



PERENNIALPASTURESYSTEMS
MAKING PASTURE GO THE DISTANCE

Perennial Pasture Systems 11th Annual Study Tour; S.E. South Australia; October 2019



PPS Study Tour supported by



*Report compiled by PPS Project Manager Rob Shea from information supplied by
Study tour host farmers, Tim Prance & PPS study tour members.
Photos; Rob Shea, Debbie Shea, Craig Altmann*

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Notes

11th Annual Study Tour October 4th – 6th 2019

South East of South Australia

Introduction

Since the group's inception in 2007; PPS has recognised the value of members visiting leading farms in other regions as well as being informed of regional research projects. In 2009, PPS implemented an annual study tour as part of the group's extension activities and since then has held single and multiple day tours within Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania and New Zealand.

At the planning meeting in February, it was decided that the 2019 study tour would be to South Australia. Twenty eight members participated in the study tour which, in addition to farmers, included an agronomist, three seed company representatives and two CMA staff. Host farmers joined the PPS group for dinner on both nights.



Friday lunch at the Apsley Hotel



*M Drain; part of the drainage system in SE S.A
from the bridge at Kirklands Fumer
(photo Craig Altmann)*

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11th Annual Study Tour – South East South Australia

Study Tour Locations



Friday 4th October

Most study tour members met in Stawell to make their way to Minimay but a couple of car pool vehicles went directly to the first farm. Plenty of discussion on the way with one car so engrossed in conversation that they missed the farm turn off and added a few extra km's to the trip.

Friday 4th October

Farm Visit 1

Property: Booroopki

Owner: Hawkins Family

Location: Minimag, Victoria

Farm Size: 13,200 Ha

Enterprise(s): Sheepmeat, Wool, Cereals, Hay, Wether Lamb Trading

Although PPS requested only hot water to go with smoko at the first farm on the tour, plates of fresh scones greeted the group as PPS met the Hawkins family at Booroopki. Smoko was accompanied by an introduction from Ron Hawkins in the impressive staff quarters which are occupied for most of the year by contract workers but also hosts school visits and other outside groups. Ron explained the philosophy at Booroopki was “expansion over profit” and this was evidenced by the 13,200Ha farm covering a 30 X 30 Km area with a 170 km perimeter.

Sheep are number one priority but the cropping and hay paddocks showed that everything done on farm is at the highest level. 20,000 self replacing ewes are joined to Merinos with old and cull ewes joined to White Suffolks or Poll Dorsets. Large numbers of merino wether lambs (27,000 in 2018) are sourced from the Riverina for finishing. Around 85,000 sheep are shorn annually.



Ron Hawkins with PPS members



Newly purchased lambs which will be sold in autumn

PPS inspected an impressive stand of Balansa Clover, a species which forms an important part of the farm operation, before stopping at a bean crop which formed part of the 2,800 Ha cropping program. Lucerne is grown under 55 centre pivots, previously for seed, but currently for sheep or hay production. 700 B Double loads of hay have left Booroopki in the last two years. Straw is also baled for the Japanese racehorse industry.



Beans on Booroopki



Part of the extensive machinery complex

Booroopki has eight full time employees and contract workers add to this for shearing, hay making, harvesting and other operations; the workforce can peak at over 100 during hay operations. Many comments were made about the high standard of staff facilities which must make Booroopki an employer of choice for agricultural contractors.

The final stop was at the large machinery complex, previously part of a vegetable farm, it formed part of a land purchase, the existing infrastructure was an added bonus. Ron made the point “aim to have your finances in order so you can make the most of any opportunities that present themselves”.

To end the tour inspections were made of the hay equipment, seeding machinery and some of the trade Merino lambs that make up part of the sheep business. The group then headed to the Apsley pub for lunch and Ron Hawkins stayed with PPS for lunch and the tour of Locmaria Farms.

Farm Visit 2

Property: Locmaria Farms

Owner: Bruce Wood

Location: Laurie Park S.A.

Farm Size: 1,800 Ha

Enterprise(s): Prime Lamb, Trade Cattle, Vineyard

Bruce Wood is a former oil and gas industry executive and after a very short retirement, he decided that agriculture was a good investment and purchased properties near the Vic/SA border. As Bruce commented “no need to slow down; you are a long time dead”. Bruce places high importance on safety and biosecurity on Locmaria and briefed the group after joining us for lunch at Apsley. He then provided a bus for the tour of the property which straddles the Victorian/South Australian border.

Locmaria is set up for “techno grazing” with the 10,500 First X and Merino ewe flock rotating through a series of cells set up with electric fencing. A water system is reticulated through 100 high pressure water points that can each meet the needs of a 4,000 ewe flock. A consultant from New Zealand visits three times a year to give advice on the grazing system. Stocking rates are continually increasing and the aim is for a flock of 10,000 First X and 4,000 Merino ewes.



Bruce discussing the water system



Before and after grazing in one of the cells

The current plan on Locmaria is to reduce the size of the cells and implement improvements to the grazing system which should take the stocking rate to 13/14 dse/ha. The overall farm average is producing 215 kg/ha of wool and sheepmeat while the “techno grazing” area is producing over 300 kg/ha. Five centre pivots and one lateral irrigator are part of the system providing summer feed on lucerne and phalaris pastures. 40% of the lambs produced are sold by Xmas each year, while the remainder are finished on the irrigated pastures.



Pasture for lambs



Pasture inspection

Bruce estimates that Locmaria has a return of 35% on the development invested since the farm was purchased. He is extremely confident in the future of the sheep meat industry and cited the substantial increase in global red meat consumption, due to cultural and economic changes, as evidence against any recent negative publicity. Bruce isn't concerned about the increase of vegetarians in places like Australia.

Areas of Locmaria are being fenced for conservation and the ten year aim is for 5% of the property to be protected including 9 Ha specifically for Red Tailed Black Cockatoo habitat. Viticulture has also been introduced with 20 ha of red wine vineyards established.

Finally a good safety tip from Bruce; all vehicles on the farm are equipped with first aid kits which include a set of pliers to cut wires in case of accidents involving electric fences.

Friday photos



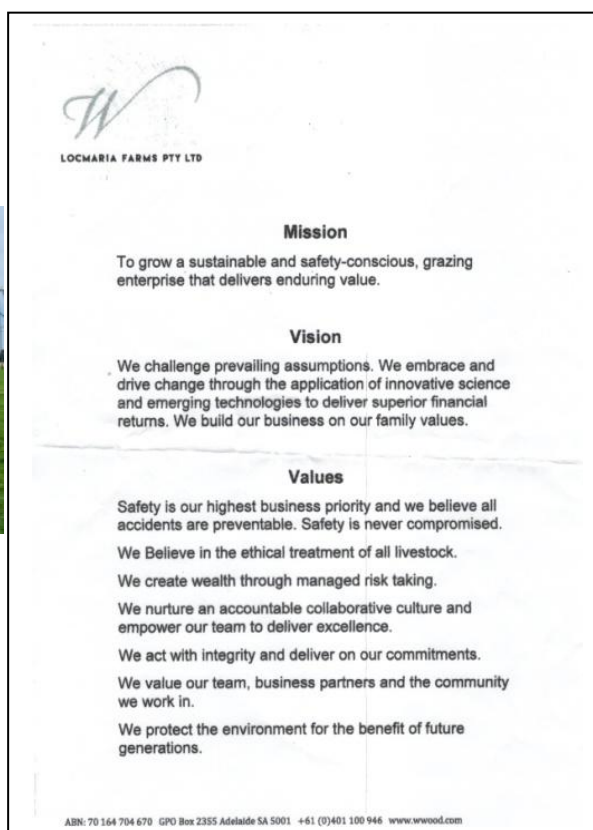
Dion Borg in the Balansa at Boorooopki



Sue Maconachie, Janine Curtis & Paul Harrington(r) with Andrew Hawkins from Boorooopki



Dryland farmers heading for one of the Locmaria centre pivots



Locmaria; Mission, Vision & Values statement



PPS President Duncan Thomas taking on bus captain duties at Locmaria



Wendy Harrington usually confines her study tour interest to the business part of the farms but the Balansa at Boorooopki was too inviting



Maureen Lawrence & Sue Maconachie ready for some serious tractor work at Boorooopki

Robe

After the final farm visit it was about an hour's drive to Robe for the overnight stop. Robe is a town and fishing port located on the Limestone Coast of South Australia. The town's distinctive combination of historical buildings, ocean, fishing fleets, lakes and dense bush is widely appreciated. Robe lies on the southern shore of Guichen Bay, just off the Princes Highway. At the 2006 census, Robe had a population of 1,246.



Robe, one of the oldest towns in South Australia, was founded by the colonial government as a seaport, administrative centre and village just ten years after the Province of South Australia was established.

During the Victorian gold rushes around 1857, over 16,000 Chinese people landed at Robe to travel overland to the goldfields, to avoid the Victorian landing tax of £10 per person (more than the cost of their voyage). Victoria wanted to reduce the number of Chinese immigrants. The immigrants then walked the 200 miles (320 km) to Ballarat and Bendigo. One group of Chinese miners stopped where Ararat is located and discovered the Canton Lead, which was regarded as the richest alluvial gold deposit in the world at the time.

Dinner was at the Caledonian Inn and Tim Prance gave a presentation on the region's agriculture. Saturday's host farmers were guests of PPS at dinner.



Paul Harrington enjoying the view outside the Caledonian Inn and inside with Dion Borg



Wendy Harrington & Duncan Thomas



*Dinner at Caledonian Inn; Robe
Mal Nicholson & Peter Howell*



Graeme & Kaye Price

Agricultural Conditions in South East, South Australia

Tim Prance; Tim Prance Rural Consulting, Victor Harbour S.A.

Tim grew up in the region and has extensive knowledge of South East S.A. agriculture; he is a PPS member and joined the study tour for some of the farm visits.

Key Points

The regions' rainfall varies from around 550 mm average at Naracoorte to 900 mm further south at Kalangadoo.

Most of the soils are derived from limestone and are quite shallow; many have a rock layer not far below the surface. Water holding capacity is low meaning that dryland pastures can run out of water in mid November.

At the time of European settlement, much of the flat terrain was prone to surface water collection restricting agriculture, the water flowed slowly to the north ending in the Coorong or swamps like Bool Lagoon. Drainage schemes commenced in the 1860's and changed the water flow directing it into the ocean.

Recent innovations have redirected fresh water to the Coorong with the aim of reducing high salinity levels.

Tim responded to questions of the Murray-Darling system and the amount of water that seems to go to S.A. pointing out that many irrigators in S.A. have converted to dry land farming due to water restrictions. He considers that the whole Murray-Darling system needs addressing rather than blaming individual users.

The South East has good underground water with the surface aquifer 10 – 30 metres underground, the artesian aquifer can be accessed at 100+ metres. The water can be salty in the north of the region.

The South East has mineral deficiencies in the soil which can affect animal health; cobalt deficiency is common and pellets are needed for sheep and cattle. Potash levels are high which suppresses magnesium in the soil.

Phalaris with sub, strawberry and balansa clover make up much of the improved pastures while lucerne replaces the clovers in some phalaris based pastures. Some cocksfoots and fescues are also used. Brassicas are planted for summer feed. White clover is used where irrigation is available.

Land prices are high with land around Millicent being sold for \$7,000/acre (\$17,500/Ha).



PPS Girls & Grass Advisory Group member, Janine Curtis, presenting some PPS gifts to Tim after his presentation.

Saturday October 5th

Farm Visit 3

Property: Barooka

Location: Mt Benson, S.A.

Enterprise(s): Sheepmeat, Wool, Beef

Owners: Goode Family

Farm Size: 3,000 Ha

PPS was introduced to the Barooka operation when Henry Goode was a presenter at the 2018 PPS Annual Conference. A visit to Barooka was one of the early decisions in the study tour planning and Henry and his father Deane gave a great insight into their operation. 6,000 adult Merino ewes and 2,000 ewe weaners are joined annually with scanning rates of around 135% and the main focus is on sheep meat production although wool production is also a priority. Long regarded as innovative producers, the Goode family ceased mulesing 12 years ago and despite not using any chemical fly treatments have minimal fly strike issues. They shear twice per year during May and November consistently producing a clip of 65 mm length at 18-19 micron in autumn and 20/21 micron in spring. Wethers are sold as lambs at 20/21 kg dressed weight. Selection for good mothering and twinning with a concentration on fat and eye muscle forms the basis of genetic improvement and sheep operations are carried out in a modern sheep handling centre which includes a sheep lifting race. The Goodes had some pretty handy rams yarded for inspection.



*Henry & Deane Goode with Peter Howell
in the background.*



Sheep handling centre

The Goodes are reducing mob size at lambing to improve lamb survival and have a high emphasis in getting feed on offer and sheep condition score spot on for lambing. Shelter at lambing is also an important part of the management.

The property also has a 350 Shorthorn breeding herd which calves in spring; weaners are grown to 350/400 kg before sale.

The farm consists of around two thirds wet flats but an area of over 1,200 Ha has red soil which allows for an area of irrigation. 5 centre pivots cover 370 Ha which grows a lucerne, cocksfoot and phalaris mixed pasture. Underground water of less than 300 ppm salinity can be at a depth of 2 metres on parts of the property and the group inspected a permanent dam created by digging through the limestone with a bulldozer.



Underground water at 2 metres



Yellow sandy, clay soil on Barooka

The Goodes have created a novel lease agreement to fund centre pivot expansion. A 40 Ha area of red soil is leased to potato growers who put in a centre pivot system. At the end of the lease the infrastructure stays on Barooka.

Farm Visit 3
Property: Barooka

Owner: Ned

While the PPS group was very impressed with the Barooka operation and Henry & Deane's informative discussions, they were upstaged by another member of the farm business; Ned.

Ned was very welcoming and it was quite noticeable that he was lacking his right hind leg.



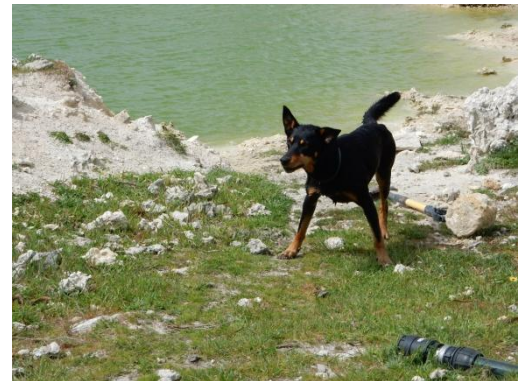
Enquires were made and Deane explained "got hit by a car; then got hit by a car again; he's also been bitten by a brown snake and nearly got cut in half by a chainsaw".

The latter occurring due to Ned's excitement when there is a bit of extra noise around.

Ned showed that he has good sheepyard skills helping during the sheep inspection and he spent the rest of his time making friends with PPS members. He seemed to like us, judging by the photo on the study tour report cover.



*Ned showing
off the high
quality of the
underground
water*



That's not a stick -



This is a stick!

Saturday 5thst October:

Farm Visit 4

Property: Konetta

Location: Greenways S.A.

Enterprise(s): Wool, Lamb

Owners: A J & P A McBride

Farm Size: 7,500 ha

Albert James McBride and his son Philip Albert Martin McBride formed AJ & PA McBride Ltd on the 22nd of July, 1920. Since then, the company has steadily acquired properties, first in North West (1924) then the South East of the state (1937). During the last forty years, the company has focused on adding to existing properties with tracts of land being purchased adjoining all properties. Now in its tenth decade of operations, all shares in AJ & PA McBride are still held by descendants of the founders and the board of the company now has a director in the fifth generation of the family. A J & P A McBride has 1.3 million Ha of land under their stewardship and produces over 6,000 bales of wool annually. Konetta Station forms part of the McBride agricultural business and produces fully grown, award winning Prime lamb, as well as more than 1,200 bales of high quality fine wool.

After meeting Konetta overseer Romain Devaud over dinner on Friday night, PPS met up again in a top fescue/phalaris/clover pasture with Romain and Tim Prance discussing the management of the region's alkaline soils. Magnesium, cobalt, selenium and copper deficiencies that need to be dealt with but the alkaline soils are very high in potassium. 20,000 Merino ewes and 300 breeding cows along with trade steers form the stock mix on Konetta, 15,000 ewes are joined to Merinos and 5,000 to Poll Dorsets. Ewes are set stocked at lambing before going into mobs of 4,000 for rotational grazing. There were 90,000 dse on Konetta when PPS visited.



*Not an issue at home for tour group
Alkaline soil at Konetta Ph 8 – 8.5*



Konetta woolshed

Lunch was taken in the new shearing shed and Romain gave the group further information on the Konetta operation. The farm has abundant artesian water supply but winter rains can cause waterlogging issues in wet years. The soil overlays limestone rock and drills are required for fencing operations.

Improvements in lamb survival are a high priority on Konetta and reductions in mob size at lambing are being implemented along with continuing increases in paddock shelter. All hoggets are fleece scanned at shearing with the aim of keeping the wool clip in the 16.5 – 18.5 micron range.

An inspection of a very productive heavy black soil flat which had impressive pasture growth completed the tour.



Fertile black soil on Konetta



*Stuart Robinson, Romain Devaud &
Charlie de Fegely at the Konetta woolshed*

PPS would like to acknowledge Konetta manager, Kingsley Breeding for his assistance in organising the visit. Kingsley had a prior engagement and was unable to meet the PPS group.

Further information on Konetta can be found at - <https://mcbride.com.au/properties/konetta>

Farm Visit 5

Property: Kirklands at Furner

Owner: Richie & Nikki Kirkland

Location: Conmurra, S.A.

Farm Size: 2,600 Ha

Enterprise(s): Lamb, wheat, canola, beans – some cattle but not for much longer

Kirklands at Furner was originally a 400 Ha soldier settler block and it has grown over the years with a recent land purchase increasing the farm area to 2,600 Ha. 8,000 to 9,000 BL X Merino ewes make up the extensive lamb operation and the 800 Ha cropping program produces wheat, canola and beans. There are some trade cattle on farm but these are to be phased out as Richie explains that the country is too wet for cattle. The sheep operation is moving to a composite flock as they handle the wet conditions better than the Merino X ewes.

The wet conditions were more problematic for farming after European settlement when large areas of water covered the large, flat plains before slowly draining to lakes in the north. Drainage schemes, including the large M Drain, now take water from the area to Lake George and the Coorong. Kirklands was one of two farms on the tour not to have irrigation.

Richie and Nikki have quality livestock management evidenced by the sheep handling facilities and the practical set up of their crutching trailer. The sheep yards have an impressive view of local forest, some of which is “heritage scrub” listed under a state government plan. The farm has several mineral deficiency issues and the Kirklands overcome these by using a mineral mix formulated by Richie for their sheep.



Sheep handling centre with heritage scrub



*Left; farm drain running into M Drain
Right; fodder rape for summer feed*

Lambing takes place in late May-June with the five week joining period to be reduced to three for a tighter lambing. Lambs are grown to a sale weight of up to 25.5 kg dressed which takes them off farm prior to the grain harvest. Pastures are of the highest quality but have restrictions on production with oestrogenic Yarloop sub clover covering a lot of the farm. Careful management is preventing the issues associated with Yarloop, such a reduced lambing percentages, from having a large impact. Grazing rotations are carefully managed and ryegrass is added to sub clover to bulk up the feed reducing the intake of the Yarloop.



Yarloop sub clover



*Nikki & Richie on the M Drain bridge
waiting for the PPS group*

Richie originally supplemented farm income working as a shearer including repeated stints in the Ararat & Stawell area working for contractor “Rocky” Nicholson. He then became a shearing instructor working throughout southern Australia. Richie’s shearing days are now in the past but Richie and Nikki host an annual shearing school on the property.

Woakwine Cutting

Ray Zippel from the Wimmera CMA suggested that a visit to the Woakwine cutting near Beachport would be of interest to the group and a short detour was added to the drive to Mt Gambier.

The Woakwine cutting releases water from 450 Ha of farmland, which was originally a peat swamp and drains into Lake George. Construction was undertaken by the owner of the land Murray McCourt and his employee Dick McIntyre in the 1950's. Completed in less than three years, it is a kilometre long and 28.34 metres deep at its deepest point. 276,000 cubic metres were removed with a Caterpillar D7, a 7 ton drain ripper and a scraper. The use of explosives helped; it is a very impressive site although it is a certainty that it would not receive planning permission today.



Mt Gambier

Mount Gambier is the second most populated city in South Australia with an estimated urban population of 28,684. The city is well known for its geographical features, particularly its volcanic and limestone features, most notably its Blue Lake, parks and gardens, caves and sinkholes. The peak of the dormant volcano was the first place in South Australia named by European explorers. Before European settlement, the Buandig (or Boandik) people were the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. They called it 'ereng balam' or 'egree belum', meaning 'home of the eagle hawk'.

The peak of the dormant Mount Gambier crater was sighted in 1800 by Lieutenant James Grant from the survey brig, HMS Lady Nelson, and named for Lord James Gambier; Admiral of the Fleet. The Henty brothers who owned large holdings in Portland, Western Victoria, laid claim to the land but were forced to retreat when the lands were granted to Evelyn Sturt, the brother of the explorer Charles Sturt.

World famous ballet dancer and actor, Sir Robert Helpmann was born in Mt Gambier as were musicians Kasey Chambers and Dave Graney. Brownlow Medallist, Gavin Wanganeen was also born in Mt Gambier.



An informal dinner was held at the South Eastern Hotel with guests Tom (Snr) and Sally Ellis from Coola Station as guests of PPS. An excellent social evening was had with study tour discussions extending well into Sunday morning.

Saturday



*What do you do about oestrogenic clover when it grows so well?
Mal Nicholson deep in thought at Kirklands*



Old sea shells in the limestone at Barooka



*Ben Greene, Wayne Burton & Tim Prance
examining root growth at Konetta*



Saturday's experts at Barooka



Wayne Burton (right) licking his lips in the clover at Kirklands



*Sue Maconachie keeping Ned amused
at Barooka (or is it the other way round)*

Sunday October 6th

Farm Visit 6

Property: Coola Station

Owner: Ellis Family

Location: German Creek S.A.

Farm Size: 5,600 Ha

Enterprise(s): Lamb, Breeding cattle, Bull beef, Trade cattle

Coola Station was established in the 1860's by Captain John Ellis and is currently running 80,000 DSE. The key objective of the mixed enterprise is to produce high quality beef and lamb concentrating on feed conversion and efficient grazing systems. The business has expanded to 5,600 Ha, of which 455 Ha is under centre pivot irrigation. The cattle enterprise has 1,100 Angus breeders as well as a bull beef and cattle trading system. Techno grazing along with a feedlot and irrigated pastures are a feature of the cattle operation.

15,000 composite ewes make up the sheep operation turning off prime lambs in the late spring.

The techno grazing system was inspected and the 8 lane, 2 day shift system is currently being used for Friesian bull beef. The bulls are stocked at 2.2/2.4 bulls/ha and go into the system at 350kg to be finished at 650 kg. The bull beef operation is being phased out and will be replaced by Angus cattle.



Tom Ellis Jnr and bull beef at the Techno Grazing system



The cattle trading system aims to buy a year ahead and has the new stock on farm or agisted on spud farms. The Composite sheep operation has a high level of reproductive capacity and replacement ewes are only kept from twin lambing ewes. The sheep graze on a mixture of cocksfoot/phalaris/chicory and clover pastures. Around 20 units of phosphorus per Ha are applied annually; the soils are sulphur deficient so single superphosphate is regularly used to maintain S levels. Sulphur is also applied as sulphate ammonia in a blend with Urea for winter pasture growth. Elemental sulphur is also used.

The centre pivot system includes an 85Ha techno grazing set up for to finish steers at a stocking rate of 10/12 steers/ha. A basic feedlot assists the finishing operation with grain feeding late in summer.



Wet & cold in the sheep pastures



Coola Woolshed

The stone shearing shed on Coola has been a local landmark for over 120 years; the greatest number of sheep and lambs shorn at Coola was 27,000 and this occurred in 1964. At the time of its construction, the Coola shed was designed to house 35 blade shearers

Coola has five full time staff with two on the cattle operation, two on sheep and one all rounder. Coola works on 15,000 – 20,000 dse per labour unit. 80 Ha of the property was used to establish vineyards in 2003.

Farm Visit 7

Property: Withnell Dairy

Location: Carapook, Victoria

Enterprise(s): Dairy, Trade cattle

Owner: Tindall Family

Farm Size: 1,295 Ha

Only two of the farms visited on the study tour were without irrigation and Withnell Dairy farm was one of them (Kirklands was the other). Withnell Dairy is an 809 Ha dryland dairy operation milking 660 Friesians. A cattle fattening enterprise is also conducted on another property, formerly it was a Wagyu contract operation but that is being replaced by a lower risk trading system. The area has an annual rainfall of 650 mm and water from the Koonongwootong reservoir provides stock water security in dry years.

Lachie and John Tindall discussed their system where phalaris, cocksfoot and ryegrass form the basis of the pasture mix and large quantities of silage are made annually to supply the annual requirement of 1200 dry tonnes. 40 kg of N is applied every 6 weeks during growing season, no more/no less; it is spread by helicopter in wet years. Dairy effluent is stored and then spread on pastures supplying much of the phosphorus required for growth. The mixed perennials grow as much as perennial ryegrass except for the late spring period. GA is added to the urea twice during the winter to provide additional dry matter. Lachie isn't a big fan of perennial ryegrass "a year to grow, a year to graze, a year to die" is his description of its life span in their environment. Lachie sows Currie Cocksfoot on the northern slopes of the farm, which had PPS members reassessing the value of a supposedly outdated cultivar. He likes its quick recovery after grazing and its suitability for silage.



Currie Cocksfoot



Graeme Maher & Charlie de Fegely with Lachie Tindall

The dairy cows have a wheat/canola meal with added mineral mix in the bail all year round going through 2.2 tonnes each, producing 28-29/litres of 2.1kg milk solids per day. The operation produces nearly 5 million litres of milk annually. There are two 3 hour milkings daily which can be conducted by one person; milk is collected once a day. Calving starts on April 1st and 500 calves are expected in the 6 weeks from April 7th. The Tindalls have three permanent staff, one of whom has a veterinary degree.



Rotary dairy



Cows coming in for milking

Collars have recently been fitted to the dairy cows for disease and heat detection. At a cost of \$200 each, Lachie calculates that he can get a good return on the investment through time savings and increased accuracy.

Lachie Tindall assisted PPS during the MLA PDS Gibberellic Acid demonstration project providing information on the long term use of GA in their system.

Long term use of GA on Withnell Dairy pastures

Rachael Campbell, Agriculture Victoria and Rob Shea, Perennial Pasture Systems

On the case study farm, long term use of Gibberellic Acid hasn't had detrimental effects on its Phalaris pastures. Gibberellic Acid (GA) is made naturally in plant roots and stimulates shoot and cell elongation, promoting plant growth. This occurs naturally in plants during spring. The application of manufactured GA in winter stimulates plant growth and creates an increase in winter feed availability.

The 'Innovative Use of Gibberellic Acid' project is an on-farm demonstration funded through Agriculture Victoria and Meat and Livestock Australia with the Perennial Pasture Systems group, based in Ararat. The project staff were keen to investigate a property that had used GA on phalaris pastures for an extended period to identify any impacts caused by long-term GA use.

Withnell Dairying Company fitted this criterion, having used GA every year since 2007 and consider it an important part of their management system. Withnell is located near Casterton, with an annual rainfall of between 625 and 650mm. Although it is a dairy, the information is useful to inform sheep and beef producers in other regions.

Lachie, at Withnell, said that they have seen no decline in pasture persistence following the on-going, yearly GA applications. GA is applied to phalaris paddocks as well as mixed sward paddocks. Two applications of 15g/ha of ProGibb is used in winter, along with a urea application. Lachie says the second application for the season makes the plants look "a bit sick and nitrogen deficient", although nitrogen has been applied with the GA application. "It makes the plants look yellow which is a natural response to the GA application and has no long-term effect on the plants," he said.

Through the on-farm demonstration project, GA applications were combined with nitrogen applications at the demonstration farms, however in the Ararat district there has been no benefit found in applying GA with nitrogen, due to the cooler conditions.

Generally, the first GA application at Withnell has been in late May to early June. However, in 2017, they held off as long as they could before applying the first application. This was to provide the growth later into the winter. Over time Lachie has learnt several lessons in maximising the benefits from GA. He said it is important to include wetter when applying GA. Some farmers further south suggest that using GA moves too much of the growth from spring to winter, however Lachie has not found this to be the case on his farm. With two applications of GA per year, he can cut silage and then get another grazing, which is extremely valuable to his system. GA is an important part of the Phalaris management on this farm and it will continue to be as long as no detrimental effects on the pasture are seen.



Sunday



Left; Ian Lawrence & Tim Curtis with a cow collar at Withnell Dairy.

Right; Peter Ham giving the collar a try – still awaiting the results!



Coola woolshed



Dion Borg is a bit of a legend at the Glenelg Hopkins CMA for his cold tolerance.

It was on display at Coola but PPS thought we should pull out a jumper photo from the 2016 study tour at Bathurst



Left; Stuart Robinson in the Currie Cocksfoot at Withnell Dairy.

Right; the PPS group missed milking duties but Mal Nicholson and Sue Holden had a look when collecting their car.



11th Annual Study Tour – South East S.A.

In a Word

PPS management committee member, Craig Altmann supplied some photos and comments for the final report. He also supplied a one word summary on the farm businesses visited which seems fairly accurate.



Barooka: Passion



Locmaria: Business



Kirklands: Generosity



Coola: Family



Konetta: People



Withnell Dairy: Feed base



Booroopki: Driven

Key Messages from Study Tour

Land is getting dearer and dearer in all areas, for both good and ordinary land. Need to focus on improving return on investment and maximising production off current land mass first. Need to broaden thinking on most enterprises and not just do what has always been done.

There are still many different ways to operate a farming business, but need to focus on the business of growing grass, consuming it and making profit a lot more than producers do.

Trading stock forms a large part of successful farming business' management of different stages of pasture growth and variable seasonal conditions.

In relation to management changes – do things when management and systems are ready.
“If you decide to run a marathon; don’t do it tomorrow” - Deane Goode; Barooka

Carcass traits in merino ewes do lead to higher productivity ewes and the possibility of ewe lamb joining but it pays not to take eye off of wool quality. Focus on overall farm performance.

“Mulesed wool and meat may be difficult to sell in 5 – 10 years” - Deane Goode; Barooka

“The conversion of people from vegetarianism is at least as high as those converting to it” – Bruce Wood; Locmaria

Reconsider the use of Currie Cocksfoot pastures as they are fast growing when they have adequate nutrition.

Techno grazing is an example of how productive land can be, when grazing management is a high priority.

Consider investment into improved sheep handling facilities and new technology like sheep bulk handlers.

“The hopeful breaking of the NSW/QLD drought next year and the Asian Swine Fever outbreak in overseas countries are opening up big punter possibilities for southern farmers. Have a plan to cash in but be wary of the risks” – Stuart Robinson

Some land purchase deals are an opportunity like winning the lottery. Don’t be blind to the possibilities.

Continue to improve on farm OH&S; some good examples seen on the study tour.

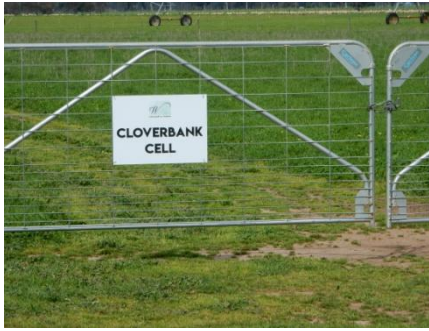
Include insulated pliers in vehicle first aid kits to cut electric fences in case of incidents.

Don’t stay at pub discussing the day’s events until 2am on the night that daylight saving commences.

PPS should host groups of S.A. farmers if the opportunity arises.



Ray Zippel at the farm map Boorooopki



Techno grazing cell Locmaria



Heritage Scrub Kirklands Furner



Sheep lifter race Barooka



Cow tunnel Withnell Dairy



Historic buildings Coola



Pasture at Konetta

PPS 11th Annual Study Tour Participants

Craig Altmann; AGF Seeds, Horsham
Simon Brady; Rhymney
Janine Curtis; Glenpatrick
Charlie de Fegely; Dobie
Peter Ham; Southern Soils, Hamilton
Paul Harrington; Mt Cole Creek
Sue Holden; Concongella
Ian Lawrence; Addington
Ian Maconachie; Ballyrogan
Graeme Maher; Lubeck
Mal Nicholson; Concongella
Kaye Price; Crowlands
Debbie Shea; Ararat
Duncan Thomas; PGG Wrightson, Ararat/Melbourne

Dion Borg; Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Hamilton
Wayne Burton; Mt Dryden
Tim Curtis; Glenpatrick
Ben Greene; Elmhurst
Martin Harmer; PGG Wrightson, Ballarat
Wendy Harrington; Mt Cole Creek
Peter Howell; Amphitheatre
Maureen Lawrence; Addington
Sue Maconachie; Ballyrogan
Derek Mason; PGG Wrightson, Ballarat
Graeme Price; Crowlands
Stuart Robinson; Ballarat
Rob Shea; PPS Project Manager, Ararat
Ray Zippel; Wimmera CMA, Laharum

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