

SUMMER FEEDING

Stubbles and lupins: With the huge mass of stubbles and dry matter available for sheep it is important to try and utilise this feed resource as best as possible. What sometimes happens is that upon seeing the mass of feed we tend to put the sheep in the paddock and think that there is adequate feed for the sheep. Now if there is adequate grain on the ground this may be so however what we can't see is the quality of the stubble. So supplement, lupins are easiest and safest!

What's really happening-

- An adult 50 kg sheep needs approximately 8MJ of energy per day and 6% protein in their diet to maintain their body weight.
- Sheep eat 3% of body weight if have appropriate protein (6% Adult, 15% Weaners) in diet.
- If % protein falls below this then the sheep's intake is limited. Without adequate protein, the rumen bugs are not able to process the 3% of body weight, thus sheep intake might reduce to 1.5% of bodyweight. For a 50 kg animal this would equate to:
 - $50\text{kg} \times 3\% = 1.5\text{ kg}$
 - $50\text{kg} \times 1.5\% = 0.75\text{ Kg}$

So, the sheep might be in a paddock that has adequate energy if they were eating 3%, however at 1.5% of bodyweight they are losing weight or "melting in the paddock".

This is where the lupins come into it! High in energy and very, very high in protein: 13MJ and 30% protein respectively. So through feeding a low ration of lupins through summer, the protein % of the sheep's diet is increased to a level where they are able to digest and in effect "unlock" the stubbles energy. 1-1.5 kg per head per week is a good starting point.

It should be noted that purchased lupins can contain, radish, and other weeds. There are also other alternative sources of protein, such as adding urea to cereals. This can be done through making your own mix or using a product such as Alkapellets. **Please contact a nutritionist such as Adrian Baker (contact AgPro for details) before making your own urea grain mix as getting the mix wrong or introducing too much too soon can kill livestock.**

Shy Feeders

For paddock feeding the most important thing and one that will yield the best return is to draft up the mob of sheep being fed and take the tail off the mob. These are the disadvantaged sheep in any mob which tend to be bullied away from the feed. They stand out in the mob and feeding tends to be done to their requirement. In reality all that will happen is that the fat get fatter and the sheep you are trying to alter at best stay the same or usually get worse.

What % should be taken off? Feeding should be done to the average condition score of the mob. Lets say you wish to keep the mob at Condition Score (C.S) 2.5. At that average condition there will be 17% at CS 2 or below. These are the sheep to treat separately. Possibly feeding for an average score of 3.0 there will be that % at 2.5 or below and probably slipping so again worth removing and treating separately. You can then give them a slightly better paddock or more feed but because they are out of the mob they will tend to improve anyway even at the same level of feeding. Repeat the

process at least once over the feeding period. At that time some of the poor mob will have done so well that they can be returned to the main mob.

Other feeding pointers

- Weaners: are growing, not just maintaining! So require a higher % of protein (15%) in their diet. Many get caught out feeding low rates of cereals, which top up the energy provided from the dry feed but unfortunately might not have the required protein content. The Key message is: if the protein is limiting then the energy is limited, regardless of how much feed they are getting fed.
- Feed cereals no less frequently than 2-3 days. (Lupins can be less frequent)
- Do not feed worms-do a test especially for young sheep as there are frequently very few worms over summer in adults. For those with summer rain, keep an eye out! Worm counts and condition scoring.
- Condition score frequently. 25 sheep out of the mob-hands on is recommended and remember CS cannot be judged from the Ute especially passing at speed.
- Have adequate minerals, calcium for ewes, weaners: selenium sometimes and vitamin E.
- Apply a similar level of skill to feeding sheep as you do to feeding and spraying crops. The results will be equally good if not better financially.
- Following are some titles of excellent publications with information on Feeding Sheep - from how to design a ration and a feedlot, to the energy in different feedstuffs. They can be found on the DPIRD web site or in some department offices:
 - Feeding and Managing Sheep in Dry Times
 - The Good Food Guide for Sheep

Water

Water quite often plays second fiddle to nutrition when considering a sheep's requirements; a lot of the time the question is: do they have water? Is it ok? However much like nutrition, as the value of sheep & wool increases, do we need to start looking beyond 'ok' and look at how average water quantity & quality might be limiting sheep production? To put this in perspective I guess it's similar to crop, once more is invested in machinery, fertiliser etc. it can become an endless chase to find what else is limiting yield, as to get the best bang for the money you've already sunk. Likewise, as sheep values increase and more is invested in improving sheep condition, it would be a waste to have this stripped off or limited it by sheep not drinking enough, due to supply or water quality issues limiting feed consumption and feed conversion.

To illustrate this here are some cases ranging in extremes from previous Summer / Autumn

1. Dam water not checked properly (cursory look) before weaners entered paddock, checked 2 days later and 50 dead from blue green algae toxicity.

2. Ewes being fed pre-shearing and troughs visually seemed ok. Mustering sheep for shearing there is a noticeable tail, post shearing, sheep can be observed to have lost ½ condition score (4 kgs). On closer inspection, the troughs' flow rate was not giving the ewes the 4 litres a day required. Cost per head to get weight back approx. \$15, rams went in day after shearing, so impact on lamb potential? Big I'd suggest.

3. A large mob of weaners on a fodder crop, gaining weight then levelling off. With unlimited lupins & they should be booming. Did the right thing and got water tested but nothing was picked up, however the water was dirty & rank. The lambs chose to drink what was required to live, however not enough to make them thrive and growth rates were sacrificed.

4. Weaners failing to thrive when feed and water plentiful, however following high winds a film of dust was quickly covering the top of the trough, again limiting intake. Lambs & weaners struggle with new things- "neophobia". Much like with new feeds such as lupins or oats, it takes time for them adapt to dust or debris on water, or water that smells differently, whereas adults are more likely to get on with it.

Most dams have become low, so salt, silt and algae are concentrated in the bottom dregs. It is worth checking dams and making sure that your young sheep have the best available water supply on the farm. See our water guide: [Water, Salinity & Desals](#)

Budgeting Carrying Capacity

People seem to be doing this more and more, and preparing earlier than usual, which is great to see. A proactive approach rather than reactive.

With limited water and feed, if you haven't already it's important to assess how many stock are going to run through summer/ autumn. This is not only for the farms sake but also for feed budgeting purposes as once the sheep have selected the better quality feed it is a large feed gap to be made up with grain - up to half a kg of lupins per head per day just to maintain condition!

Good luck and please don't hesitate to contact me for further information.

Edward Riggall