

MEDIA RELEASE

NSW sheep grazier trials innovative methods to combat drought.

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A NSW sheep grazier has just revealed the details of a new animal health program he's recently implemented to boost livestock performance in the face of the state's recent and widespread drought.

Farmer Alex Willson and his wife Steph run 'Kalaree Poll Merino', a stud in the Southern Tablelands region of NSW. They breed fine/medium Poll Merinos over three properties— yet challenging weather conditions have forced the drought-affected farmer to take new steps to ensure the survival, welfare and profitability of his stock.

“Currently we are experiencing a very dry year with just under half of our annual rainfall” says Alex, “and so we've implemented a range of measures to combat these difficult conditions and keep our animals alive.” Alex explains how the first of these measures, the introduction of lick feeders, has already had an impact. “Instead of trail feeding, we've invested in feeders to give our ewes and growing lambs consistent access to grain, which is a ration of wheat and buffer pellets. Since doing that, we've seen a decrease in mis-mothering, a consistent condition score in our ewes, an improvement in milking, and generally better health in both lambs and ewes.”

Following advice from Delta Agribusiness agronomist James Cheetham, Alex has planted highly productive grazing crops including Ascend Ryegrass, grazing wheat and Hyola 970 Canola. “These varieties have been better able to make use of what little rain we've had this year, providing targeted grazing to carry us through the worst parts of the drought and importantly add value to our business by finishing stock at record prices”.

Alex also made the decision to move away from cross-breeds and focus primarily on merinos. “For us it's about increasing our scale as a single enterprise. Moving to an all merino ewe base enables us to take advantage of their wool and meat production – and we avoid seasonal vulnerabilities and getting caught having to carry ewes and lambs through winter. We also made the decision to sell our cows which has proven a wise move due to the ongoing dry.”

He explains how the introduction of a nutritional supplementation program (developed by Matthew Hallam of Landmark) has played an important role in maintaining animal health. “We've added AD&E pre -lambing, a starch based loose lick high in calcium and magnesium, and a starch based lick for lambs on grazing crops to improve rumen function.”



In addition, Alex is also running his own trial with Multimin trace mineral injection, as part of the *Multimin Performance Ready Challenge*, a 12-month program run by animal health company Virbac Australia. The trial gives a group of seven farmers, including Alex, the chance to experience first-hand the benefits of Multimin injection, with assistance from expert mentors. Challengers receive a tailored nutrition program developed by leading industry mentors – and each challenger is sharing their Multimin program results and experiences on social media (#multiminchallenge), with a winner announced in May 2019 as judged by the challenge mentors and public.

Under the supervision of Coinda Vet Hospital vet Dr Elizabeth Bramley, Alex is currently treating 355 of 710 lambs with Multimin 3 in 1 trace mineral injection for sheep, with the other half used as a control group. After a first treatment in September, they'll be weighed again next month prior to processing, to measure average weight gain of treated v untreated lambs. Alex is looking forward to gaining greater insight into the effects of using Multimin. "This is set to be a very informative trial, and I'm proud to be a part of this study", he says. "We're hoping that Multimin can effectively increase the immunity and production of our lambs, and that we'll see an increase in weight gain triggered by greater overall health."

Virbac Product Manager and nutritionist Dr Jerry Liu is eager to see the upcoming results. "When used strategically during periods of high demand, Multimin has been shown to optimise fertility and immunity in livestock. However, formally trialing the product in such challenging drought conditions on a real, well-managed property will provide a lot of scientific insight for the future. We should always seek best practice and look for innovative ways to face some of the challenges we have in livestock. The Multimin Performance Ready Challenge is a unique opportunity for innovative graziers like Alex to observe the benefits of following a program like this."

As Jerry explains, Multimin contains three trace minerals that aid in reproduction and immunocompetence, via a balanced ratio of zinc, manganese and selenium that bypasses the rumen for direct uptake from the blood. Multimin is designed to 'top up' essential trace mineral levels during high demand periods, such as joining, lambing, weaning and for young growing stock. "Increasing optimal levels of trace minerals in young sheep will have an impact for the farmer's profitability and return on investment," he continues. "Multimin assists with improving animal health, and hence maximises their production potential. The Multimin Performance Ready Challenge has given Alex the opportunity to improve both livestock performance and ultimately his financial bottom line."

To find out more about how Multimin can improve livestock performance, contact your local stockist or Virbac on 1800 242 100.



Interested farmers can sign up for continuing updates on the Multimin Performance Ready Challenge at www.multiminchallenge.com/signup/.

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Photo captions:

1. Alex Willson, NSW Multimin Challenger
2. Dr Jerry Liu, Virbac Product Manager and nutritionist