

When the yearly rainfall was considerably below average Paul Schutz decided to try containment feeding to manage the pre lambing nutritional requirements of his ewes and maintain the precious ground cover during the drought.

LOCATION: 879 Keller Rd,
Australia Plains. SA

ANNUAL RAINFALL: 325 mm
annual average (however
<200mm was recorded in 2017-
2019 and 2021 recorded
<275mm)

FARM SIZE: 5000 HA

ENTERPRISES: Wool, Self
replacing Merino flock, prime
lamb

SOIL TYPE: variable soil including
Calcareous loam, shallow
limestone.

Schutz Family Trust had a containment site involved in the MLA Producer demonstration sites (PDS) containment ewe project.

Farmer Paul Schutz wanted to trial containment feeding to allow their pasture to take advantage of the opening rains in the lead up to lambing and improve the quality and quantity of feed available.

The Schutz Family run 3000 Merino ewes. The farming land comprising of 4000ha of arable country and 1000ha of native pastures (predominately salt bush and native perennials).

Enterprise

Paul runs Merinos, predominantly for wool production, of which 97% are joined with Merino rams to produce replacement ewes. Whether lambs are grown out and sold when finished. The remaining ewes are joined to produce a first cross prime lamb.

Containment feeding decision

Ultimately drought played a large part in Paul's decision to try containment feeding. After recording much lower-than-average rainfall in recent years, Paul saw containment feeding as a tool to allow them to control ewe nutrition in the lead up to lambing. Drought conditions meant ordinarily adequate pastures struggled to get away if the ewes were grazing pre-lambing.

Containment feeding assisted to retain paddock feed and maintain ground cover during the dry season, however kangaroos still had an impact on ground cover overall. Paul decided to contain 80% of his breeding flock.

Containment timing

Ewes were pregnancy scanned and drafted into single and multiple mobs. 2000 of their 2500 breeding ewes were put into containment, dries were left out and later joined to a terminal ram for prime lamb production.

Ewes are put into containment for the 10-week period prior to lambing in April / May. During this time Paul also aims to improve the condition score of the ewe. Upon entry into containment ewes recorded condition scores of 2.75 for singles and 3.0 for twins which was lifted, with an average of 3.0 condition score recorded across the mobs when ewes were released from containment two weeks prior to lambing.



Farmer: Paul Schutz

Containment pens

Seven containment pens were constructed to allow accurate feeding of ewes based on pregnancy status. The pens are between 1800 and 7600m² and hold mobs of between 300 – 600 ewes. Paul purchased a Taarup mixer second-hand prior to commencing containment feeding as it had the ability to chop hay which allowed him to control nutrition and deliver a correctly formulated ration. Paul can mix all the ingredients (grain and roughage) and feed out in troughs. The Schutz family constructed their own troughs with lift-up lids which means they can feed out multiple days ration at a time in each pen.

Containment ration and cost

Ewes are fed a total mixed ration made up of canola hay, cereal hay, cereal straw, and barley. This ration was formulated over the containment period to ensure nutritional requirements of each ewe were met as they progressed through pregnancy. Ration requirements varied depending on stage of pregnancy and if the ewe was scanned as a twin or single. The average ration cost during their 2021 ewe containment feeding period was 0.45 cents per ewe per day.

Lambing paddocks

Paddock sizes varied from 10-120ha with the multiples being allocated the more sheltered and protected paddock. Due to the late breaks over the last few years, there still wasn't adequate feed in the lambing paddocks to meet ewe energy requirements, so a total mixed ration was provided as a supplement to lambing ewes in the paddock. Lambing went well, recording 106% on ewes joined.



Schutz's own manufactured feed troughs to hold the total mixed ration

that allowing the pasture to get a head start in a dry season was imperative to improve the value of the pasture for lambing.

The Future

Paul plans to continue to containment feed particularly in dry years and plans to use the infrastructure for growing and managing wether lambs outside of the pre-lambing season. Paul plans to put in another 3 containment areas and is looking to increase his ewe numbers in the future.

Paul commented that *"Starting with a 'Lifetime Ewe Management course' will give you a good understanding of ewe nutrition and vital information to manage ration requirements. In the dry seasons this information is valuable"*.

Ease of management

Paul is very positive about the containment feeding concept and felt that there were almost no disadvantages to containment feeding his breeding ewes. He saw the set-up costs as minimal compared to the *"huge benefits"* of preserving the pasture.

Paul noted that in containment he was able to improve the average CS and feeding the containment ration in one area meant a lot less driving to manage ewes. Paul also noted



Schutz's heavy-duty shade across the containment pens – materials purchased and installed themselves.