

8x5 Wool Profit Program

Monthly Newsletter – Jan 2003

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CHANGE IN NEWSLETTER FORMAT

This month you will notice a change in format in the 8x5 monthly newsletter. In response to feedback, I have altered the content of the monthly newsletter to now cover several topic areas. Articles will cover short, topical issues that are occurring on-farm at the moment, including the management of pastures and livestock. The newsletter will also feature a recent conference paper that many producers may not have heard about. Finally, we intend keeping you up-to-date with activities of the 8x5 Wool Profit Program.

Previously we have published in the monthly newsletter, lengthy articles of a highly technical nature. It is our intention to continue to produce these articles, they will be available later in the year.

WORM MANAGEMENT ISSUES OVER SUMMER

Producers should consider determining if worm pick-up has occurred since the 1st summer drench. Regularly monitor one or two mobs with a FEC (Faecal Egg Count) test to determine if sheep have picked up worms recently and are contaminating pastures with worm larvae. Wormy mobs that are running on pastures that will be used as important sheep pastures this winter SHOULD BE RE-DRENCHED.

What should be the cut-off on the FEC result to determine whether sheep require drenching in the summer? This question is hotly debated and there is no conclusive answer. Some say 50epg (eggs per gram), others say 200epg. My gut feeling is around 100epg but I tend to include a lot of additional information when making a recommendation on whether to drench.

Monitoring for worms in the summer is a new strategy that producers are using to control internal parasites. By re-drenching mobs that have picked up worms since the 1st summer drench, the producer is reducing the number of worm eggs that will be waiting on that pasture this autumn break. It is the size of the population of worms on the pastures at the start of winter that determine the production losses over winter from worms.

WEANER MANAGEMENT OVER SUMMER

Re-weigh weaners NOW to ensure bodyweight gains are adequate to reduce the potential for weaner deaths. Compare bodyweight measurements to the last series of measurements to determine weight gain or loss. Use this information to guide your decision to supplement.

The 'imprint feeding' that occurred prior to weaning will now pay dividends, as weaners who need protein supplementation come onto the ration. Seek professional advice if greater than 4% deaths from weaning to winter are occurring on your farm.

Imprint feeding refers to the training of weaners to eat grain. The training occurs when lamb-weaners are fed when they are on their mothers just prior to weaning. The ewe mothers train the lamb to eat the grain supplement. This dramatically shortens the time taken to get weaners to eat grain if required over the summer. 3-4 feeds of less than 50 grams per ewe is best over a week, prior to weaning. Make sure

all the ewes come onto the feed. Treat the imprint feeding session as the real thing so the weaners will be familiar with the grain trailer, tute of the horn, etc. Use grain that will be used to supplement weaners over summer.

In my travels around Tasmania in the past month, it is clear that there are many regimes for the management of weaners over summer. When I have asked, many people regard weaner death rates over summer (often over 10%) as par for the course. The success of the DPIWE's Weaner Watch program several years ago tells me that weaner management is important, therefore sheep producers need to revisit many of the messages from the Weaner Watch program.

CONFERENCE PAPER FEATURE – ROTATIONAL VERSUS SET STOCKING

The following abstract outlines the results of a large trial examining grazing management strategies. The conference was the Inaugural Wool Industry Science & Technology Conference in Hamilton, Victoria 2002, sponsored by AUSTRALIAN WOOL INNOVATION limited. If you would like a full copy of the paper, please e-mail me.

Effects of Grazing Method and Soil Fertility and Stocking Rate and Wool Production

L.K. Warn, H.R. Frame and G.R. McLarty

Department of Natural Resources and Environment, PO Box 879, Seymour, VIC 3660

lisa.warn@nre.vic.gov.au

Summary

An experiment at Broadford, Victoria, compared two rotational grazing systems (an "intensive" plant-based rotation and a "simple" time-based rotation) to continuous grazing (set stocking) under two rates of phosphorus fertiliser application (High P and Low P). The higher rate of fertiliser allowed stocking rates to be increased by 18% to 45%. Further increases were achieved from changing from continuous grazing to rotational grazing. The intensive rotation allowed up to 17% to 21% more stock to be carried under High P and Low P conditions, without compromising per head production. The simple rotation allowed up to a 10% increase in stocking rate, compared to continuous grazing, but only under High P conditions. There was some evidence to suggest that the High P/simple rotation may have had a rationing effect on stock in autumn, leading to lower staple strength. In general, wool cut per head and wool-quality parameters were not significantly different across grazing systems or fertiliser levels. The highest stocking rates were obtained from the combination of higher soil fertility (Olsen P of 15 mg/g) and the intensive rotation, where the rest period was based on phalaris recovery to the 4-leaf stage rather than a fixed time. The treatment allowed 21 wethers/ha to be carried and produced over 100kg greasy wool/ha. The results highlight that, to obtain optimum stocking rate benefits from a rotation, the rotation interval, or "rest", should be flexible and based on plant-growth criteria, not time-based recipes.

Introduction

Under continuous grazing (set stocking), wool and meat producers have demonstrated that large increases in stocking rate are possible through increased fertiliser use and improved pasture utilisation (GSV 1998). However, with the combination of high soil fertility, high utilisation and continuous grazing, pastures tend to become clover-dominant. This, in turn, leads to excessive bare ground by midsummer, causing concern by producers about the sustainability of their grazing system. Rotational grazing was seen as a way of maintaining a higher grass content in the pasture, improving the persistence of any sown perennial grasses and improving ground cover. Producers were not confident that they would get an animal-production/economic benefit from adopting rotational grazing nor were they confident that there was any benefit in going beyond a relatively simple time-based rotation with a few paddocks. Earlier research on time-based rotational grazing had concluded that there was no animal production benefit from the practice (Morley *et al.* 1969). Work by Fulkerson *et al.* (1993) on perennial ryegrass indicated that there were greater pasture growth benefits from a rotation when it was based on plant-growth criteria rather than fixed times. For perennial ryegrass, this meant grazing when plants had regrown to the 3-leaf stage. There have been no controlled comparisons made of continuous grazing with a time-based rotation and a plant-criteria-based rotation. This research was initiated in

