COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS: Containment Feeding

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The containment feeding project run by Barossa Improved Grazing Group showed that marking percentage across major sites improved by 12% with the use of containment compared to their pre-containment long term average. This was associated with improved feed on offer in the lambing paddocks but also improved ewe management while ewes were in containment. Containment feeding, allowed more control over the process and more frequent monitoring of the sheep may be a more reliable way to ensure that condition score targets are met. In dry season's labour was also reduced by feeing all ewes in one area.

BACKGROUND

Persistent dry conditions, with later autumn breaks, is having a detrimental impact on pasture production which has seen increased interest in containment feeding from sheep producers in the Barossa region. In partnership with Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Barossa Improved Grazing Group's (BIGG) conducted a Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS) to demonstrate the practices and the outcomes from containment feeding. The PDS observed 3 major sites over three consecutive seasons starting in 2020.

The PDS aimed to demonstrate and assess the use of an on-farm containment area to:

- Maintain annual enterprise stocking rate
- Maintain ground cover
- Increase the reproductive rate
- Maintain condition score of the ewe to increase lamb marking percentage and maintain wool cut.

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

Data from the three major sites has been used to demonstrate a methodology for analysing the financial benefits that might be gained by using containment feeding over summer and autumn for a June lambing merino ewe flock.

Based on the 3 main PDS sites, and an assumed 40% digestibility of pasture from January to April, the marginal cost of containment was $0.74 to $3.70. Under the assumption that the containment fed ewes were 0.5 of a CS better off than had they not been fed, and that containment feeding was going to be a more reliable way to achieve that outcome, the net benefit of the additional CS maintained in ewes from the progeny would therefore be between ~$8 per ewe and ~$5.30 (deduct the additional cost of containment feeding from the net benefit of ewes being 0.5 of a CS better at lambing).

Producers maintained higher ground cover and reported higher individual animal production that had been achieved in previous years.

The economic analysis did not attempt to quantify any additional benefits to pasture persistence or soil preservation that may also accrue from containment.

For further information and detailed analysis, please visit:
www.biggroup.org.au/ewe-containment-areas/

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