

Feed365

Hosts: Slade Family (Mount Barker) and Lester Family (Manypeaks).

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Background

The Stirlings to Coast Farmers FEED365 is a three-year project (2023–2025) being undertaken in collaboration with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) SheepLinks program. This larger program aims to engage sheep producers and allied industries to re-design livestock forage systems for grazing all-year-round in Mediterranean environments, and to underpin the future prosperity of the sheep industry in Western Australia. The SheepLinks program is a partnership between DPIRD and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA).

Specifically, the FEED365 project as part of this larger program, aims to create resilient sheep production systems to enable farmers to increase livestock returns by grazing quality (preferably green) forage all year round with minimal supplementary feeding.

DPIRD Project Outcome: To reduce supplementary feeding costs of a typical mixed farming business by 30% and lift on-farm profitability by 10%.

Methodology

The SCF FEED365 project will investigate various pastures and forage plants through demonstrations implemented on host producer properties. Sheep weight gain will be monitored on the alternative pastures and forages and compared to weight gain on traditional pastures. Different crop and pasture types and different management methodologies will be implemented to gauge what will best suit producers in the Albany Port Zone.

In 2022

In Mount Barker, a paddock was sown to winter canola (variety Hyola 970CL) in September 2022, and will be divided into two with half the paddock over-sown with Maximus barley at 30 kg/ha. The sheep weight gains will be compared between the straight winter canola (control) and the winter canola/barley mix (treatment). The site is yet to be grazed.

In Manypeaks an annual mix of plantain and ryegrass

(control) will be compared to a nearby paddock divided in two and sown to:

- Lotus @ 80kg/ha, ryegrass @ 10-15 kg/ha and chicory @ 1-1.5 kg/ha.
- Red clover @ 8kg/ha, ryegrass @ 10-15 kg/ha and chicory @ 1-1.5 kg/ha.

Producer Surveys

Grower surveys are also currently being undertaken to gain information on current attitudes of SCF members towards including alternate pastures in their farming systems and to gauge what sorts of 'non-standard' pastures have already being successfully implemented by local producers.

Results to date

Data collected from producers during the survey process so far is yielding some interesting results, with a mix of attitudes towards including alternative pastures and forages in farming systems. Some farmers can be hesitant to experiment with different species while others have embraced the notion of substituting traditional methods with other practices which may be more complementary to their individual farming enterprises.

Conclusion

The FEED365 project will provide important data for sheep producers, providing data on new species and pasture systems, validated in the local area. This will assist producers in making decisions as to what will work on their farms. It is hoped that the inclusion of alternative pasture crops and forage shrubs in farming systems will help fill the feeds gaps throughout the year and potentially alleviate the need for supplementary feeding, providing better economic outcomes for farmers.

Acknowledgments

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