

Containment feeding decision to manage pre lambing nutritional requirements of the ewes and improve the quality and quantity of pasture.

LOCATION: 15 kms NE of Kapunda

ANNUAL RAINFALL: 450 mm annual average (however less rainfall than the average over the last 3 years)

FARM SIZE: 2900 HA

ENTERPRISES: Wool, first cross ewe hoggets, prime lamb, Merino wethers and self replacing Merino ewes

Twin Creeks Pastoral Company is a site for the MLA Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS) containment ewe project. Farmer Kym Mosey wanted to trial containment feeding so they could have ewes off paddocks prior to and over the break of season. The goal is to improve the quality and quantity of feed available for ewes over lambing.

Twin Creeks runs 3000 merino breeding ewes and 1300 ewe hoggets on their 2900ha property. 1000ha is arable and sown to cereal crops while 1900ha is native pasture grazing.

Enterprise

Kym runs Merinos, predominantly for wool production, of which 1500 are joined with Merino rams to produce replacement ewes and wether lambs. 1500 are joined with Border Leicester rams to produce a prime lamb and first cross ewe hoggets.

Containment feeding decision

Kym mainly wanted to try containment feeding for nutrition control in the lead up to lambing and allow pasture to recover and grow quickly at the beginning of the season. Containment has also allowed them to remove all stock from grazing stubbles and pasture ahead of seeding which made it easier to manage paddocks and the seeding program.

Twin Creeks containment feed 100% of their breeding ewes 2 months prior to lambing. Kym joins in February and March with lambing starting on July 1st. Ewes are pregnancy tested in late April and drafted into twins, singles and ewes are separated if they are scanned to lamb late. Scanning late lambers was an additional management measure put in place as last year, probably due to the high temperatures at joining, 35% were late lambers. By separating ewes into their pregnancy status they have been able to feed ewes according to their requirements.

Kym aimed to improve the condition score of the multiple bearing ewes in the containment period prior to lambing. Ideally Kym would also like to separate the ewes according to their condition score however current numbers of pens and infrastructure don't allow for this yet.

Kym also noted that feeding the ewes in containment reduced the requirement of their normal ration to 80% due their restricted movement compared to supplementary feeding in the paddock.

Containment area

The containment area consists of 7 pens with mobs of 250 put into a 25 x 100m containment pen and mobs of 500 in a 50m x 100m size pen. The containment areas are on gently sloping ground with several large trees for protection (these same pens are used for lambs in summer and provide ample shade). Each pen is equipped with hay feeders and troughs and Kym has invested in cement pads at the feeders and troughs.

Containment ration

The ewes were fed oaten and vetch hay ad lib in feeders and baling string is left on to slow consumption. Four weeks prior to lambing ewes are trough fed either barley or oats (depending on what is available on farm) every second day. The troughs are in a small 10 acres paddocks with a small amount of pick available – and mobs are alternated and fed in the same feed out area.

Kym commented that the 4-week period does require intensive feeding management however he felt the results justify this time investment.

Lambing paddocks

The ewes were moved out of containment for lambing onto either native grass pasture or barley or canola crops (depending on the season). Due to a later lambing, 1st July – 5th August, pasture has had significant growth and no additional supplementary feeding is required. Ewes also have access to mineral lick.

In general twin bearing ewes are put onto the crops. Cropped paddocks are divided into smaller paddocks, around 50 acres, with electric fencing to control grazing. Singles bearing ewes are put on the native pasture paddocks which are around 200ha. Later in the season, prior to weaning, Kym will often trail feed some grain to assist with imprinting of the lambs. 2021 lambing saw a lower-than-expected rate of 105% from ewes joined which Kym attributed to extremely bad weather (July 12th-17th). He saw a larger number of lamb losses straight after lambing and as a result lambing was down 10-12% on average.

Ewe deaths

Kym reported no significant or abnormal losses in ewes during the containment period or prior to and over the lambing period.

Ease of management

Kym says that *“the greatest benefit of the containment method is taking advantage of the early season rain and growing feed in both quantity and quality that you can’t buy”*.

The disadvantages Kym noted related to the labour cost required with a more intensive feeding regime. Sheep are fed three times daily, seven days per week during the four-week period, pre lambing.

The Future

Kym will continue to containment feed 100% of his breeding ewes. Not only does containment allow better nutritional management of the ewes it also takes the stock off the paddocks in time for seeding and as already mentioned allows pasture to get ahead prior to lambing. Ideally Kym would like to build more containment yards to be able to separate the ewes further based on condition score and allow more precise management.

Currently the ewes are contained in mobs of 250 and 500 however Kym plans to have facilities to contain smaller mobs of 100. Kym also noted that the infrastructure he has already built and plans to expand, will not only be used for pre lambing containment but will also benefit his sheep management in many ways throughout the year.

Kym says, *“I encourage anyone to look at what we are doing and give containment feeding a try”* and believes that it gives him *“the best potential results from his sheep”*.



Kym Mosey: Twin Creeks Pastoral Company