

BestWool/BestLamb – Measure to manage

Creightons Creek Group, October 2020



Picture: Bent grass trial site at Rob Jamiesons 2020

Coordinator – Jim Shovelton

Group – Creightons Creek

- Strathbogie, Ruffy

Enterprise mix

- Prime lamb and wool, mixed farming

Measure to manage

Eight years ago, when Peter Righetti purchased his property and moved to the area, he approached his local extension officer looking for a discussion group to join to help facilitate his transition from beef cattle to sheep. He has now been a member of the Creightons Creek Group for three years.

“There is so much knowledge, so much experience in the group,” Peter said. “When we meet, suggestions and ideas are forthcoming drawing from other members’ experiences and knowledge, and these opinions allow an informed decision to be made on farm,” he said.

Recently, the group did some climate modelling, assessing the historical weather patterns and comparing them to more recent years. It showed a reduction in the growing season by a number of weeks, primarily in the autumn.

Like many areas the delay in the autumn break put pressure on ewes at the point of lambing. This led to increased supplementary feeding in most years, increased disturbance at lambing and put pressure on the maternal bonds in his Merino and first cross flocks.

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The evaluation of the long-term climate data has been used by Peter and other members to understand their current climate and adjust their lambing periods from late autumn to early winter.

Moving to a later lambing has resulted in more feed-on-offer available to the ewes. Now the focus is on the implementation of shelter, given their exposed position on the Strathbogie Plateau.

Group members were successful in obtaining grants through Agriculture Victoria's Dry Seasonal Conditions program (2019), allowing them to purchase fencing equipment to reduce the size of their paddocks or fence out shelterbelts, which is producing "very good outcomes" according to Peter.

On-farm trials

In the past the group has done many on-farm trials including the application of fertiliser, conventional lime versus pelletised lime, acid tolerant pasture species and the use of Gibberellic Acid.

Group member David Jamieson, who has hosted previous demonstrations said "the group had a measure to manage focus, allowing them to investigate different methods in a consistent and replicable manner under Jim's guidance."

The outcomes and learnings from these specific on-farm trials is a key feature of the group, allowing members to make informed decisions on their farms based on locally gained knowledge.

David highlighted that the analysis of the performance of acid tolerant grass species trialled on his property, has guided his decision on what to sow in his current renovation schedule. The groups 'measure-to-manage' philosophy is highly valued by its members.

Currently, a small-scale trial on bent grass control is being conducted on group member Rob Jamieson's property. Bent grass control programs are highly developed for the Ballarat region in Victoria but results are not as defined in other areas. With the increasing invasion of bent grass into their area, it is becoming an issue for some members of the Creightons Creek BestWool/BestLamb group.

The trial will investigate the timing of spray applications and their effect on the substantial root mass of bent grass. Rob has been increasingly concerned about the infiltration of bent grass into his native grass pastures over the years and thought it was "a good year to have a go at it" on his farm. Therefore, in consultation with Jim, they devised a trial plot; Rob has chosen a paddock that he is concerned about, and the plan was to spray a single rate of Glyphosate at weekly intervals for four weeks beginning in mid-October. The sprayed areas will be marked and revisited during and after the trial.

Photos will be taken before and during the trial and Rob intends to dig up patches of the sprayed and non-sprayed grass to see if the spray has had any effect on the plant's root system. This breakdown of the root system will provide a space for more desirable species of grass.

The results will be shared at a group meeting later in the year, as the development of a best-practice spraying regime for the region will be of benefit to other members.