



DOHNE

Solutions

Flock recovery and re-build post drought

At the time of writing, January 2019, much of the inland grazing area of Eastern Australia is still in the grip of severe drought.

It will rain!

Principles outlined in this article will apply following future droughts.

Strategic planning for the most rapid, cost effective and sustainable rebuilding of sheep flocks is best done before the drought breaking rains come.

Strategic planning is the opposite of impulsive, knee-jerk reactions.

Rapid Rebuild

A flock is in the best position for rapid rebuild and recovery if it has good availability of two factors.

1. Do-ability
2. Fertility

Both are linked.

Do-ability is the genetic robustness of an animal to maintain body condition under poor nutrition availability, and the return to peak condition quickly when food sources are more plentiful.

Fertility is highly linked to do-ability and condition scores, and combined with fecundity, (litter size), rearing or mothering ability and maternal milk supply, ensures that the maximum weight of weaned replacements becomes possible.

Dohnes are renowned for both these traits; however, the evidence has, until now, largely been anecdotal.

At Glen Holme Dohne Stud, we hold strong beliefs in a number of principles including: -

Environmental testing under high pressure

Genetic evaluation and benchmarking

Robust testing under Harsh Environmental Conditions

At our Glen Holme property at Manoora in South Australia, whilst we notionally have a mild, Mediterranean climate, we frequently experience three harsh seasons out of the four each year.

- a. Summers are hot and dry with daytime temperatures up to 44 degrees Celsius.
- b. Autumn is difficult due to low feed supply. Annual species matured in the previous spring and there is little or no growth of feed. Ewes are in late pregnancy.

- c. Winters can be cold, dark and wet with little solid feed available. Cold misty days without direct sunlight produce very little vegetative growth.

Over Spring and Summer, thunderstorms can bring heavy, warm rains and set up high pressure for flystrike. We use these weather events for Genetic screening of susceptibility to body strike.

Results: Enhanced fertility.

The Merino Lifetime Productivity evaluation is a huge project across five sites in three states using 135 sires. The ewe progeny will be measured and evaluated along with all their progeny for their productive lifetime. An economic analysis will follow.

Glen Holme have provided the only Dohne Ram in this entire project. Through linked sires, he will be evaluated against the other 134 rams, both Poll Merinos and Merinos. Glen Holme 141077 has been used in the 2016 drop at the Balmoral site in Victoria.

The last published results from the 2016-drop Balmoral MLP project showed our ram a clear leader for condition scores, body weights and genetic fat. All these are important contributors to fertility. The count of foetuses in the maiden ewes that were due to lamb in 2018 show that the Glen Holme sire 141077 to be 10% clear of the nearest ram, and up to 40% ahead of the poorest ones.

This has clear implications for the rebuilding of flocks after drought!

Firstly, ewe condition score determines how quickly a ewe returns to pregnancy **and** the number of lambs she can successfully raise.

Secondly, genetic fertility is a permanent inclusion in a flock; it has ongoing benefits over many female generations.

Rationale

There is now solid documented evidence of the availability of the Glen Holme Dohnes to provide the best option for wool growing flocks to rebuild and recover from low ewe numbers post drought.

Wool quality has been a distinguishing feature of our flock for some time now, and any analysis of data will provide evidence of the productive capability of our sheep.

Recovery

Recovery to profitability following drought-breaking rains will best be achieved through highly productive, fertile, robust genetics.