

## Opportunity presented profits at Mooneys Gap

**Although the wet summer conditions of 2010/11 caused many headaches for farmers in the Ararat district of western Victoria, it also created an opportunity for a windfall profit for Rod & Bernadette Vearing.**

"We purchased our property at Mooneys Gap in 2000. It is host to an EverGraze Supporting Site conducted by the Perennial Pasture Systems (PPS) group. The site has two paddocks which are sown with lucerne and Holdfast GT phalaris respectively.

### Lucerne and phalaris making the best of a wet spring/summer

The paddocks produced spectacular growth through the wet spring and summer, with the phalaris being rotationally grazed and the lucerne cut for hay. A first cut was undertaken but was severely rain damaged. The spoilt hay was baled to remove residue.

The lucerne was grazed prior to a second cut for hay in late February. It yielded 116 round bales (3.1 tonnes/ha). The lucerne was returned to the grazing rotation when the regrowth allowed.

### Confidence to take the opportunity

We had 280 white suffolk/merino lambs left from our 2011 drop of 1500, which were too light to sell to the trade. Normally these would be sold as stores to a lamb finisher.

We were confident that the EverGraze paddocks would continue to produce enough feed to finish the lambs, so we decided to keep them on.

The paddocks were grazed by the 280 lambs plus 120 first-cross ewes (15 DSE/ha). When it became apparent that even with below average autumn

rains, we would be able to finish the lambs, we locked into contract at the high prices that were available in early 2011 - (640 c/kg) for a July delivery.

This proved to be around \$1/kg better than the spot price at delivery, so the EverGraze paddocks have again proven their value.

In fact the phalaris and lucerne may have worked too well as 94 of the lambs weighed outside of the 26kg contract price and were discounted for being too heavy. This is another issue of managing these high production pastures that we will need to take account of in the future.

### Learning from Peers

I joined PPS when it was formed by a group of farmers in the upper Wimmera in 2007. It has changed my outlook on farm management. I used to be reluctant to discuss pasture issues with leading farmers in our area as their pasture management seemed superior to mine, but I soon found out that the PPS group was pushing to further everyone's knowledge and became confident in planning pasture improvement on our farm.

*The lambs on the EverGraze phalaris site in March 2011*



### EverGraze Supporting Site

**Producer:** Rod and Bernadette Vearing

**Location:** Mooneys Gap, Ararat, Victoria

**Property size:** 1000 ha

**Enterprise:** fine wool Merinos,  
1st cross ewes for lamb production.



*Rod Vearing (right) with the EverGraze team*

When we were asked to host the EverGraze Supporting Site at Mooneys Gap, there was no looking back. We have had great support from the site coordinator and PPS project manager, Rob Shea, as well as PPS executive member, Paul Harrington, who provides advice on the site's management. They have been joined by Cam Conboy from Gorst Rural (ex Seedmark) who provides honorary agronomic advice. We all learn something extra each time Cam inspects the site.

### Putting learning into practice

We are currently replicating the EverGraze Supporting Site with an adjoining paddock sown with Holdfast GT phalaris and another paddock in crop in preparation for lucerne establishment in 2012."

The site is an EverGraze Supporting Site and an MLA Producer Demonstration Site. It is supported by Caring for Our Country funding (via Central Highlands Agribusiness Forum).



Further information can be found on the EverGraze website [www.evergraze.com.au](http://www.evergraze.com.au)

**contact**

**Rob Shea**

**P:** 0438 521 357

**E:** [yadin@netconnect.com.au](mailto:yadin@netconnect.com.au)