mixed farming systems in the region to ensure dry feed and ground cover is retained and to allow pasture to get away prior to lambing. Poor quality hay (low energy and high fibre) due to the lush spring and rain damage at hay making will be an issue this year and needs to be taken into account when feed budgeting. Ewes are likely to need higher quantities of energy dense feed to make up for the energy shortfall. Mycotoxin tests are also worth considering this year to determine if you are likely to have production or reproductive issues.

The advantages to containing pregnant ewes include:

1. Improved ground cover and food on offer in lambing paddocks
2. More effective management of ewes – keeping a closer eye on condition
3. Confidence to hold onto stock during dry periods
4. Can achieve higher stocking rates
5. Improved marking percentages – or maintain %'s rather than experiencing a dip in the dry times

Sheep were drafted using a BreedElite autodrafter as a demonstration for the group. Caleb explained that he purchased this handler because the "system had a lot of potential". He has had 'teething issues' to the point of not using it initially but has recently invested the time to work through setting up the system and inputting data and can now see the potential gains for his business in labour efficiency and improved data-based decision making in the future. Nathan Scott advised that these processes can be complex, and they may not save you time at the start, they will take you more time in the learning and set-up phase, but the benefits will start to be apparent down the track. As mixed farmers we do not use



these operations regularly with cropping being the main priority at certain times of the year so there are two things to consider when choosing a system:

1. Do you like the way it operates?
2. What back up support is provided – look for good reps and back up support – because you WILL be using them!

Nathan reiterated the importance of lead up race design for smooth operation of sheep handlers. The race needs to be as narrow as possible directly behind the drafter and an adjustable option is ideal to change race width when drafting lambs compared with ewes.

Nathan urged livestock producers to think about eID's as 'precision ag for livestock'. He said "you cant improve what you cant measure" and understanding the information is crucial. For instance, recording birth status against ewe hoggets can be very useful because visually we could be classing out our twins as lesser looking animals and potentially reducing fertility of our flock as a result. The data collected and stored for each animal may not be utilised straight away, but down the track when dry conditions hit and feed is tight, we can refer to this data to make informed decisions on which ewes to keep and which to cull, for example holding onto ewes that have been pregnancy scanned with twins 2-3 years running to improve fertility.

Nathan talked through how crucial eID's are in managing biosecurity, especially in the case of a foot and mouth disease outbreak in Australia. He said "it's not just another cost but an investment in our industry".

PDS Lotsa Lambs is not only focussing on containment feeding of pregnant ewes but also lambing multiples in smaller mobs to improve reproduction success in our Upper North flocks. Nathan is a firm believer that mob size is an underestimated factor in lamb survival from his experience as a farmer as well as working with many sheep producers. He says, for singles, mob size doesn't matter too much, but for multiples, it is best to aim for as small a mob size as you can practically achieve, ideally less than 100. The time between the birth of the 1st & 2nd lamb and the 2nd & 3rd lamb is crucial and mob size significantly improves the chance of survival of these multiples.

Lastly, Mary Rowe came to talk about the importance of managing worms in our sheep flocks this season with large worm burdens developing locally due to substantial summer rainfall including the potentially harmful Barber pole worm. Mary emphasised that effective drenching will control a worm burden and also minimise the incidence and impact of drench resistance and listed 6 important principles to consider:

1. Only use drenches that work
2. Only drench when needed
3. Use paddock management to decrease worm risk
4. Use combinations
5. Use short-acting drenches preferentially
6. Rotate drenches

Many workshop attendees took advantage of free feed tests offered on the day for hay, pasture and grain samples. These samples were coordinated by Deb and funded by the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board.

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If you'd like any additional information about future UNFS livestock events, please contact Project Officer - Rachel Trengove, 0438452003, rachel@unfs.com.au

