

Livestock to help manage risk

Growers should determine the long-term role of livestock in reducing risk and plan drought recovery over several years according to the new Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) *2008 Planning Guide for Low-Risk Farming*.

GRDC Southern Panel chair David Shannon said the guide included advice about utilising and managing livestock as a risk management tool.

“Livestock can be a major risk management tool in dryland farming systems, but it may be difficult to apply this knowledge in 2008,” he said. “Feeding and managing livestock through drought carries a cost so it’s important to assess the likely costs and benefits before making a decision to sell down or feed through. Every drought is different.

“Determining the long-term role that livestock plays in reducing risk on their farm will help growers decide whether stock numbers need to change in 2008. Growers should plan their recovery over the next few years rather than focus on last season.”

David said the guide’s livestock section included advice about making better use of existing dry feed and managing soil erosion when grazing stock.

Utilising more dry stockfeed

“There are ways growers can utilise more of their existing dry feed,” he said. “The difficulty lies in doing it without exposing paddocks to high erosion risk. When grazing dry feed, sheep will camp less and bare out fewer patches if they are in the paddock for only a short time.

“Growers should consider joining mobs together and moving them, in a paddock rotation, about once a week and continuing with this as long as critical ground cover levels are maintained. This way the stock will lose condition more evenly. Water supply needs to be adequate or sheep will camp around the trough.

“Containment feeding is a relatively easy and labour-efficient option that growers can consider, but it should only be used once the paddock feed has been utilised. Containment feeding helps to reduce erosion and permanent pasture damage from over-grazing.

“Agistment may also be a good option for growers this year. Costs may be less than \$1.40 per week. Where there are capital constraints on the farm business and stocking rate is well below potential, agistment and backgrounding should be considered by



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AT A GLANCE...

- Effective risk management is the key to meeting cropping challenges.
- Growers urged to assess costs and benefits in livestock management decisions.

growers during their recovery phase. The returns from these enterprises are generally lower than alternatives, but they are relatively low-risk.”

David said effective management of risk and profitability was the key to success in farming.

“Effective risk management is vital to maintaining farm sustainability and profitability for growers in the face of climate risk and rising production costs,” David said. “Growers have experienced poor seasons and marketing difficulties over the past two years and are looking for tools and information that will enable them to better manage these risks.

“In a timely response to this need, the GRDC gathered together a team of experts late last year to produce the *2008 Planning Guide for Low-Risk Farming*.”

Growers can obtain a copy of the 2008 guide by contacting the GRDC on (02) 6166 4500, or downloading a copy from www.grdc.com.au/lowriskfarming.

The guide will also be available through the Birchip, Eyre Peninsula, Central West, Mallee and Upper North farming systems groups involved in the GRDC Low Rainfall Collaboration Project.

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