



BLNZ Regional Case Study - Southland

Case Study Farm: Russell and Janine Drummond

Analysis & Report prepared by: Simon Glennie – AbacusBio Ltd

Exec Summary:

While lamb kill was 700 ahead of June 1st predictions, crop yields have been measured and confirmed as being behind. Pasture covers came in around 80Kg/Ha below expectation which has the impact of increasing the deficit from 25t which we were happy to run with back up to 100t. With the measured certainty of the feed crops, we have decided to explore the market for hogget grazing in spring and will also plan an additional Nitrogen application in Spring.

Background: This report is an update of a previous case study examining the issues, analysis and management options considered by a local farmer.

Farm Overview: *Farm size, brief overview of farm system and farm performance*

The farm is 810Ha of rolling country 40 minutes west of Winton. 250Ha is oversown tussock while the remaining 560Ha has been cultivated ranging from steep to easy rolling. Stock performance has been historically good with ewes lambing around 140% and calving 90%+. Lambs are finished on the property with final weights determined by feed availability.

Current situation: *What is the current feed position on farm, what are the key issues?*

Our expectations were based on needing to carry 1000 lambs into June as a response to Covid 19. Due to good fortune and great work at the processing plants, the number of lambs remaining on farm is just 212 as we enter June. As a direct result our total feed demand has dropped earlier than predicted. However, pasture growth was slightly behind expectation in May, possibly moisture limited as conditions appeared to be favourable. The Nitrogen did appear to boost growth, and with very good feed utilisation we are happy with ewe condition at this stage. While we had anticipated being able to hold ewe condition, the current pasture covers are lower than predicted so will need to allocate feed carefully as we begin supplementary feeding. Winter crop yields were expected to be behind normal placing pressure on spring pasture covers. Modelling shows that in spite of the earlier lamb kill, spring is still very tight and the feed situation hinged on crop yields.

We have reviewed the yield of winter crops by random sampling and weighing of a number of carefully measured areas. Actual yields remained very close to estimations overall and no silver bullet came to pass. As a result and as anticipated, the crops remain poor relative to normal expectations.



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Options

With a 150t deficit still looming in spring we discussed the consequences of doing nothing. Pasture covers are predicted to be around 1200 in Spring if this were the case and we expect the ewes would get on top of feed, have lower than optimal intake and not be able to support the best possible lactation. As a result, lambs are forced onto grass earlier and begin to compete with the ewe from an earlier age. Lamb growth rate pre weaning is compromised and options are more limited should summer dry conditions bite. From past experience, the impact could be as much as \$5-10/ sale lamb next season (\$40-\$80K). Doing nothing, while very easy to implement, was not an option we wanted to take.

Delayed mating dates of the 1750 hoggets and 1100 early lambing ewes were updated in the farm model and lambing expectation of the hoggets reduced from 1000 to 900 lambs. These changes were the result of earlier decisions but did reduce the deficit to 133t DM.

1. Based on the very healthy state of pastures with no tag and very good ground conditions, we did lift growth expectations for pastures in August from 8KgDM/Ha/day (which was low end for the farm anyway) up to a more moderate 10Kg/d. In the modelling over 5 years, as much as 17KgDM/Ha/d has been produced in August. The size of the deficit reduced a further 30t to 103t.
2. A further application of Nitrogen in the spring. 140ha of additional area with N applied around mid August reduced the deficit to 69t. The cost to apply is \$9,800 and will generate approximately 70t of additional feed.
3. Dry hoggets grazing off farm. By mid August, scanning results of the mated hoggets will likely mean 500 dry hoggets will be able to go to grazing for 14 weeks. The grazing market is currently tight and at \$2/hd per week will cost \$14K plus cartage. The impact on the feed deficit was to reduce the deficit by 50t, back down to 17t

Decisions

With somewhere near 100t of deficit looming in October (we had expected 25t) we will try hard to secure grazing for the dry hoggets from August. As well as reducing feed demand, it does free up space for lambing livestock. With hogget lambing due in mid October, we need to free up the better sheltered areas and having the dry hoggets off farm should allow us this to occur with more ease.

More will be known by mid August with ewe condition, scanning and also the hogget scan to take into consideration. It is likely both hogget grazing and additional Nitrogen options will be taken so some financial preparation will be undertaken. With both options in the pipeline, an additional cost of \$25-\$30K will be incurred. But by taking the initiative, we are reducing the risk of a poor result in spring. In any case, a feed surplus, if it eventuates, will be well converted by ewes and lambs into weight gain.

It could well pan out that doing nothing works out OK but it is our deduction, at this stage, that the merit of taking the options discussed will work out for the best.