

Curries – Sheltering their lamb income

Tim and Richard Currie, manage “Lyndoch Park” north of Casterton in South West Victoria.

They run a self replacing Multi Meat Flock where lamb survival and marking percentages are important profit drivers. They successfully established grass hedgerows at farm scale to protect lambing ewes.

The Multi Meat composite ewes contain the Booroola gene which can achieve scanning percentages of 200%. The challenge is to increase the survival of the many twins and triplets.

Lambing mid June has benefits but can also present risks associated with poor lambing weather and a lack of quality feed.

Modelling work conducted at Hamilton EverGraze Proof Site utilised long term weather records to illustrate trends in the level of chill (combination of wind, rain and temperature) causing heat loss exposure to new born lambs. On average, 10-13 days of each month between June and September are high risk for lamb mortality.

On the Hamilton EverGraze Proof Site, grass hedges were established to provide lambing nurseries in order to reduce wind speed and increase lamb survival.

Westerly winds were most dominant on the most inclement days, so the hedge rows were established north to south. These hedges increased lamb survival by 30%.

The Currie's were looking to provide both shelter and high quality feed to their multiple bearing ewes and saw the results from the Proof Site. “It was just a matter of establishing these hedges at a farm scale”.

Establishment

Tim and Richard established 110ha of autumn and spring sown grass hedges as part of the pasture renovation program in 2010.

Phalaris and sub clover was sown in Autumn in 10, 20 and 30 metre bays with 1.5 metre strips being left for hedges between the bays.

The drill was blocked to 1.5 metres and grass hedges were sown into the strips at 10kg/ha.

The autumn sown hedges were set up along the contour of the slopes to prevent runoff and erosion. This meant they didn't specifically block the westerly winds.

Spring sown hedges were sown on a flat paddock allowing the hedges to be established running north to south. The pasture in the bays consisted of lucerne, phalaris and chicory.

Impact

Ewes were scanned and those carrying twins were put into the phalaris and sub clover paddock with hedges stocked at 5.2 ewes/ha (roughly 22 DSE).

The ewes preferentially grazed the phalaris and sub clover pasture and usually left the hedges alone.

The remaining twin bearing mobs were run at 18-25 DSE/ha on the most sheltered paddocks.

Marking percentages in the hedge rows were 159% compared to 157% in twin bearing mobs in unsheltered paddocks.

This is not significant but we think there are a number of reasons;

- Mild lambing conditions this year 2011 in June/July,
- Hedges were only a year old and not fully developed,
- There was a considerable amount of dry feed in the control paddock which would have also given protection.

EverGraze Supporting Site

Producer: Tim and Richard Currie

Location: “Lyndoch Park”,
Casterton, Victoria

Enterprise: sheep, cattle and cropping

Pastures: Phalaris and sub clover with some lucerne



Autumn sown grass hedge – phalaris and sub clover in the bays (Nov 2011). Inset: Tim Currie

Considerations

Sheep tend to leave the hedges alone as long as the feed between the rows is of high quality and there is an alternative source of roughage.

Autumn sown hedges need at least the first spring to go to head. Spring sown hedges need two years before providing good shelter from wind.

The hedges need to be sown at least 1.5 metres wide otherwise they seem to be out-competed by the sub clover and phalaris.

Nitrogen should be applied in spring when hedges are actively growing.

For further information see the EverGraze Action – Perennial grass hedges provide shelter at lambing. www.evergraze.com.au/fact-sheets



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