

producer case studies

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Queensland: Don Perkins (wool)

Queensland producer Don Perkins has been breeding and growing sheep all his life and despite the challenges of the seasons he regards himself as a “true believer” in the Merino’s capacity to provide a good income.

Mr Perkins and his wife Belinda’s property, the 8100 hectare “Nelyambo”, 40 km north of the NSW and Queensland border near Dirranbandi is a mixed operation - some cattle and 405ha of farming country – but it is his 20-micron Merino flock that is the economic engine of the enterprise.

“We enjoy sheep breeding and wool growing and find sheep are suited to a majority of our country and provide a competitive return in most years,” Mr Perkins said.

At “Nelyambo”, Mr Perkins said an important development program was to turn woody vegetation into grass, providing a sound nutrition base for his sheep.

Another key management decision was not to “get married to the flock”. The drought in 2002 dried up all their stock water supplies and forced him to quit almost all of his sheep. The decision to sell almost all of the sheep was a difficult one; the loss of his selection and classing work over a number of years was tough. After rain in 2003 Mr Perkins bought in three mobs of sheep to rebuild numbers.

“By 2006 we had one of our better wool clips which indicated that by using quality genetics and the ‘evening up’ effect of the environment that we were not too far behind,” Mr Perkins said.

The stock water situation has been remedied since the 2002 drought with the installation of a shared bore.

With last year one of the driest years on the property, nutrition management produced a great result with a strong lambing from his flock.

“We had 115 per cent lambing from our scanned ewes and we only got a break three-parts of the way through lambing,” Mr Perkins said. “We had been feeding the ewes up until then.”

During 2006 the breeding ewes were fed “right the way through” and with indications of a dry year in early 2007, a decision was made not to join. However rain after May shearing (bought forward a month because of the dry) and indications more rain would follow from the weather forecasters, gave Mr Perkins the confidence to put the rams out for a short five-week joining.

“At the beginning of November we were feeding everything, six weeks later we had 300mm (12 inches) of rain; I’ve seldom seen it as good,” Mr Perkins said.

Mr Perkins will be a guest speaker at the Queensland launch of Making More From Sheep at Goondiwindi on February 20.

Mr Perkins says *Making More From sheep – A sheep producer’s manual* is a great starting point for on-farm improvement and its format and content is appropriate for sheep and wool producers at different levels.

He said the different modules in the manual also pointed to other resources that could assist producers make a financial comeback after the drought. Some of the options available include using genetics to improve flock quality, nutrition to improve lambing and weaning percentages and pasture improvement.

The manual has been developed by harnessing the combined experience of almost 250 leading sheep and wool producers and technical experts.

Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer’s manual costs \$65 (ex GST) and can be ordered from the AWI helpline 1800 070 099 or the MLA membership line on 1800 675 717 or on the program website www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au. Information on Making More From Sheep activities, forums and workshops can also be found on the website or by contacting the helplines.