

The latest news from the Barossa Improved Grazing Group

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The BIGG Bulletin

April 2015

Producer workshop focuses on boosting lamb survival



New South Wales Department of Primary Industries research officer Gordon Refshaug presents to BIGG members at a lamb survival workshop on April 14.



Presenters Jason Trompf and Gordon Refshaug with BIGG technical facilitator Georgie Keynes.

Barossa sheep producers have learnt about farm management practices to improve lamb survival at a workshop in Flaxman Valley.

The workshop, organised by Rural Solutions in conjunction with the Barossa Improved Grazing Group, featured presenters Jason Trompf, J.T. Agri-source, and Gordon Refshaug, New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, and provided

producers with strategies for minimising lamb losses.

Kapunda producer Clyde Hazel and his daughter Sarah were among 28 participants in the workshop.

“While I’m reasonably comfortable with my current lambing performance, I am always interested in reducing lamb losses and improving the welfare of my animals,” Clyde said.

“I’ve found this type of practical workshop to be wonderful in the past, and Sarah has joined me for her professional development; as an agriculture teacher this information is invaluable for her.”

Presenter Jason Trompf said there were steps that producers could take to improve lamb survival.

“The first 48 hours of a lamb’s life are critical. Mismothering and dystocia (difficult births) are the most common causes of lamb losses,” he said.

The workshop presented key management practices to improve survival rates including management of ewe nutrition, genetics, feed on offer and mob size.

“Ewe nutrition is the number one factor to ensure lamb survival. Maintaining a good condition score can reduce birth trauma, mismothering, and improve birthweight, milk production and lamb growth rates,” Dr Trompf said.

The condition score needs to be maintained at CS3 from early pregnancy, and then after scanning at 90 days, single-bearing ewes can be maintained at CS2.8-3, while twin-bearing ewes require CS3.0-3.3.

Feed on offer in lambing paddocks is important. The ewe requires sufficient feed available so she does not have to leave the birth site, which allows for improved bonding with the new born lamb.

Ram and ewe selection can have a significant effect on survival rates. Excessively large lambs or small lambs can result in dystocia or starvation respectively. Where high birthweight issues occur, particularly with maiden ewes, producers should select rams with low Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) for birth weight. Ewes that consistently fail to rear lambs should be culled from the core breeding flock.

Mismothering can be minimised through improving mob management. Smaller mobs can help reduce the risk, with recommended targets of fewer than 200 for twin-bearing ewes and 400-500 for single-bearing ewes. Reducing both mob size and stocking rate gives the lambing ewe more privacy resulting in less disturbances during lambing and

therefore better bonding and improved mothering.

A key strategy Dr Trompf recommends is adequate data collection.

“Lamb marking is an excellent opportunity to collect useful data that can help producers plan their next lambing season,” he said.

“I know everyone is under pressure and often producers struggle to get time to collect data, they’re just flat out marking but my advice is if there’s ever a day in the year that it’s worth getting an extra pair of hands, it is lamb marking day. That way you’re using the opportunity to collect the data you need to maximise lamb survival in the future. Lamb marking day for sheep producers is equivalent to yield mapping for cropping enterprises”

The workshop was sponsored by AWI and SheepConnect.

For more information on lamb survival, visit www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au/

BIGG Investigates Vineyard Grazing



Local vigneron & livestock producer Sue Holt won a Dorper lamb, donated by BIGG member Bruce Hancock, after participating in the survey.



Sheep grazing in Sue Holt's Eden Valley vineyard.

A survey by the Barossa Improved Grazing Group and Barossa Grape & Wine Association has investigated attitudes of growers towards grazing in vineyards.

With funding from Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges, BIGG and BGWA are aiming to understand the barriers to grazing adoption and promote the natural resources management and productivity benefits of the practice.

Eden Valley producer Sue Holt was one of the participants in the survey, and the winner of a lucky draw prize; a Dorper lamb donated by BIGG member Bruce Hancock.

“We’ve been grazing sheep in our vineyard for the past five years. We started putting the sheep in the vineyard to reduce chemical consumption, which has been really successful; we’ve used only one knockdown spray in the past five years. Since we started, we’ve also found that it’s very beneficial for resting other paddocks, and reduces compaction,” she said.

In total 34 grape growers participated in the survey, which found that growers who graze their vineyards for a number of reasons, including weed control, reducing chemical consumption and reducing input costs.

The survey determined that the key success criteria to successfully graze livestock in vineyards included adopting rotational (or crash) grazing, managing the timing of grazing and having good fencing.

The primary reason growers do not graze were the need for new or upgraded fencing, followed by concerns about potential soil compaction and a lack of interest in sheep.

Sue’s key tip for vineyard grazing is careful monitoring.

“We wait until most of the leaves have fallen before letting the sheep in, so that we achieve as much sugar accumulation as possible before the vines go dormant, then take them out either before budburst, or earlier if they’ve eaten all the feed. It’s important to take them out when feed is scarce to stop them chewing on the bark,” she said.

The project will now elaborate on the survey findings with a focus group made up of a cross-section of grower and industry representatives.

NRM techniques on display at annual Hogget Competition



Following a record dry spell through spring and summer, increasing numbers of Barossa producers have been turning to confinement feeding to preserve paddock groundcover and increase NRM outcomes.

The Angaston Agricultural Bureau held its annual Hogget Competition at Keyneton Park on March 26, supported by Natura Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges, with the theme of 'innovations in sheep feeders and trailers'.

After such a dry start to the season, groundcover in pastures has been essential to ensure soil stability when the season breaking rains arrived.

The Bureau showcased the work some of their producers have done in sheep feeding equipment at the Hogget competition last month, to show how simple it is to set up confinement feeding and improve the pasture conditions going into late autumn.

While recent rains may have helped in the short term, with dry spells becoming more and more common, these innovations will become more important in the future.

Keyneton producer Graham Keynes (pictured) was one of those who brought along his feeding trailer to the competition.

"On our property we've set up a dedicated confinement block with troughs, and have been using our feeding trailer to feed while the pastures have been pretty bare over summer.

"This means we can protect the pasture, while ensuring the stock are healthy and getting adequate feed. It's really important to us to ensure there's groundcover in the paddocks so that the top-soil isn't lost in the first big rain," Mr Keynes said.

From the Inbox...

- Autumn [open day at the Barossa Bushgardens](#): 3 May 2015, 10:00, featuring a presentation by BIGG technical facilitator Georgie Keynes.
- Learn about maintaining resilience in the face of challenges at the [Being Happy](#) presentation sponsored by BGWA and the Koonunga Ag Bureau, Saturday 23 May in Tanunda
- [Showcasing Innovation and Technology in Agriculture and NRM](#): DEWNR is hosting workshops in Clare (May 11) and Murray Bridge (May 12)
- The [economic benefits of native shelter belts](#): A valuable report has been put together by the Basalt to Bay Landcare network.

Your BIGG Contacts

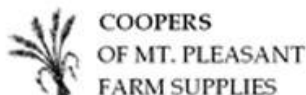
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