# Containment feeding allows ground cover to be maintained and pastures to establish prior to a June / July lambing.

LOCATION: 12 kms N of Nuriootpa

ANNUAL RAINFALL: 460 mm annual average

FARM SIZE: 300 HA

ENTERPRISES: Cropping, wool self replacing Merino flock and wether lambs

SOIL TYPE: Red brown earth

BS and YL Nietschke's Koonunga property is located 12kms north of Nuriootpa. Farmer Brett Nietschke began containment feeding to maintain ground cover and focus on pasture management in the lead up to lambing.

Nietschke's run 400 merino breeding ewes and 200 ewe hoggets on their 300HA property, of which 93% is arable.

**Enterprise**

Brett runs a self-replacing Merino flock, predominantly for wool production. Wether lambs and second draft ewe lambs are on sold.

**Containment feeding decision**

Nietschke's lamb in June and July, by putting ewes in containment Brett is able to take advantage of the break and ideally let lambing pasture get away. Brett's focus is on pasture management, protecting the existing ground cover and ensuring there is some feed on offer in the lambing paddocks. Of the arable country around 30% of Nietschke's land is pastures whilst 70% is cropped. Most cereal crops are grazed early to delay maturity and allow some extra short-term feed for ewes.

<u>Containment area</u>

All of Nietschke's ewes are pregnancy scanned and then moved into containment 6 to 8 weeks prior to lambing. Ewes were also conditioned scored throughout the containment period with twins being held close to the condition score target of 3.3-3.5 and singles slightly lower condition score.

The containment area was set up at very low cost with a 4ha paddock temporarily divided in half for twin and single bearing ewes.

Containment ration

Brett uses lick feeders to feed a ration of grain to the twins and hay is rolled out in the pens. The single bearing ewes are generally fed a ration of hay only which has been adequate with good quality hay available over the last few seasons (however this is dependent on the price of barley at the time).

Lambing paddocks

The ewes were moved out of containment for lambing onto either regenerated pasture (clover/grass) or sown pasture paddocks. The containment period allows the existing pasture to really get away for lambing, unfortunately due to the recent late breaks pasture has taken longer to establish and hasn't always supplied adequate feed on offer. This year the twin ewes were released onto pasture paddocks ranging from 6ha to 15ha, with 50 to 80 head per mob. The singles were released onto a 15ha paddock. Twin ewes still had access to grain and the singles hay as paddock feed wasn't adequate to meet their lambing requirements.

**Brett Nietschke; Koonunga with some of his merino lambs**

Brett recorded 116% lambing (to ewes joined) this season, probably helped by fortunate weather conditions during lambing. Lamb losses were predicted to be attributed more so to mismothering and in turn starvation. Brett also believes that the good lambing percentage were attributed to ideal condition score of the ewes.

Ewe deaths

Brett reported ewe losses of 3% between the start of containment through to lamb marking. All deaths were twin bearing ewes, and therefore Brett thought was probably due to pregnancy toxaemia.

Ease of management

Brett finds containment to be a very worthwhile management practice and sees very few disadvantages. Brett also mentions that he was able more easily maintain condition score until release from containment and has also seen an improvement in lambing percentage this year.

Containment yards made hand feeding more cost effective reducing the feed requirement as ewes aren't wasting energy walking around a paddock.

Brett says that *"after 4 years of using containment to manage ewe nutrition and pasture this will continue to be part of our ongoing practice; the benefits far outweigh the costs".* **The Future**

**Brett's twin bearing ewes in the 2ha containment pen**

**The future**

Going into their 5th year of containment practice next autumn Brett will continue to containment feed all his breeding ewes. The current sheep numbers and infrastructure suit their enterprise and therefore they have no plans to expand at this stage.