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ASHEEP & BEEF Quarterly

Case study: Reducing bull breakdown

ASHEEP & BEEF interviews Simon Fowler, Chilwell Farms

Simon Fowler (Chilwell Farms) is the lead producer of ASHEEP & BEEF's 'Preventing Bull Preputial Breakdown by Vaccination' – a Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project funded by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and facilitated by Dr Enoch Bergman (Swans Veterinary Services). As the PDS closes out its final year, ASHEEP & BEEF caught up with Simon to learn about the project's impact at Chilwell. Our thanks to Simon for his time giving the following interview.

Project background

The PDS has run over three years (2023 – 2025) and aimed to:

- demonstrate that a commercial Bovine Herpesvirus vaccine (either Rhinogard or Bovilis MH + IBR) prior to mating can reduce the incidence and severity of Bovine Balanoposthitis and hence bull wastage in virgin British bred bulls
- establish a baseline incidence of the syndrome and produce statistics useful to estimate both the cost of the syndrome to Esperance producers and the return on investment of vaccination.

Enoch has recently collated the final season of data and has been interviewing producers in the Esperance region about the 2025 breeding season. Results are again showing a reduction in the incidence of preputial breakdown in bulls vaccinated on individual farms. Final results, including cost benefit analysis, will be published in early 2026.

[Continued over page].

Image: Cattle yarded at Chilwell. Image credit David Riggs (Riggs Australia).

Highlights

What is Bovine Balanoposthitis?

Infectious Balanoposthitis (IBP) is a condition caused by a herpesvirus in cattle. It leads to ulcerative inflammation of the penis and prepuce of bulls and of the vulva of cows. Like all herpesviruses, infection is permanent, often becoming dormant and may later reactivate when animals are under stress. Virgin bulls can become infected during the joining process when working with other older bulls or merely by being in contact with infected cows. (Find out more about the condition via the guide on page 4).

Chilwell Farms overview

Chilwell Farms is owned and managed by Simon and Robyn Fowler, and Andrew and Marie Fowler.

"Andrew runs the cropping enterprises, and I run the livestock operation with seven fulltime stock team members," said Simon. "Livestock form an important part of our mixed farming operation and we focus on the synergies between livestock and cropping to improve the whole farm profitability."

"We use Angus bulls purchased mainly from Ken MacLeay's Blackrock Angus Stud in Vasse and also purchase a few local bulls from Andrew Kuss's Allegria Park Stud. They are both very good people to deal with and their stock's genetics are well suited to the grass finishing program that we have for our steers."

Farm Snapshot

Farm name: Chilwell Farms

Farm area: Condingup, 50,000ha, mix of owned and leased

Enterprise mix: 38,000 ha cropping (canola/wheat/barley), 12,000 ha pasture

Average annual rainfall: 600mm (coast) to 350 (north)

Annual rainfall to date 2025: 500mm

Typical rotation: Pasture/canola/wheat

Soil: Largely duplex sand over clays with some heavy clay on the coast

Sheep: 28,000 Merino ewes, 2000 UltraWhite ewes

Cattle: 2000 Angus cows

Bulls: 80

"Generally, we purchase about 25 bulls each year and the new bulls are initially used to back up our fixed time AI [artificial insemination] program on 500 heifers. They are then used in the cow herd to replace any injured bulls or improve the joining ratios."

Bull breakdown experiences prior to vaccinating

"Before we started our bull vaccination program, virgin bull breakdown was a large issue. We were seeing up to 50% of our first-year bulls suffering penile breakdown within the first three weeks of joining. This was having a large financial impact to both the cost of the bull and the cost of lower pregnancy rates in the cows. It was also a large disincentive to spend money on superior bull genetics as the risk of breakdown was too high.

"The other factor influencing our bull herd was losing large amounts of bulls to corkscrewing penises when we jump tested them. This has dramatically reduced since we started vaccinating from as many as 15 bulls out of 80, to about 4 bulls.

"Previously, we thought that preputial breakdown was caused by physical damage from fighting and accidents. We are now very confident that a large amount of the issues are caused by the bulls contracting bovine herpesvirus whilst working. Testing during the PDS has shown that the few bulls that do breakdown are positive."

Above left: Dr Enoch Bergman vaccinating a bull. Right: Two bulls that were identified with preputial damage this season.

Above: Close ups of the preputial damage of the bulls on the previous page.

Vaccination program

"Vaccination is only done on bulls before their first joining, as we rarely see any preputial breakdown after the first year. Current available vaccinations are Rhinogard or Bovilis MH + IBR. We have used both vaccines in the past and don't have a preference as they both seem effective."

"We include the vaccination with our standard pre-joining protocols, so it is easy to manage."

Vaccination results

"Since starting vaccinating, we have seen a large reduction in penile breakdown in young bulls and corkscrewing in older bulls. We are still getting a small number of penile breakdowns but no big disasters like in previous years.

"Now that we are aware of the issue, we remove any bulls showing signs of injury or swelling from the joining process to allow them to recover. This year, two bulls out of the four impacted seem to have recovered fully."

Why was running a PDS on the issue important?

"I think this PDS project was important to run because it gave us the opportunity to gather important information and put some science behind what we thought was happening in the field. We have now proved that vaccination for bovine herpesvirus does reduce the amount of preputial breakdown in virgin bulls, this gives local producers the knowledge they need to develop the best pre-joining protocols for their bull herd and the confidence to invest in better bull genetics.

"Through this PDS I have learned that the bulls that are showing early signs of penile damage can be saved if they are removed from joining and allowed to recover. This has a far better animal welfare outcome for the bull and a better financial outcome for the enterprise.

"MLA's PDS program is a great tool for grower groups to gather information and share best practice. Practical on-farm demonstrations and trials are always the best way for farmers to learn and share information. I personally enjoy being involved in PDS sites and get great value from seeing how other enterprises manage the issues that we all face."

Simon's top 3 tips for producers considering vaccination to prevent bull preputial breakdown:

1. *Vaccinate all virgin bulls at the correct time.*
2. *Monitor joining and remove bulls showing damage.*
3. *Jump test bulls yearly to ensure that mild infections haven't led to permanent damage.*

Above: Simon Fowler with veterinarians Reuben Welke and Enoch Bergman. Thanks to David Riggs for the images in this article.

Producer guide: Infectious balanoposthitis of bulls

Dr Enoch Bergman, Swans Veterinary Services

Infectious Balanoposthitis (IBP) is a condition caused by a herpesvirus in cattle. It leads to ulcerative inflammation of the penis and prepuce of bulls and of the vulva of cows. Like all herpesviruses, infection is permanent, often becoming dormant and may later reactivate when animals are under stress. Virgin bulls can become infected during the joining process when working with other older bulls or merely by being in contact with infected cows.

Figure 1: Bull penis with severe case of IBP.

The 2023-2025 ASHEEP & BEEF delivered Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project "Preventing Bull Preputial Breakdown by Vaccination", in the Esperance region of WA, funded by Meat & Livestock Australia and facilitated by Swans Veterinary Services, demonstrated the value of vaccinating virgin bulls with commercial vaccines to reduce the incidence and severity of bovine herpesvirus infections.

The results of the PDS strongly support the use of either of two commercially available herpesvirus vaccines to reduce premature bull breakdown (meaning early loss of breeding ability in bulls due to severe preputial damage) associated with balanoposthitis in virgin bulls. While multiple factors likely impact the syndrome, including infectious, environmental and genetic contributors, many cases may be initiated by herpesvirus infection, leading to secondary infection, and further damage to the bull's prepuce. Sometimes, severe swelling can prevent the bull from retracting his penis, causing further injury.

Figure 2: Rhinogard.

There are 3 keys to managing IBP successfully

1. Vaccination of virgin bulls before joining
2. Vigilant monitoring for early signs during joining
3. Prompt treatment and enforced sexual rest

Vaccination

The targeted vaccination of virgin bulls can be achieved using one or both of the following commercially available vaccines, either Rhinogard or Bovilis MH + IBR.

Rhinogard [*Figure 2*], produced by Zoetis, is a modified live vaccination administered intranasally requiring a single dose. The vaccine is available in either 50 or 10 dose packets which are reconstituted with either 100 or 20 mls of saline respectively. Administer 2 ml intranasally using the Zoetis-designed applicator.

Figure 3: Bovilis MH + IBR.

Bovilis MH + IBR developed by Coopers [*Figure 3*], is a killed vaccine requiring two 2 ml doses to be delivered subcutaneously at least one month apart. It is available in 100 ml and 250 ml packs. No reconstitution of the vaccine is required.

Swans Veterinary Services recommends that studs vaccinate their sale bulls prior to sale, but also recommends that producers provide boosters to bulls purchased from studs already vaccinated. Producers should administer whichever vaccine they choose three to one weeks prior to joining.

Early Recognition

IBP often progresses rapidly, and can have catastrophic consequences. By remaining vigilant through joining, producers can remove affected bulls promptly, improving the chances for recovery for subsequent seasons.

Treatment and Sexual Rest

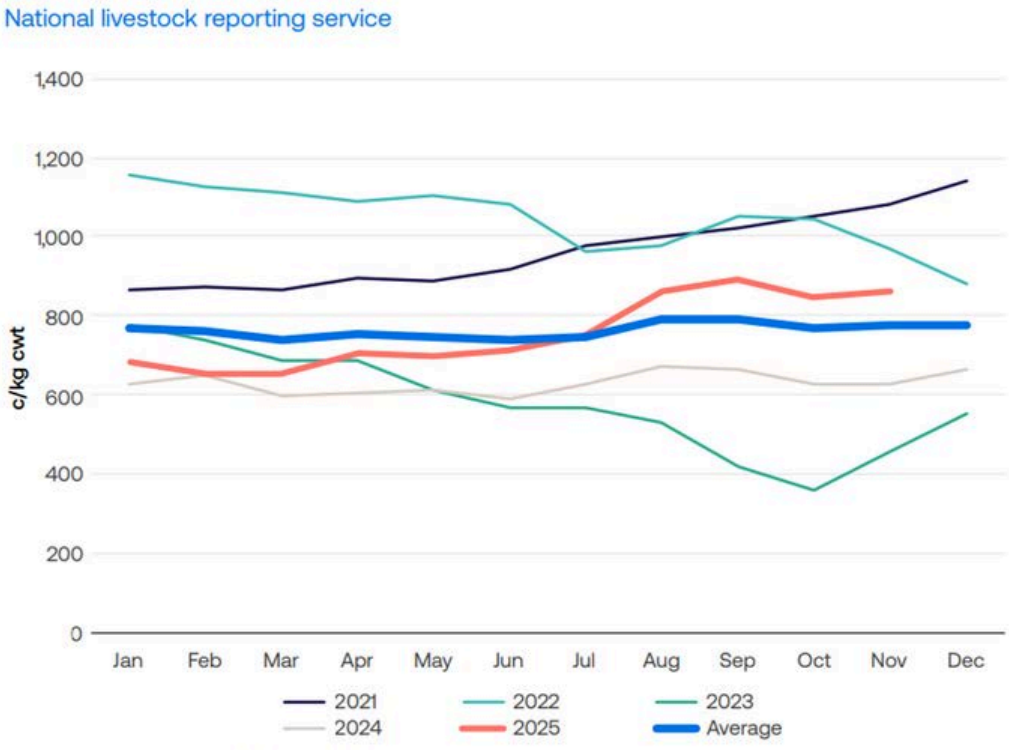
Sexual rest is critical for improving the likelihood of adequate recovery. Broad-spectrum antibiotics and anti-inflammatories can further improve outcomes. Once infection and inflammation have subsided, your bull may need veterinary assessment to see if he will be able to function adequately next season. Using an Electroejaculator (a device used to assess reproductive function), a veterinarian can evaluate whether a bull is capable of achieving an erection and likely to still be able to serve a cow. In some more severe cases, surgical repair (via circumcision) may be necessary in order to restore service capability in subsequent seasons. In some severe cases, where return to service is unlikely, affected bulls unfit for transport may require veterinary treatment including surgery for salvage.

ANZ sheep summer insights

ANZ Agribusiness

Sheep and lamb prices are entering the summer months on a high, as a lack of supply and solid demand continue to influence market dynamics. Prices across all indicators have climbed back from a slight correction in late spring, to find heavy, trade and restocker lamb prices trading relatively evenly at around the 1150 cent mark, with light lambs and merino lambs hovering either side of 1000 cents and mutton consistently sitting above 700 cents per kilogram carcase weight. Breeding ewe sales across both physical and online auctions have also crept higher as high lamb and mutton prices encourage producer decisions to restock where conditions are favourable. For the calendar year to early November, national lamb slaughter is tracking around 3 per cent or over 600,000 head down year on year. However, it was the traditional spring flush of lambs that failed to arrive in any substantial quantity, with lamb slaughter for spring back 10 per cent at the time of writing on 2024 levels, accounting for well over 400,000 head.

For mutton, slaughter is down around 6 per cent or 500,000 head for the year to date, again with the largest year on year gap opening up through the spring months. Going forward, as more southern lambs find their way to market in what has been a late season for many producers, strong demand is expected to continue to support prices, particularly as good pasture availability and low grain prices through some key sheep production zones supports feeding for heavier weights through the remainder of 2025 and into 2026.



Source: National Livestock Reporting Service

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Podcast: AWI's new Chair

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) has a new Chair, with South Australian grower and businessman George Millington taking over the role from retiring Chair Jock Laurie at the recent AGM. To hear George's thoughts on the appointment and priorities moving forward, listen to AWI's The Yarn Podcast - Episode 278 from 20th November 2025.

"Bringing profitability back to wool production and consultation with the woolgrowers the company serves are his clear priorities."

To listen, search for The Yarn Podcast in your preferred podcast player or visit AWI's website www.wool.com/news-events/the-yarn-podcast/ via the QR code to the left.

With widespread resistance to older single, double and triple sheep drenches[1,2], it's time to switch to the power of Zolvix™ Plus. This unique drench delivers the power of monepantel, the only member of the 'orange' drench class[3], in combination with abamectin. Monepantel's unique mode of action provides >99.9% efficacy against a broad spectrum of internal parasites in sheep, including single, double and triple resistant strains.[4,5,6] Contact Elanco or your rural supplier and put the power of orange to work in your worm control program.

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References: 1. Elanco National Drench Check Summary 2022-2024 PM-AU-25-0128. 2. Playford, M.C. *et al.* (2014). Prevalence and severity of anthelmintic resistance in ovine gastrointestinal nematodes in Australia (2009-2012). *Aust Vet J* 92(12):464–471. 3. Monepantel is a member of the amino-acetonitrile derivative (AAD or 'orange') family of anthelmintics. 4. Hosking, B.C. *et al.* (2010). A pooled analysis of the efficacy of monepantel, an amino-acetonitrile derivative against gastrointestinal nematodes of sheep. *Parasitol Res* 106:529-532. 5. Refer to registered label. 6. Baker, K.E. *et al.* (2012). Efficacy of monepantel and anthelmintic combinations against multiple-resistant *Haemonchus contortus* in sheep, including characterisation of the nematode isolate. *Vet Para* 186(3–4): 513–517.

Wool & livestock market summaries

Westcoast Wool & Livestock

The **Merino wool market** has strengthened significantly since July, with a September rally pushing 18-micron and broader categories to their highest price levels in five years. This momentum has been driven almost entirely by supply pressures. Australian Merino production fell by around ten percent last year and is expected to decline again as growers shift into alternative enterprises, upsetting the previously delicate supply-demand balance. As a result, auction clearance rates have remained high, with current production clearing readily and long-held wool stocks now being released. In effect, we are selling more wool nationally than we are producing.

There is a strong case to suggest that as growers clear existing stocks and current production continues to move through the system, wool supply is likely to tighten from February 2026 onward. This would result in fewer national offerings reaching the 40,000-bale mark; the level at which the market typically stabilises because there will be no reserve stocks available to supplement supply, similar to the situation in 2019. This tightening is expected to place further upward pressure on the Merino market.

Supply constraints are also likely to persist into 2027, as flock numbers cannot be rebuilt quickly enough to ease the current shortage in a shorter timeframe.

With the above been said the forward market has risen in line with the physical and strong opinion this will continue, so opportunity will present to take some cover as we move forward.

Danny Burkett, Westcoast Wools

This year has seen **livestock prices** rebound sharply from the record lows of 2023–2024 to reach record highs in 2025. In December 2024, mutton was trading at around $3/kg CW and lamb at $6/kg CW. By December 2025, mutton values have lifted to approximately $7.20/kg CW, with lamb exceeding $10/kg CW.

Prices appear set to remain strong for the foreseeable future, supported by robust export demand and a reduced national supply, largely driven by the significant increase in cropping hectares over the past five years.

Overall confidence in the sheep and wool industry is high. Combined wool and lamb returns are delivering solid profitability for producers. Those who have maintained flock numbers and invested in the infrastructure required to manage sheep are well positioned to capitalise on the current market conditions.

It is encouraging to see ewe numbers increasing across most regions of the state, with a growing proportion being joined to Merino rams as the industry works to rebuild Western Australia's ewe base.

We are also seeing strong growth in lamb finishing systems as the industry adapts to shifting market dynamics. More feedlots are emerging, providing additional options for producers with store lambs, while also supporting local processors with consistent product and reliable supply. Moving forward, the relationships between breeders, backgrounders, feedlots, and processors will continue to strengthen, helping to build a more resilient and efficient industry in WA.

Let's hope 2026 delivers a favourable season, with well-timed rainfall across the Esperance region and continued strength in livestock prices.

Clint Wardle, Westcoast Livestock

Contact Our Team

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Danny Burkett | Key Wool Account Manager - 0418 848 314

Sam Wakefield | Livestock Agent - 0436 308 970

Tristan Thomas | Wool Broker - 0428 843 999

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Vet Spot: Cows can get hair balls?

Dr Scott Jackson, Swans Veterinary Services

Like cats, cattle can suffer from hair balls! However, unlike cats they cannot throw them up (cows can't vomit). Instead they sometimes get stuck resulting in dead cattle and the farmer/vet scratching their head about why it happened!

The hair ball form of these obstructions we call trichobezoars. This year we have seen two cases of down cow syndrome due to gastrointestinal obstruction from the plant type we call phytobezoars. These are ball like accumulations of plant material with Gilford grass as the main culprit due to its stringy/fibrous nature.

Gastrointestinal obstruction is a rare cause of sporadic down cow syndrome and death that can often mimic and be mistaken for other causes of illness such as milk fever and snake bite. The cases we observed showed varying degrees of dehydration, fluid filled/bloated rumen, respiratory distress and scant/bloody manure in the colon. Post mortems of both animals revealed these grass ball obstructions that normally lodge within the outlet of the fourth (true) stomach. Diagnosing them can be difficult for vets and farmers alike as the symptoms can be so variable. One animal had the classical scant/bloody (raspberry jam) manure commonly seen with obstructions (as little ingesta is making it to the colon). However, another animal continued to defecate normally which threw us off the scent until the post mortem revealed that the grass ball was acting like a float valve, only intermittently blocking the outflow to the stomach.

Both cows were grazing pastures with a high proportion of native grasses and specifically Gilford grass. Though rare, herds that graze these pastures are at higher risk of sporadic deaths due to blockages. One farm experienced two cases a few years ago. Gilford grass can be quite easily controlled by feeding up your desirable species (rye grass, kike etc) which will outcompete it if adequately fertilised.

Contact:

Swans Veterinary Services

(08) 9071 5777

Swans Veterinary Services

Mates Mental Health Toolbox Podcast

Grain Producers Australia released a new podcast series in 2025 called the 'Mates Mental Health Toolbox', aiming to connect "rural and remote Australians with the practical tools and services available to support rural community members."

The podcast is broken down into components to "foster understanding and empowerment within rural communities, whether you're supporting a loved one or seeking guidance on ways to support yourself."

GPA Grain Producers Australia

Mates Mental Health Toolbox *Podcast*

Eight episodes are available with a range of special guests – each from varied life experiences and expertise. In the opening episode former Australian cricketer and mental health ambassador Brad Hogg shares his insights and experiences. Find the podcast by searching in your preferred player, or visit www.grainproducers.com.au/matespodcast (via the QR code).

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SUMMIT FERTILIZERS

Elders Esperance summer forage demonstration

Adelaide Hagan, Agronomist, Elders Esperance

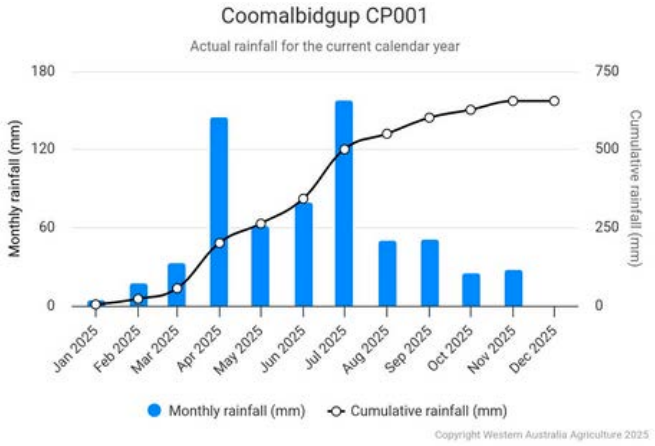
Location: Tom & George Carmody's, Nilarbour on South Coast Hwy, Coomalbidgup

Through the help of Tom and George Carmody along with their team, as well as our key pasture seed suppliers, Barenbrug and DLF seeds, Elders Esperance has put together a demonstration of a range of summer forage options. The aim of the demonstration is to understand more about summer forage options and to help the team get a better feel for the challenges and opportunities of summer pastures in the coastal region.

During ASHEEP & BEEF's Spring Field Day, attendees will recall the site as being very wet and near untrafficable. After the paddock had somewhat dried and became accessible, seeding was conducted on October 3rd 2025. The Carmodys used a wide seeding width at 600 mm.

Weather data for Coomalbidgup:
Year to Date: 655.4 mm. Average ~570 mm.

Month	Rainfall (mm)
September	51.4
October – Seeded 3rd Oct	25.2
November	28.0

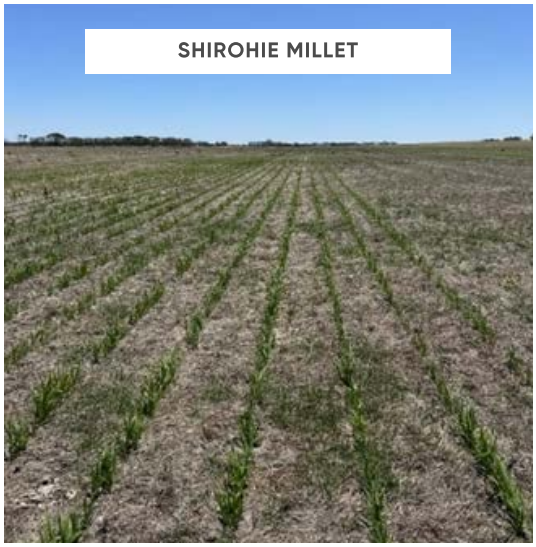


SORGHUM
Summer growing grass native to Africa and Asia. Grows in areas with **limited summer rainfall**. Sub soil moisture is critical. Potential for drying soil profile, minimising winter water logging. Range of soil types, best in loams. Can grow in heavy soil types. **Soil temperature: 16 degrees and rising**. **Sowing depth: 4 – 6 cm**. **Prussic acid poisoning** may occur if hungry stock graze on fresh young growth. **Must NOT be grazed until 80 cm to 1.5 m height** depending on cultivar. Prussic acid higher in grain + sweet varieties. Lower in Sudan x Sudan. Avoid grazing stressed or fresh growth shortly after stress. Sulphur lick block helps detox. Monitor stock for 2 hours after introduction.
DM = 20-30% ME = 8 – 10 MJ/kg DM CP = 8 – 14%

MILLET
Small seeded, quick maturing summer grass, native to Africa and Asia. **Does not produce as much feed as Sorghums but DOES NOT have prussic acid**. Root system like winter cereals. Not as drought tolerant as sorghum. Suits light textured, neutral to slightly acidic soils. Not well suited to heavy clays. Soil Temperature: 14 – 16 degrees and rising. Sowing depth: 1.5 – 3 cm. Grazing 4 – 7 weeks at height of: Japanese = 25 – 40cm tall, Pennisetum = 30 – 80cm tall. DM = 15 – 20%, ME = 8 – 10 MJ/kg DM, CP = 10-16%

Millet can be sown at cooler soil temperatures (14–16°C), is less expensive, allows grazing in 4–7 weeks at shorter heights, and poses no prussic acid risk, but yields less and is less drought-tolerant.

Sorghum needs warmer soils (16°C and rising), costs more per kg, can be grazed after 8–10 weeks at 80 cm, has a potential prussic acid toxicity risk, but offers higher yields and performs better in dry conditions. Dry matter yield of Sorghum is the significant advantage.



Nine Varieties of Summer Forage

- FLEXIGRAZE FORAGE SORGHUM – AlfaGen Seeds, Sorghum x Sudan x Sudan, 4 kg/ha
- TRIPPLE S SORGHUM – Pioneer Seeds, Super Sweet Sudan (SSS), 8kg/ha
- SHIROHIE MILLET – DLF Seeds, 10 kg/ha
- PASJA II – DLF SEED, 4 kg/ha, 2.5 ha
- REVOLUTION BMR – SORGHUM – Barenbrug, 8 kg/ha
- HUNNIGREEN FORAGE SORGHUM 10KG/HA + EBONY COWPEA 10KG/HA – Barenbrug
- NUDAN FORAGE SORGHUM – Barenbrug – 8kg/ha
- MIXED TRIAL SEED – Left over seed was mixed and seeded throughout the remainder of the paddock

Mixed Trial Seed

Learnings so far

The initial, 6-week cuts are complete. 8-week cuts and grazing recovery assessments will follow. Revolution BMR and Shirohie millet are performing best.

The Pasja II has been chewed away due to insect pressure. DBM and other caterpillars have eaten all biomass. If using a brassica system an insecticide early is essential for plant survival.

Pasja II plot with no plants left

Germination has been poor in heavy and clay soils due to rapid surface drying and low rainfall after seeding, while loamy soils show better results. Summer forage grows best in lighter soil types. Sand is where the summer fodder game is.

Paddock preparation is very important. Moisture conservation in the surface of the soil profile makes a big difference when trying to get a good germination.

As Tom noted in other summer cropping paddocks on the property, where Glyphosate + Amine was used as a knockdown prior to seeding germination has been greatly improved. Apply the same weed control standards to summer crops as to winter ones, effective weed management conserves moisture, aiding plant germination under marginal conditions.

Elders Esperance would like to thank the Carmodys and our pasture seed suppliers Barenbrug and DLF seeds for their support with this demonstration.

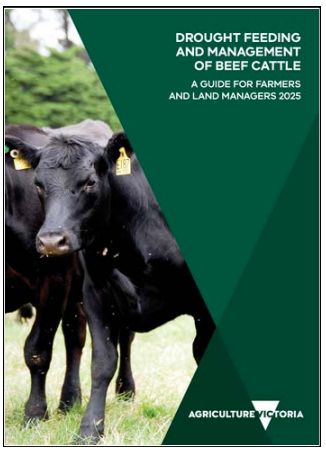
Contact: Adelaide Hagan, Agronomist, Elders - 0400 204 381

Supplementary feeding grain to cattle?

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

This year in the Esperance region, recent late rains have caused damage to wheat crops in some areas. An ASHEEP & BEEF member asked for more information on feeding wheat to cattle. After some hunting, the best resource I've been pointed to (thanks to Danny Roberts at DPIRD for the tip!) is "Drought Feeding and Management of Beef Cattle" (2025) from Agriculture Victoria. It's worth a look. Whilst no doubt handy in a dry season, it also has good general information, with sections on:

- Choosing feed sources and understanding feed tests
- Nutritional requirements and feed budgeting
- Feeding grain to cattle
- Feeding cattle in containment areas



Some of the key messages the booklet raises regarding feeding grain include that "it needs to be introduced gradually, ensure that roughage (fibre) levels are adequate, buffers will reduce the risk of grain poisoning (acidosis), and processing (such as cracking or rolling) can markedly increase the grain's energy availability. Monitor grain fed cattle carefully for signs of acidosis" (*pg. 48*). You can also consider adding a calcium source such as limestone (*pg. 46*) to avoid calcium deficiency. Follow the QR code for more detail.

WALRC Livestock Matters 2026: Save the date

The WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC) has announced that planning is underway for their Livestock Matters forum in 2026. Save the date for 18th March. The event will be hosted by the Thompson family at Moojepin Merinos, 30 km east of Katanning.

Pictured are members of the WALRC team - Chair Bronwyn Clarke, producers Hamish Thompson and Clayton South, and Executive Officer Amy Coombe, who visited the farm in November to "kick off planning for an exciting, sheep-focused program."

Enquiries to WALRC via Amy Coombe at eo@walrc.com.au.

New soils project in southern WA with mapping, training & demonstration sites

Jayme Burkett, South Coast NRM

A new soils project on the South Coast aims to benefit farmers in the region by increasing soil landscape mapping, supporting sustainable soils management and growing the capacity of the local soils workforce.

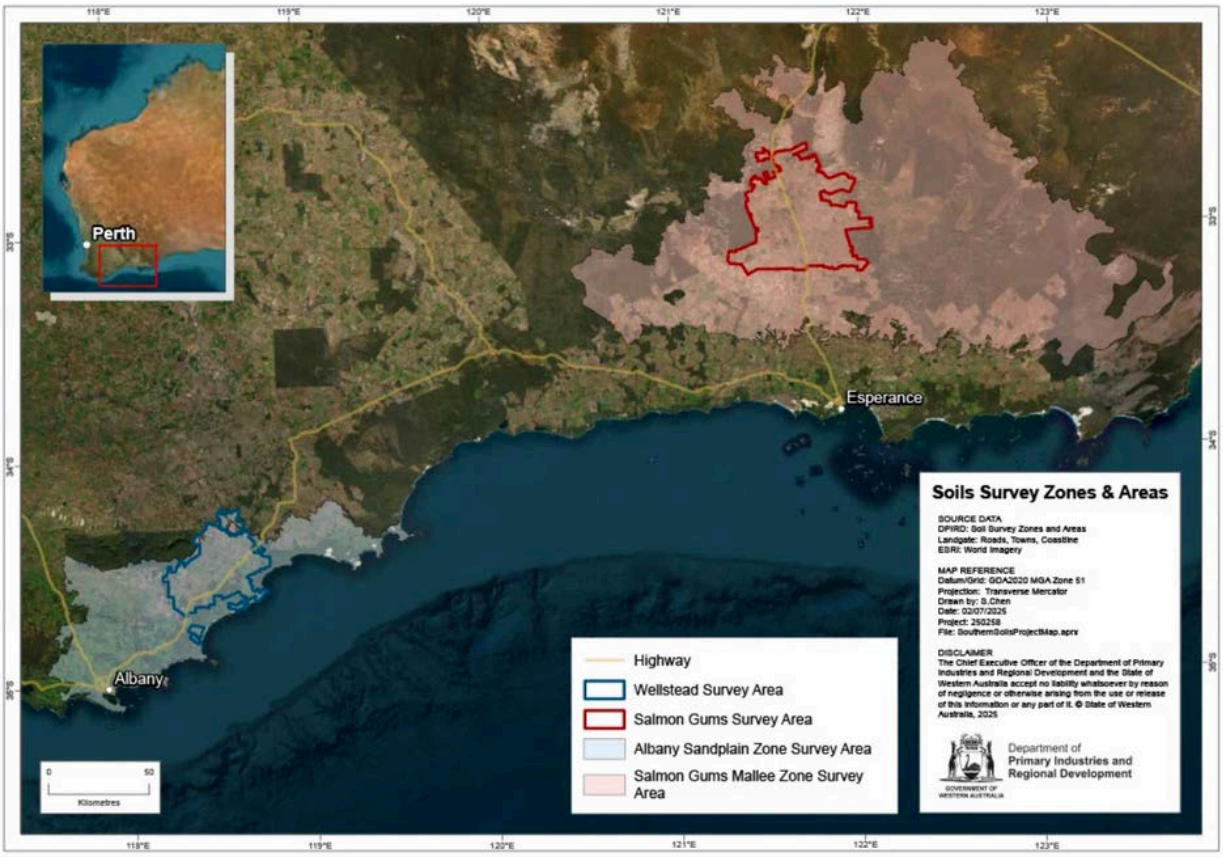
The Know Your Southern Soils project is a partnership between Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and South Coast Natural Resource Management (South Coast NRM), who will be working with grower groups ASHEEP & BEEF and North Stirlings Pallinup Natural Resources (NSPNR).

Through the collaborative approach, with grower groups delivering the extension element of the project, there is a focus on addressing soil constraints affecting farmers in the Esperance and North Stirlings Pallinup areas. This will be supported through a two-year demonstration site in each region and an array of events and workshops to increase skills and knowledge regarding soil health.

During the project, DPIRD will be undertaking soil sampling to increase soil mapping in the Salmon Gums and Wellstead regions, two areas which are underrepresented in current datasets. The sampling has already commenced, with 800 sites identified for testing key chemical and physical soil health indicators.

South Coast NRM is responsible for supporting ASHEEP & BEEF and NSPNR to deliver the extension components of this project. In the Esperance region, ASHEEP & BEEF will be establishing a demonstration site focusing on soil performance improvement relevant to pasture systems.

Lastly, this project will work to create a soils training package that will be available to the greater workforce who include agronomists, farmers, grower group professionals and other industry representatives who have an interest in soils.



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WHY CHOOSE ALOSCA DRY LEGUME INOCULANTS?

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- ✔ Can be used with seed dressings that are typically harmful to inoculants.
- ✔ Simple application.
- ✔ Can be blended with fertilisers, seeds or in a third box for ease of application.
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CBA agriculture sector review

CommBank (CBA)

Australia's agriculture sector is on track to deliver a record-breaking year, with farm-gate value across agriculture, fisheries and forestry production expected to hit a combined value of $101.6 billion in 2025–26, according to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES, www.agriculture.gov.au/abares). China's re-entry into the Australian canola market has boosted short-term prospects, but industry watchers say the next decade will be defined by the agriculture industry's ability to innovate and stay resilient.

Staying competitive in international markets

Agriculture remains one of Australia's most powerful economic engines says CBA Agriculture Economist Dennis Voznesenski. "Australian farmers are rapidly innovating and scaling to stay competitive with international peers. The drive to stay relevant in a very competitive global market is helping grow the Australian agricultural sector," he said.

2025 is proving broadly positive for Australian farmers. Despite droughts in parts of South Australia and Victoria, national winter crop production remains resilient. Wheat and barley prices have softened, but strong local yields provide optimism. Canola is a standout, and in November Australia loaded the first shipment of canola to China in five years. With this year's canola crop possibly the second largest on record, the return of China is welcome news.

Livestock is also holding firm, supported by global demand, Voznesenski said. "China's appetite for beef remains healthy, and US imports are at record import levels."

Regional strength and diversity

Few regions illustrate Australia's agricultural scale and diversity better than Griffith in the Riverina. "One in four bottles of wine produced in Australia comes from Griffith," Mayor Doug Curran said. "It's also home to a third of the nation's citrus." Griffith is a prime example of the kind of diversity that makes Australian agriculture so resilient, CBA General Manager in Regional and Agribusiness Banking Josh Foster said. "From citrus and wine to grains and cotton, the Riverina shows how diversity and innovation keep regional economies strong."

Opportunity in an unpredictable future

Across the country, farmers are balancing a mix of optimism and practical responses to challenges. In Northern NSW producers are feeling positive despite global market volatility, CBA Agri Executive Tom Rookyard said.

The biggest talking point in my community right now is opportunity. Beef prices in America are influencing our markets, and that's turning into opportunity for producers out here," he said.

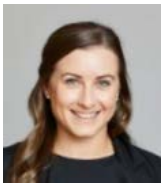
Further south, in Victoria's northwest, resilience is the focus. "Right now everyone's talking about how tough it is balancing rising input costs with unpredictable weather, whether it's fuel, fertiliser or feed. We're all trying to plan for a future that's harder to predict," said Gabriela Munari, CBA Agribusiness Analyst.

Backing Australian Ag

CBA National General Manager for Agribusiness Distribution, Roddy Brown said it's the resilience and adaptability of Australian farmers – even in an unpredictable future - that sets them apart on the world stage. "Farming hasn't been without its challenges, but there's a real sense of optimism again. Seeing young people step up and take on the family business is inspiring, and the way technology continues to improve how we work is incredible to watch," he said. "Regional producers are leading the world in adopting smarter, cleaner ways to grow. Whether it's automation, precision farming, robotics or renewable energy, innovation is helping to increase productivity and keep Australian agriculture at the forefront of global markets."

CBA's Regional and Agribusiness Banking team includes more than 700 specialists across 70 centres, supporting over 12,000 customers with solutions for farmers and regional businesses.

Your local contacts



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Sampling methods for feed testing

Steve Cotton, Dynamic Ag; Emily King, AWI National Extension Manager; and Krisi Frost, AWI Manager, Woolgrower Communications

With rainfall and temperatures fluctuating widely across Australia, feed testing is an invaluable step for livestock producers. With affordable lab services available nationwide, timely sampling and testing ensure producers make confident, data-driven feeding decisions to sheep health, productivity, and profitability, despite seasonal variability.

The benefits of feed testing

Feed testing is a critical tool for optimising livestock nutrition, improving production efficiency, and ensuring economic sustainability. By analysing the nutritional composition of grain, forage, and fodder you can make informed feeding decisions, calculate feed rations, and budget for feed gaps to avoid over- or under-feeding.

As pastures mature quickly in warmer conditions, quality can drop sharply, making objective testing essential for assessing nutritional value. If you are purchasing fodder from a supplier that has multiple lots or varieties of feed available, a feed test provides a very cost effective objective assessment of what feed is the cheapest on an energy and protein basis, and which will suit your sheep's requirements. There are multiple feed testing laboratories across Australia that provide essential nutritional information (as well as advanced reports containing the trace element composition of the feed combined with other parameters) that can help you understand the level of stock performance that could be achieved.

Before you start sampling

When collecting samples for feed analysis, it is important to obtain the most representative sample possible. As a starting point, speak to your laboratory and ask them if they have a preferred sampling method for the feed type you are testing. Most laboratories follow similar procedures and guidelines but there are some differences in sample collection procedures, often regarding the sample volume required.

The Australian Fodder Industry Association (AFIA) has published a set of guidelines and minimum standards relating to the sampling of hay and silage for feed analysis. The hay and silage sampling methods listed below are adapted from the AFIA Laboratory Methods Manual v8 September 2014 (pages 9–11).

Sampling procedure: pasture

To collect a pasture sample for quality analysis, follow the procedure below:

- Sample 15–20 areas across a paddock by taking a grab or 'pluck' sample.
- Samples should be collected from random areas of the paddock, but to reduce bias in where samples are collected, walk/ride/drive diagonally across the paddock and sample at similar intervals (e.g. about every 30 steps if you are walking) until you reach the other side of the paddock.
- If you get to the other side of paddock and your sample collection bag isn't full, repeat the process travelling in the opposite diagonal direction.
- Samples should be collected down to grazing height to provide a representative sample.
- Do not include faeces, plant roots, or soil with your sample.
- Avoid sampling on stock camps and dung or urine patches.

Sampling procedure: grain

For grain samples taken from a silo or field bin:

- Fill a plastic bucket full of grain and take 5+ random handfuls from the bucket and place in the sample zip lock bag provided by the laboratory.
- Discard the remaining grain from the bucket, refill the bucket, and repeat the step above twice more until you have filled the sample bag to the specified line.

Sampling procedure: hay

Representative hay samples can only be obtained with a probe or core sampling device. Do not rely on a couple of handfuls or a 'flake' or 'biscuit' from one bale. Australian made corers are commercially available, or a home-made corer can be made from 32 mm steel tubing. It should be at least 450 mm long with a slightly scalloped and sharp cutting edge. Corers are driven using either a hand brace or by a continuously variable speed, electric drill (preferred option where practicable). A portable generator is useful and can be justified if many samples are to be taken. Cordless drills can be used if they meet power (torque) requirements.

In the following sampling procedures, a 'lot' is defined as hay or silage taken from:

- the same species (pure or mixed) and variety;
- the same paddock or pit/bunker; and
- harvested within 48 hours.

A 'lot' of baled hay or cubes should not exceed 200 tonnes.

Hay sampling procedures vary depending on the bale size and method.

- Small square bales:
  - Sample between 10–20 small square bales, selected at random from the lot.
  - Take one core from each bale selected, probing near the centre of the 'butt' end and at right angles to the surface. Ensure that the corer does not get hot.
  - Combine all cores into a single sample in a bucket and mix thoroughly. Keep the whole sample intact.
- Large round or square bales:
  - Sample between 5–10 large bales, selected at random from the lot.
  - Take one core from each side of all bales selected, probing at right angles to the surface at different heights.
  - Combine all cores into a single sample in a bucket and mix thoroughly. Keep the whole sample intact.
- Cubes or pellets:
  - Select a good handful of cubes or pellets from at least six locations or bags which make up the complete lot.
  - Combine the sub-samples in a bucket and mix thoroughly.
  - Use the 'riffle box' or 'coning and quartering' process to reduce sample size to at least 250 g, but not more than 500 g.

Sampling procedure: silage

Silage is best sampled at least three (3) weeks after it has been ensiled and as close to the time of feeding as is practicable.

Pit or bunker silage – unopened pit or bunker:

- Obtain core samples for analysis using a long coring device that extends deeply into the pit or bunker. Sample from at least 3–5 locations to ensure a representative sample.
- Combine all the material into a single sample in a bucket and mix thoroughly. Keep the whole sample intact and do not subdivide.

Pit or bunker silage – opened pit or bunker:

- Take random grab samples from at least 10 locations across a freshly cut face of the stack, although this will not provide as good a representative sample as multi-site coring.
- Combine all the material into a single sample in a bucket and mix thoroughly. Keep the whole sample intact and do not subdivide.

Wrapped baled silage:

- Sample between 5–10 large bales at random using a coring device in the same manner as for large hay bales (see above).
- Combine all cores into a single sample in a bucket and mix thoroughly. Keep the whole sample intact.

Sending your sample to the lab

1. Exclude as much air as possible from the feed test collection bag, then seal tightly.
2. Whenever possible, collect and post the samples on the same day. If this is not possible, place your pasture sample in the fridge (NOT in the freezer) if not posted the same day as it was collected.
3. Avoid collecting and sending sample(s) late in the week (e.g., Thursday or Friday) to avoid mail delays and the sample sitting in the heat over the weekend.
4. It is best to collect and send samples on Monday to get them to the lab as quickly as possible. If samples are harvested late in the week, leave in the fridge over the weekend and send on Monday.

Other relevant resources from AWI (access these via the QR code, links at base of online article)

- Making More From Sheep Module 7 Grow more pasture
- Making More From Sheep Tool 7.6 Pasture assessment techniques
- Making More From Sheep Module 8 Turn pasture into product
- Making More From Sheep Tool 8.5 Pasture rulers, sticks and meters
- AWI Feed on Offer Library


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Daisy Dam Cover installed at Mt Ridley to reduce evaporation losses

David Cook, SEPWA. Resources at sepwa.org.au/demo-trials/

Two years ago, SEPWA began a demonstration exploring how second-hand CBH tarps could help improve farm water security in the Esperance port zone. Working with grower hosts at Salmon Gums and Mt Ridley, 1.3 hectares of reused tarps were installed across two dam catchments to assess whether this low-cost material could generate runoff from small rainfall events and build more reliable dam storage.

The project is funded through the Community Water Supply Program and delivered collaboratively by SEPWA, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), ASHEEP & BEEF, the Shire of Esperance and the participating host growers. The aim is to demonstrate a practical, scalable option for growers wanting to build resilience into their water systems and over these 2 years the lined catchments have demonstrated how this low-cost material can significantly increase water capture and storage reliability.

Building the tarped catchments

Before installation, each site was assessed using DamCat modelling to calculate the catchment area required based on dam size, expected water use, evaporation rates and local rainfall patterns. The modelling indicated the need for 0.44 hectares of tarped catchment at Salmon Gums and 0.88 hectares at Mt Ridley. This equated to 11 and 22 second-hand CBH tarps respectively, each measuring 40 m × 10 m.

Earthworks were completed to prepare both sites, and Elpha Contracting installed the tarps at an average cost of $2.40/m². The tarps themselves were sourced for $157 each. Once installed, the lined catchments immediately demonstrated their effectiveness.

Since installation, both sites have consistently generated runoff from rainfall events as small as 1.5 mm. This is a substantial improvement compared with well-maintained roaded catchments—common across the region—which generally require 10–12 mm of rainfall before producing inflows. At Mt Ridley in 2024, only three rainfall events exceeded 10 mm, meaning unlined catchments offered almost no runoff opportunities. The tarped catchment, however, continued to deliver valuable inflows throughout the season.

Both demonstration sites have been fenced to protect the tarps from livestock and wildlife, and ongoing monitoring will track their durability under heat, sunlight and rainfall over time.

Image: An aerial view of the Mt Ridley demonstration site, combining a tarped catchment and evaporation control.

Adding Daisy Dam Covers at Mt Ridley

At Mt Ridley, the tarped catchment is part of a broader long-term water strategy on Scott Wandel's "Ridley Plains" property. Scott aims to maintain enough water storage to withstand up to three dry years without disrupting cropping or livestock operations. A windmill pumps water from the dam into central spray tanks, meaning every litre saved from evaporation contributes directly to the farm's operational resilience.

To support this goal, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) funded the installation of a Daisy Dam Cover over the dam surface. The dam measures about 40 m × 40 m at full capacity, and the cover system was designed to protect 35 m × 32 m of that surface. Twelve modular covers—each 5.24 m wide and cut to custom lengths—were installed by a four-person team in just three hours. The system, costing $19.20/m² delivered and installed, allows sections to be removed as the water level drops.

Next steps

SEPWA and DPIRD will continue monitoring inflows, evaporation reduction, water quality and structural performance of the tarps and covers. Together, the tarped catchment and Daisy Dam Cover provide a compelling demonstration of how simple, cost-effective infrastructure can significantly enhance on-farm water reliability.


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Meet Western Meat Packers Group (WMPG)

Anthony Morabito, WMPG

Western Meat Packers Group (WMPG) is a proud, family-owned business established in 1983. We are excited to announce that WMPG has recently joined the ASHEEP & BEEF grower group.

Our commitment is simple: **support Western Australian beef** by fostering strong relationships and delivering some of the highest-quality products in the market.

WMPG has a rich legacy of supplying safe, premium beef to customers both domestically and internationally. We proudly serve markets in North America, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, while remaining a trusted provider for Western Australian retail supermarkets and butcheries.

In addition to our traditional operations, WMPG has expanded into the wholesale direct-to-public sector through **WA's Big Butcher** and our premium brand **Margaret River Fresh**. We continually source products from reputable and reliable producers to maintain quality and consistency.

Our **livestock team** works closely with producers and agents to ensure a robust supply chain. This includes discussing market trends, exploring retail opportunities, and interpreting MSA feedback to help producers achieve exceptional results.

WMPG Livestock Team:

- **Anthony Morabito** – 0476 592 810 | anthony.morabito@wmpg.com.au
- **Jo Dragicevich** – 0438 086 150 | jo@wmpg.com.au

Emissions reduction case study: Carnigup

Jan Clawson, ASHEEP & BEEF

Ryan and Elisha Willing own and operate a mixed cattle and cropping enterprise in the Boyatup area, east of Esperance, in WA. They were among the first group of producers in 2023 to join the Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) funded, Producer Demonstration Site Project *Emission Intensity – Getting started on farm* previously known as *Carbon Neutral 2030: Getting started on farm*.

Above: Ryan and Elisha Willing.

Ryan joined the project because he believed there would be an immediate requirement for carbon reporting and wanted to understand what was needed and to be prepared. He feels there is still a need to understand carbon emissions, but the reporting requirements are further away. That said, financial institutions will require producers' emissions data as part of their reporting. We are already seeing producers being asked to share data.

"In the first year of the project, it was all about understanding carbon emissions and the information required to complete the calculator. In years two and three, we focused on fine-tuning the calculator information." Ryan said.

There has been a real benefit in learning as a group - sharing ideas, discussing what works and what doesn't etc. Having a group of like-minded people sharing ideas around a table always helps identify different ways to achieve productivity gains. For Ryan this included considering **earlier turn-off time** and gaining a better understanding of **cattle weights** - which provides opportunity for productivity gains and influences emissions intensity.

In addition to being the lead producer for this project, Ryan is also a demonstration site host. The aim for his demonstration site was to reduce carbon emissions by improving pastures and better pasture utilisation.
The objective was to show by planting **higher quality perennial pastures** and implementing a **rotational grazing strategy**, he could reduce enteric methane, net carbon emissions, and emission intensity over the life of the project. Ryan had intended to plant lucerne in spring 2024 but due to an early and short finish to the season, he postponed this until conditions were more favourable.

During the 2025 growing season, Ryan has focused on improving the quality and quantity of his annual legumes and grasses and worked to improve pasture utilisation through rotational grazing.

Ryan had used rotational grazing before the project and knew it worked with weaner cattle but hadn't used it for cows and calves before. He was concerned using a single hot wire would allow the calves to end up everywhere, but that wasn't the case.

Ryan runs the rotational grazing system on his best pastures. This also requires mapping the lighter soil types, so cells have the same number of grazing days available without becoming overgrazed.

In early April, Ryan seeded RM4 Vetch at 9 kg/ha and Abundant Ryegrass at 5 kg/ha. With favourable rainfall and growing conditions, the result has been outstanding.

The area also received fertiliser treatments of 50 kg/ha of MOP pre-seeding, followed by 70 kg/ha of MAP and 70 kg/ha of Urea at seeding.

Ryan commenced rotational grazing on the 1 June 2025, maintaining 1.5 cow-calf units per hectare until the end of October 2025. While the ryegrass remained green, growth slowed as soil moisture reduced.

Following weaning, Ryan believes the area should continue to support two weaners per hectare through November and December.

[Continued over page]

The standard stocking rate for unimproved pasture in this area is typically one cow-calf unit on two hectares. This represents a 200 percent increase for Ryan. The high rotational grazing stocking rate has also improved weed management. Ryan was able to control radish easily by using a weed wipe after a graze - ensuring the weeds were out of the withholding period before cows returned to that section.

Above: Cows & calves moving to a new grazing cell.

For more information on this project:
www.asheepbeef.org.au/projects-activities

Another project benefit has been better understanding of cattle weights by taking the opportunity to weigh cattle while they are in the yards. At the beginning of this project in 2023, Ryan had no recorded weights for his cattle and instead relied on educated estimates. In 2024 he weighed around 75% of his cattle. This weighing identified his weaners experienced a flat spot of reduced growth in May. He found by providing supplementary feed during May, he was able to turn his finished cattle off a month earlier in 2025.

Ryan said, "Completing the calculator is absolutely worth doing. Gathering the information and completing the calculator is a great way to understand the factors that affect production and carbon emissions, and how small changes can make a difference. The development of the easy-to-read 'Starting your emissions journey' toolkit has also helped make it less daunting."

"The data you needed to complete the calculator is data you should be collecting anyway and is worthwhile knowing. It's also good to see it all in one place."

Ryan said he will continue to complete the calculator every year after the project has finished, as it will be good to know how he's progressing.

ASHEEP & BEEF | Richard Brake Consulting Pty Ltd Agri Business Consultants | mla Meat & Livestock Australia | Producer Demonstration Site

DPIRD: Sheep industry turnoff update

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

Senior Research Scientist Kate Pritchett (Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development) releases quarterly sheep turnoff numbers for WA, most recently reporting that "total sheep and lamb turnoff for 9 months of 2025 reached 3.93 million head, representing a 19% decline year-on-year and tracking 7% below 2023 levels."

"Despite this reduction," wrote Kate, "slaughter volumes remain historically strong, particularly for adult sheep. Domestic slaughter reached 3.41 million head, down 11% on the same period in 2024. Adult sheep slaughter totalled 1.37 million head, a 7% decrease, but remained high in a long-term context following 2 elevated years in 2023 and 2024. Lamb slaughter declined 13%, falling from 2.35 million in 2024 to 2.05 million in 2025, reflecting both a smaller 2024 lamb drop and the later seasonal flow of 2025 lambs."

Kate's role for DPIRD also includes carrying out quarterly flock modelling. "Flock modelling indicates that the WA flock, estimated at 12.4 million head in mid-2022, has likely declined to between 8.6 and 9 million head by July 2025. Elevated turn-off across 2023–24, driven by seasonal pressure, low prices and uncertainty around the Australian Government's live export phase-out, contributed to the reduction. However, improving prices and stronger seasonal conditions through 2025 have slowed the sell-down, increasing the likelihood of stabilisation—or potential flock recovery—entering 2026 if favourable conditions continue."

Find the full report, including live export volumes, interstate transfers and more, plus cattle reporting, at www.dpird.wa.gov.au/research/research-areas/Livestock-research-development-programs/WA-livestock-industries - via the QR code.


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Shearwell Update

Brad McCormick, Shearwell

Hot off the press – Shearwell's new NLIS Button tag for cattle has attained Conditional Accreditation and can now be sold!

The NLIS Button tag joins the Shearwell NLIS MET tag and the BOS management tag range to provide cattle producers with all of their identification requirements.

The new Button tag with the green centre has improved ease of application and quality Shearwell construction. Stocks are now available at competitive prices.

For sheep producers, most will be aware of the **extension of the WA Government Tag Incentive Payment into 2026** – with orange, yellow and pink sheep/goat NLIS eID tags to attract $0.60 per tag point-of-sale discount from 1 January 2026.

Yellow and pink NLIS eID tags have been included in the discount program as older sheep will require eID tags when moved off properties after 30 June 2026 – yellow for homebred and pink for bought in sheep or goats.

If you would like to find out more about any Shearwell products – contact:

Jack Nixon
0427 089 860

Brad McCormick
0429 932 266

Shearwell.com.au
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Kikuyu resources

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

In July this year the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) teamed up with ASHEEP & BEEF and Swans Veterinary Services to deliver a kikuyu workshop, hosted by David Swan at Quarry Farm in Myrup. A great group of farmers, researchers and vets shared their knowledge on how to get the most out of kikuyu pasture systems, as well as how to identify and deal with occurrences of kikuyu toxicity (of which cases were seen in cattle in the Esperance region last season).

To find out more about kikuyu toxicity in cattle, an article by Dr Scott Jackson and Dr David Swan that covers the details and the 2025 occurrences in the Esperance region was published in the June ASHEEP & BEEF newsletter (pg. 21, access via QR code to the right). It is a rare phenomenon.

If you are considering **renovating kikuyu pastures** this coming year, you may find the following tips and resources from Paul Sanford (DPIRD) useful:

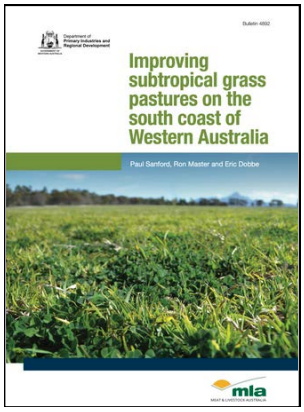
Improving legume content

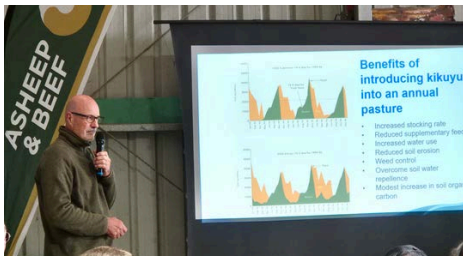
- *Legume content can be increased after the break of season using a grass-selective chemical (e.g. 0.5–1 L/ha clethodim) to suppress kikuyu. This tactic requires an adequate legume seedbank.*
- *If it is necessary to sow a legume because of a poor seedbank, suppress kikuyu and drill in the seed. Do not broadcast.*
- *Insect control is critical for clover establishment.*
- *Subterranean clover remains the best companion legume for kikuyu however serradella is a good option for deep sands and can be sown as pod in summer or seed in winter.*
- *Subterranean clover density can be increased in kikuyu pastures by applying sufficient grazing pressure before the break of season to provide space for clover seedlings.*

Increasing production

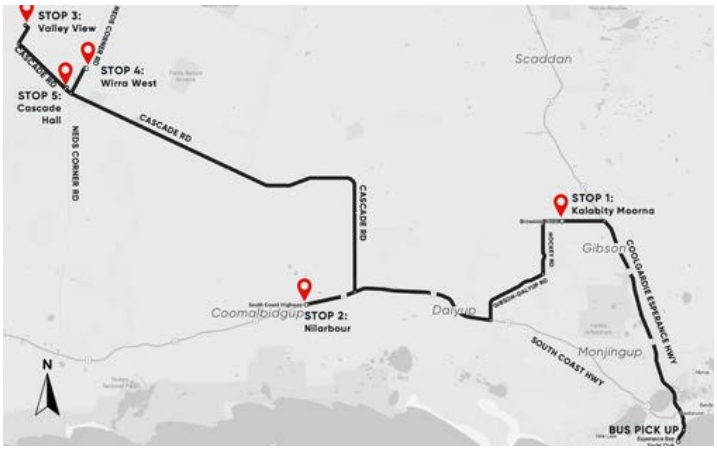
- *Sowing annual ryegrass into suppressed kikuyu stands can also substantially increase winter production.*
- *Addressing soil constraints such as soil fertility and acidity is critical to ensuring a productive pasture, most legumes are more sensitive than kikuyu to low soil pH and infertility which can lead to poor legume content.*
- *When suppressing kikuyu to lift legume content, consider using chemicals to control minor weeds such as silver grass, as weed numbers can increase quickly once kikuyu is suppressed.*
- *Techniques like spray-topping and cropping of kikuyu paddocks can also be used effectively to control problem weeds.*

QR Code links to below resource for further info.





Top to bottom: The Swans' cattle at Quarry Farm; Alan Hoggart (The Duke); Paul Sanford (DPIRD); Robert Graham (DPIRD); Erica Ayres (Cape View Grazing); David Swan (Swans Veterinary Services).



Spring Field Day wrap

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

18th September 2025 saw around 75 people take to the paddock for ASHEEP & BEEF's annual Spring Field Day.

Clockwise from top left: Field day map; F&G pasture herbicide trial; Luke Edwards; Annie Ciampaglia (right); Tom Carmody (right) speaking to the group in lucerne; Jack Nixon.

Agronomist **Luke Edwards (Farm & General)** opened the day by presenting a **pasture legume herbicide matrix trial** at Josh and Tegan Sullivan's farm in Gibson. The trial looked at eight pasture legumes, recording visual observations on the use of pre-emergent, post-emergent and PSPE sprays to identify effective broadleaf weed control options. Luke noted the trial was significantly affected by glyphosate applied shortly before sowing, emphasising the detrimental impact of excessive glyphosate rates on small-seeded pasture species prior to seeding. The impact of Asulam on different pasture varieties was also noteworthy, and Luke plans to investigate this further.

Annie Ciampaglia, Elanco's new WA rep, then discussed a recently launched product called **Cyrex**, **a dual-active jetting fluid** used to prevent and treat strike, and control lice in long-wool sheep.

Next stop was a farm in Coomalbidgup, where **Tom Carmody (Clare Downs)** gave us an overview of the operation, including work he has been undertaking to establish a **rotational grazing system**. The Carmody's livestock program includes a pastoral property in Wiluna, from which cattle are brought down to Esperance at around 200kg for finishing on pasture and then a feedlot, along with some cull cows and bulls. Tom's goal for the rotational grazing system is that it will come to produce 10 tonne to the hectare of dry matter, harvested through the cows with a conversion ratio of 10:1, in order to produce a tonne of beef to the hectare.

The system was mainly composed of annuals, but Tom was trying to lengthen the grazing season by integrating millet and lucerne. He had faced some challenges establishing the lucerne (GTL60 Goldstrike), having sown it in March and then becoming busy with the main cropping program which delayed his availability to control insects. The area then became very wet and the resulting establishment was less than ideal. Speaking with Tom recently, he commented that later in the season he had sprayed out the lucerne to make way for an Elders summer forage trial (pg. 10), but that a surprising amount of it had come back showing how hardy it can be. Tom plans to make a second attempt establishing the lucerne next season. There was also a discussion around supply shortages of Pearler Millet seed, with a number of producers in the region having to use alternate varieties.

Tom also gave some insight into plans to get a **travelling irrigation system** going, using excess winter surface water captured in a dam, to jump start a summer or winter crop.



Jack Nixon (Shearwell) finished off the stop at the Carmody's by giving an update on Shearwell's range of sheep and cattle tags (more on pg. 25).

We then headed to **Mark and Liv Walter**'s (**TKO Farming**) in Cascade, where lunch from the CWA burger van was a hit, plus the opportunity to have a look at Liam Reeves' **ram shearing trailer** in action.

Mark and Liv were planning to bulk up seed from **two new harvestable annual legume cultivars** that they were considering integrating into their system; **Carn$_2$ac Trigonella** and **Diaman$_2$ti Bladder Clover**. Paddock preparation included two knockdowns pre-seeding, seeding was on the 27th April, and then the paddocks were rolled immediately post seeding. Post seeding the paddocks received 250 ml chlorpyrifos and 90 ml bifenthrin, and then a grass spray on 12th August with 750 ml clethodim and trojan at 12 ml.

Dr Tom Edwards (DPIRD) addressed the group about the **Harvestable Annual Legume Options (HALO) research project**, which aims to incorporate legumes into crop rotations to reduce the risk to the farming system by reducing fertiliser costs and improving weed and disease management. Part of this research is focussed on supporting the introduction and management of Carn$_2$ac and Diaman$_2$ti.

Tom explained that **Diaman$_2$ti** is suited for the 250-400mm annual rainfall zones and is 100 days to flowering with very high seed yields. Being tall growth (0.5m) and highly nutritious for livestock makes it a very productive forage and well suited for hay. **Carn$_2$ac** is suited to mildly acidic-alkaline soils that are fine or medium textured in the 200-450mm annual rainfall zones. It is 76 days to flowering with good pod retention, making it a harvestable replacement for annual medics. It has high levels of nitrogen fixation above what is seen in most annual medic pastures.

Speaking with Mark recently, he commented that they had not ended up harvesting the seed but had been pleased with the performance of both varieties. The paddocks were sprayed to control the volunteer vetch and then grazed. The Diaman$_2$ti particularly caught Mark's eye, with the seed pods providing really good grazing and dry feed, and the paddock holding together well. The Walters intend to put in around 200ha of Diaman$_2$ti and some of the Carn$_2$ac in the coming season (in separate paddocks), with the aim to establish a longer-term rotation that will regenerate periodically around their cropping program. If you are interested in purchasing seed contact Clint Butler (0429 647 335) for Carn$_2$ac and John Howieson (0438 903 705) for Diaman$_2$ti.

At the field day Mark and Liv also took us through their **pit silage**, with a comparison of silage stored in 2024 and that cut in August 2025. The composition was barley (seeded at 50 kg/ha) with zoom ryegrass (at 10 kg/ha).

Images starting top left: Staff and students from Wongutha CAPS; Enjoying lunch from CWA; Ram shearing trailer; Carn$_2$ac Trigonella; Dr Tom Edwards; Assessing Carn$_2$ac nodulation; Close-up of Carn$_2$ac nodulation; Mark and Liv Walter in the Diaman$_2$ti Bladder Clover holding silage samples; Comparing pit silage.

[Cont'd over page]

It was then back on the road to the next stop in Cascade, to hear from **Simeon Roberts (Lortleaze Farms)**, who started by taking us through a paddock of **RM4 Vetch** at Wirra West that had been seeded with no fertiliser, at 22kg/ha, on 15th March. Simeon explained that he had experienced problems with **mustard weed** getting through the system and setting seed early, and that he had found that sheep do not like to eat it. To target the mustard, he has had two years of successful control by using REFLEX at 750ml/ha PSPE.

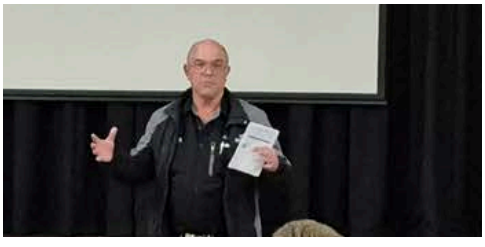
The paddock at Wirra West had a spray pass with no applied REFLEX for comparison, as Simeon wanted to check on concerns he had that the REFLEX application could be reducing the biomass of the vetch and also have a residual effect on following wheat crop. There was no notable visible difference in the vetch in the control strip at the time of the field day.

Simeon then took us to a nearby dam where he had installed retired CBH **tarps on a dam catchment**. This was the second catchment Simeon had lined, aiming to improve the farm's water security. The tarped area was 250m x 40m, with 1 meter buried around the perimeter. Simeon reported that it had been achieving run-off in as little as 1mm rainfall events. Tips for install included ensuring it was a very calm day, that the area was not too wet for trucks, to make sure to have enough side walls, and that site preparation was very important (the Roberts' catchment preparation included laser levelling, carry grader and road grader to prepare site, a roller to flatten site, and grading to cover tarp edges).

John Simons (DPIRD) added his expertise to the conversation, having been involved in a SEPWA-led project that has assessed the install and then monitored two tarp-lined dam catchments in the Esperance region. Key resources on the project are available at sepwa.org.au/demo-trials/, including an instructional video on installing a catchment liner, and a video on the November 2023 project results. John also raised that another project, the "WaterSmart Dams Project" has produced a range of useful resources for farmers (visit www.gga.org.au/activity/watersmart-dams/).

The day finished off at the Cascade Hall with an interesting series of talks, including from **Ian Donaldson (Rabobank)** on the WA farmland market, **John Mitchell (Esperance Livestock Transport)** on the importance of preparing livestock well for transport, **Andrew Longbottom (DPIRD)** on the transition to compulsory eID tagging of sheep, and **Nick Ruddenklau** with an update on ASHEEP & BEEF's cattle-focused MLA producer demonstration site projects. Many thanks to all who helped to bring the day together!

Images clockwise starting top left: The Roberts' ewes and lambs in RM4 Vetch; Simeon Roberts in a paddock of RM4 Vetch; John Simons with Nick Ruddenklau and Simeon Roberts at a tarped dam catchment; Three images of the dam catchment works; Andrew Longbottom; John Mitchell; Ian Donaldson.



WAMMCO looks to the year ahead

Damien Giumelli, WAMMCO

The past year has seen an impressive strengthening in global demand and prices for lamb and mutton, led by strong sales into North America and the Middle East, along with other important markets in China, South-East Asia and Europe. A somewhat restricted supply in Australia and New Zealand has assisted exporters to secure higher prices and more revenue for both lamb and mutton, allowing for significantly higher livestock prices in 2025.

A competitive Australian dollar exchange rate has helped returns, with the currency ranging from 62 cents to over 66 cents. The outlook for the A$ is difficult to predict, though with recent signals of fewer interest rate cuts in Australia, and potential for higher rates, some of the banks are calling the dollar higher in 2026.

North America continues to drive strong demand for our lamb, and another solid year is predicted for the year ahead, aided by our close cooperation with our US and Canadian based partners, and our fellow shareholders in the Australian and New Zealand Lamb Company.

The Middle East is displaying ongoing growth with sales and prices lifting again to this region. Shipping to ports in the Red Sea is still experiencing disruption, though some shipping lines have recommenced operations, allowing for some of WAMMCO's important trade to resume.

Chinese demand has been tempered by high prices and weaker consumer confidence this year. We have seen a significant shift in the sales of mutton products away from China and into the Middle East where returns have been higher. Despite this, China continues to be extremely important to the Australian sheepmeat industry and provides some of the best returns for specific cuts of lamb and mutton.

Europe and UK have provided improved options for high value cuts this year with increased sales recorded into the UK under the Free Trade Agreement. European prices have also firmed, particularly for leg sales at Christmas and Easter time. However, the EU is still restricted by tight quotas on the import of sheepmeat. Government trade envoys continue to push for a relaxation of quotas, and there is some optimism for a favourable outcome in the coming 1-2 years.

In the year ahead we expect to see continuing strong demand for our premium WAMMCO branded products through our well-established network of customers around the world.

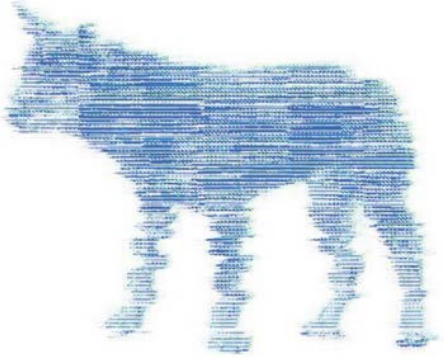
New farmer guide to cyber security

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

Charles Sturt University has released a new online cyber security guide for farmers. The initiative aims to provide farmers with the awareness and skills to minimise or prevent cyber intrusions or attacks on their farm business, including their digital farming operations.

The evidence-based resource materials were developed by a research project team from four Australian universities - Charles Sturt University, Adelaide University, Queensland University of Technology and Edith Cowan University.

The guide includes an interactive jump-in jump-out, study at your own pace practical training module about cybersecurity that has sections on how to get help now if you have been affected by a cybersecurity incident; the basics of cybersecurity; information about cyber safe practices on social media, on the web, with passwords, with software and devices, and with sending data online; threats, including scams and secure websites; and how to report and recover from a cybersecurity attack. There is also a range of fact sheets.



The resources are freely available, find them at:
www.csu.edu.au/research/farmers-cybersecurity (via the QR code).

Are oestrogenic clovers costing you calves?

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

Dr Jess Shilling (Bovitech Veterinary Services) recently got in touch with ASHEEP & BEEF, having wrapped up a three-year research project in collaboration with the University of Western Australia. "The project looked at the effects of grazing oestrogenic clovers on cattle fertility and whether cattle exhibit the 'clover disease' syndrome which is known to occur in sheep," wrote Dr Shilling. A timely email, as an ASHEEP & BEEF member was recently asking about the impact of these clovers on cattle.

Dr Shilling advised that the project could not demonstrate a 'clover disease' like syndrome in heifers grazing oestrogenic clovers, although they "did find some minor negative effects on bull semen quality." The properties involved in the trial were in Albany, but the same clover types exist in the Esperance region. **Following is a summary provided by Dr Shilling of the project results.**

What is the issue?

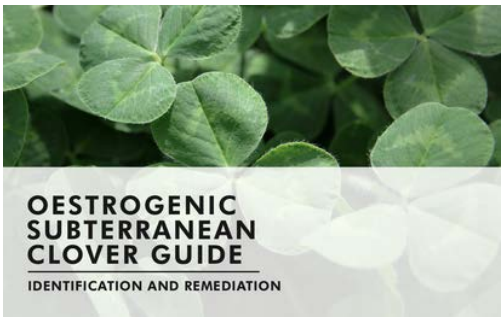
Old cultivars of subterranean clovers are commonly found in pasture mixes in southern Australia – even if they have not been seeded for many years. Some of these old cultivars contain high levels of a phytoestrogen called "formononetin" and are known to cause reduced fertility in sheep that consume it. The term "clover disease" is used to describe infertility, prolapsing of reproductive organs, reduced lambing rates and inappropriate lactation in maiden ewes and wethers, associated with grazing these old subclovers.

Despite the development and release of newer, lower oestrogenic cultivars, the old cultivars still exist and can hybridise with other subclovers, making visual identification difficult. Until recently, ***it was thought that the negative effects on fertility were limited to ewes****, however* ***new studies have shown that rams are also affected.*** *An* ***increasing number of infertility cases have been reported for cattle*** *grazing high oestrogenic forages or silage in recent years, both locally and around the world. This prompted a study on the effects in cattle.*

What did we do?

The effects of oestrogenic clovers on the fertility of cattle was studied over a 3-year period.

Below: A guide developed by UWA and DPIRD, a great resource to identify clovers. Find it at the QR code, hard copies are available.



Year 1 (2022)

A laboratory test that could identify phytoestrogen exposure in cattle needed to be developed. Blood samples were collected from heifers across 10 different properties, which were grazing known oestrogenic clovers. These samples were used to validate a test that can reliably detect phytoestrogens in blood.

Year 2 (2023)

Attempts were made to study the effects of oestrogenic clovers on heifer fertility. Unfortunately, poor seasonal conditions and a sharp downturn in the Western Australian cattle market, limited the number of heifers available for the study. A link between the grazing of oestrogenic clovers with a lower reproductive performance in heifers was unable to be made as high levels of oestrogenic clovers were not available during the study period.

Year 3 (2024)

The effects of oestrogenic clovers on bull fertility were studied. Bulls from two different properties were grazed on oestrogenic clovers and the effects on semen quality were assessed before and after exposure.
A decrease in sperm motility was seen at both properties. An increase in sperm morphological defects and an increase in sperm DNA fragmentation was seen on one property. The changes seen in bull semen quality were only mild, however, they did not have a high level of exposure. It should be noted that again, oestrogenic clover levels were low during this year of the study as well.

How can you test the risk of oestrogenic clovers?

Laboratory testing is not required to determine the risks of oestrogenic clover affecting your cattle's fertility. You can use simple field guides to help identify oestrogenic clover cultivars, in combination with visual pasture assessments to estimate the percentage of oestrogenic clover in your paddocks. See the MLA guide "Oestrogenic sub clover pastures: identification and remediation" for tips on how to identify oestrogenic clovers. *[Continued]*

What levels of oestrogenic clovers are "safe" to graze cattle?

- *Oestrogenic clovers in low levels (<20% of the diet) are unlikely to have a significant impact on cattle fertility.*
- *Other health issues (scouring, bloating, death) are associated with grazing any clover dominant pastures (>80% of diet) – avoiding risky pastures or diluting with a good quality fibre source (hay) and providing anti-bloat supplements is recommended.*
- *The effects of phytoestrogens on cattle fertility is still not fully understood. Further studies are now required to determine the effects of grazing high levels of oestrogenic clover over multiple seasons.*

How can oestrogenic clovers be controlled?

- *Dilute old subclover varieties by seeding with new "safer" cultivars, and/or by seeding competitor pasture species such as ryegrasses and cereals.*
- *Phytoestrogen levels are highest when subclover is green and prior to flowering, however they can remain high in hay and silage.*
- *Waterlogging can increase phytoestrogens in subclovers.*
- *Optimising phosphorus and sulphur levels can decrease formononetin.*
- *If you experience poor reproductive performance in your herd, ensure a thorough workup is conducted by your livestock veterinarian to rule out other common causes of infertility.*

More Information: *Contact Dr Jess Shilling (Bovitech Veterinary Services), 0499 489 919, office@bovitech.com.au.*

How are rams impacted by oestrogenic clovers?

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

As highlighted by Dr Jess Shilling in the previous article, ewe fertility can be affected by grazing oestrogenic sub clovers. What is less widely known is that ram fertility may also be impacted. I contacted Dr Kevin Foster (UWA) to learn more about what recent research is telling us.

Dr Foster directed me to a paper by Pool et al 2023 titled "*Low-moderate dietary phytoestrogens transiently disrupt spermatogenesis and the seminal plasma proteome in the ram*." The key finding is that clover disease is not limited to ewes, as previously believed for many years.

In the study, rams were grazed on an oestrogenic pasture for eight weeks (June–August) at the UWA Ridgefield research farm. These rams developed abnormal reproductive traits, while rams in the control (low-oestrogen) pasture did not. Importantly, once the rams were returned to non-oestrogenic pastures, the issues resolved, and no differences between groups were observed in the following breeding season (monitored during February).

In discussing the findings, Dr Foster explained that ram fertility risk in WA is likely to be low during our normal joining period, as joining usually occurs when pastures are dry. Phytoestrogen concentrations fall rapidly after flowering and are typically low to almost zero in dry feed. (Silage and hay are exceptions, as oestrogen levels can remain high if cut green). He also noted that artificial insemination (AI) programs could be at risk if semen is collected when rams are grazing green oestrogenic clovers. The study only covered one season, so longer-term impacts on ram fertility still need further investigation.

This is only a snapshot of the research, so if you'd like to explore the study further, contact Dr Kelsey Pool (kelsey.pool@uwa.edu.au) or look up the paper online.

New research is also emerging from the USA showing that insect damage can increase phytoestrogen levels in red clover, and Dr Foster mentioned an Esperance case a few years ago where a foliar fungal infection in annual medics was later associated with ewe fertility issues when grazed dry over summer, although this is a different compound to that found in sub and red clover.

If you suspect fertility problems linked to pasture, or want to know more, contact Dr Kevin Foster (UWA) at kevin.foster@uwa.edu.au.

For producers wanting more information on identifying and managing oestrogenic clovers, the UWA/DPIRD factsheet "**Oestrogenic sub clover pastures: identification and remediation**" is an excellent resource. (Note that it does not yet include the newer findings on ram fertility or insect-related increases in phytoestrogens). Find it via the QR code to the right.

MLA PDS projects in southern WA

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

The Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) program, led by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), is a "hands-on initiative designed to accelerate the adoption of best-practice management and new technologies across Australia's livestock industry" (*Alana McEwan, MLA*). MLA has 12 active PDS projects across southern WA, including 4 being run by ASHEEP & BEEF (and we hope to announce a couple of new PDS projects shortly!) ASHEEP & BEEF's current PDS projects include:

- **Emission intensity: Getting started on farm** (concluding in 2027, this PDS has produced a toolkit to help livestock producers complete an emissions profile that you can download via the ASHEEP & BEEF website)
- **Preventing bull preputial breakdown by vaccination** (we are currently preparing the final results)
- **Optimising age of weaning cattle** (the last season of data is being gathered with final results out next year)
- **Utilising heifer pre-mating serology to manage BVDV** (has been extended for three additional seasons of data collection! If you have not already, get involved to take advantage of subsidised BVDV testing via Swans Veterinary Services)

Find more information on each of these projects, including results to date and case studies, at www.asheepbeef.org.au/projects-activities.

Other WA PDS projects

It's great to be able to learn from the activities that other producer groups are undertaking. Here are a few of the current projects in WA that may be of interest. ASHEEP & BEEF members are welcome to get in touch if you have a project idea that you would like to develop for future PDS funding rounds.

Productive saltland pastures for southern WA

Through this project, the Gillamii Grower Group in the Great Southern region of WA has set out to improve the productivity of marginal saltland land, with 150 hectares of salt-tolerant forage systems being established over the course of their PDS project in collaboration with four farming families.

Beyond this PDS, Gillamii has built a lot of knowledge over the years on saltland pastures. Along with DPIRD they developed a **web app**, which is worthwhile accessing for anyone interested in solutions for saline land.

Contact: The Gillamii Centre, (08) 9826 1234, admin@gillamii.org.au

Ewe lamb joining made easy

Delivered across five demonstration sites within Boyup Brook, Broomehill, Ongerup, Palmdale, and Munglinup, this PDS is designed to showcase the practical and financial benefits of best-practice ewe lamb joining techniques. Activities commence in 2026, run by advisor James Macfarlane, AgricUltra. If you are interested in finding out more, contact James on 0447 999 902 or james@agricultra.com.au.

AI and microscopy for worm control

Led by Stirlings to Coast Farmers, this PDS aims to address the challenge of drench resistance in sheep gastrointestinal worms across the Great Southern and South Coastal regions of WA. The PDS will demonstrate the use of digital microscope and AI technology to enable timely, on-farm identification of worm burdens and resistance status, helping producers make more informed drenching decisions and reduce reliance on chemical treatments. Activities start in 2026, for more information contact Victoria Surridge on 0428 171 285 or victoria.surridge@scfarmers.org.au.

Search for more PDS projects

To look up other PDS projects in WA and around Australia visit:
www.mla.com.au/extension-training-and-tools/search-pds/

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February

Next ASHEEP & BEEF Committee Meeting is scheduled for FEBRUARY 2026

Contact a committee or staff member to raise an item.

UPCOMING EVENTS

AWI Novice Shearing and Wool Handling Course - 12-16 Jan (Boyup Brook)

Esperance Zone Innovation AGM - 4 Mar (Esperance)

Fitzgerald Biosphere Group Dancing in the Dirt Gala Ball - 14 Mar (Gairdner)

WALRC Livestock Matters - 18 Mar (Katanning area)

Gillamii Centre Great Southern Salinity Summit - 19 Mar (Tambellup)

Condingup Fair - 21 Mar (Condingup) - wool competition entries wanted!

ASHEEP & BEEF Autumn Field Day - 25 Mar (Esperance region)

LambEx Conference - 7-10 Jul (Adelaide)

SAVE THE DATE

ASHEEP & BEEF Autumn Field Day 25th March 2026

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