

WORKSHOP 1

FARMER CASE STUDY

JOHN KIDMAN

MERINO SHEEP AND HEREFORD CATTLE PENOLA, LOWER SOUTH EAST

ABOUT THE PROPERTY

Location: Penola, South East SA

Size: 1150ha

Enterprise: historically Merino breeders, moving into Hereford cattle. Spring lambing and Spring calving

Soil: mostly sand over clay, with some areas of heavier clay, pH varies between paddocks (4.35 - 7.36 CaCl)

Annual Rainfall: average = 650mm, June '23-June '24 = 250mm



Image: Bureau of Meteorology

"I've been in the game 55 years... About every 12-13 years you get a tough one like last year"

PASTURE MANAGEMENT AND LIVESTOCK SYSTEM

Persistent pasture species: Phalaris and subclover. Historically the subclover was cv Mt Barker. Pastures are continually renovated, each time introducing new clover species to improve diversity and resilience, resulting in a mix in each paddock. Chicory has been introduced in recent years, contributing to spring and summer green growth and filling feed gaps. The farm also runs a pivot irrigation system for lucerne, which is grazed and used for hay and silage production, which is used in a supplement feed mix for growing lambs.



Sandy paddock due for renovation

Key challenges: pasture establishment and balance of pasture composition depending on soil type. In lighter country, Phalaris can be difficult to establish. In contrast, Phalaris can be hard to suppress in the heavier, alkaline soils.



Key assets: Legumes play a crucial role in the pastures, helping to fix nitrogen, provide high protein feed, and generate spring growth. Lucerne, grown under the pivot, is a vital source of protein for livestock, and allows the farm to produce their own feed for more of the year.

Effective pasture rotation, allowing plants to rest and regenerate, has resulted in 'huge' increases in pasture growth, up to 30% in places. This has boosted productivity and profitability.

Managing pasture to maintain ground cover and reduce soil erosion is essential for long-term sustainability.

Phalaris and Chicory on light sandy loam



MANAGING DRY YEARS

John implements several strategies to ensure livestock resilience during dry times. The ability to contain stock is a critical part of their strategy, though the extent of containment feeding depends on the season. This year, they are currently feeding sheep in paddocks and may put cattle into containment, depending on the break in the season. To manage feed supplies they buy in grain to balance energy and protein with farm grown forages. Maize is mixed with lucerne silage when feeding growing lambs in containment and ewes are often supplemented with lupins to increase protein and extract maximum value from dry feed. In normal years, the farm keeps a two-year supply of hay on hand and also grows beans, which are sold and to purchase lupins.

When facing dry conditions, stock are removed from paddocks with insufficient cover. While stock reduction is a consideration, John prefers to feed through the dry period rather than sell stock.

"Basically, just be concerned about your ground cover, you have to look after your ground cover so your soil doesn't move... if you don't flog it, your perennials will still be there, your seed will be there"

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The most significant change has been the shift from a sheep-dominated enterprise to incorporating more cattle. This shift was made to simplify farm management and ease of handling. The introduction of chicory into renovated paddocks has been a success, with chicory providing green growth during the summer and spring, helping to fill feed gaps without becoming overly dominant in the pasture mix.

Going forward, John plans to continue to fine tune current practices, without any major changes. Continued careful grazing management and experimentation with pasture species will continue to improve productivity and resilience.

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