

Containment feeding decision to preserve ground cover and regenerate hills.

LOCATION: Keyneton

ANNUAL RAINFALL: 450 mm

FARM SIZE: 1215HA + 1000HA
LEASED

ENTERPRISES: Wool, Lamb, 1st x
ewe production

SOIL TYPE: Loam over clay

Brown family enterprises, Keyneton are a minor site for the MLA Producer demonstration sites (PDS) containment ewe project. Tim and his wife Kelly wanted to trial containment feeding to protect their hills grazing country over summer and autumn and maintain ground cover.

They run 2500 merino ewes on their 1215ha property which is predominately hills grazing along with 1000 ha of leased land.

Enterprise

The Browns run merino ewes of which a portion are joined to merinos for replacement ewes, a portion are joined to border Leicester's to produce first cross ewes which are sold and wethers which are finished in their own feedlot and a portion joined to white Suffolk's for prime lamb production.

Containment feeding decision

Tim and Kelly have a lot of hills grazing and have struggled for feed and ground cover over the last few years. Their hills land and pastures have not recovered since the fires that burnt out their property in 2014 and 2006 and groundcover has been a major issue in the last 2 years of dry seasons. Their hills are predominately nut grass and geranium and they would prefer to destock some areas to allow improvement and pasture recovery.

Tim had been interested in trying to contain some ewes over summer and into autumn to let some of their paddock get away prior to lambing and to allow their hills country to rest. They decided to become a site for the containment ewe project so they could commence containment on a small mob and determine whether it was going to be successful for them.



Tim in his newly built containment lot which he is currently using to wean lambs.

Containment area

180 ewes were contained on a lease block which had a small containment area already fenced off – which was the ideal way for Tim to try containment without putting in new infrastructure. The ewes were contained for 8 weeks from late February to late April where they were moved to their lambing paddocks a week prior to lambing. The ewes which were contained had been joined in lighter than ideal condition and were an average of 1.75 condition score – the aim of containing the ewes was to build them up to a better condition score throughout pregnancy.

Containment ration and cost

The ewes were fed a combination of Oats, barley, and pea grain along with oaten hay, vetch hay and ad-lib pea straw in pens. The total cost per ewe over the 8-week containment period was \$19.76 or \$2.47 per ewe per week. The ewes increased condition score over the 8-week containment period and when they were let out, they averaged 2.97.

Lambing paddocks

The ewes were moved to a small 5-acre paddock to lamb in small mobs of 80 ewes, still with supplementary feed available and have lambed successfully at this stage.

Ewe deaths

There have been some ewe losses (1.6%) one attributed to pulpy kidney and a missed vaccine and two ewes lost to prolapse.

Ease of management

The Browns were surprised at the small cost of adding condition to pregnant ewes in containment and are confident it will be an effective management tool for them going forward. The biggest advantage will be to be able to destock some paddocks and allow pastures to regenerate and groundcover to be maintained over summer and autumn. They have also found the smaller lambing paddocks closer to home easier to manage and are planning to put more of these in. They found it easier to manage ewes in dry starts when the feed has not had time to take off.

The future

The Browns are planning to containment feed more ewes next year and are currently constructing a 4-pen containment area on their home property. They are planning to feed using troughing so different mobs can be fed more accurately and to their energy requirements as they progress through pregnancy. The aim is to allow their hills grazing country to maintain groundcover in drier years and allow pasture regeneration to make the grazing more productive.