

From Feed Pinch Point to Plenty

Producer case study: Simon Gabb

Location	Skipton, Victoria
Area	830 ha
Enterprise	Lamb production and cropping
Livestock	Lamb Pro ewes
Pastures	Perennial ryegrass/clover and speciality finishing pastures
Soils	Basalt soils with loamy clays and clay loams over heavy clay subsoil
Rainfall	600 mm

For Skipton producer Simon Gabb, his goal has always been clear: grow the 5,300 weaners more than 300g/day across his 830-hectare Blacks Creek property.

The challenge was finding the right forage system to consistently deliver those gains on his volcanic soil farm which receives 600mm rainfall annually and with weaning beginning in early October.

Finding the right fit

Simon's approach centres on a two-pronged, weed management-focused strategy in his designated crop and pasture paddocks.



Image 1 Simon Gabb in an October-sown chicory and white clover paddock. Photo taken November 17 2025, by Lisa Miller, Southern Farming Systems.

Across 300ha of cereal and canola rotations, he regularly sows a high-density legume mix including Antas sub-clover, Persian, Balansa and white clover in autumn – primarily to clean up annual ryegrass.

In his pasture paddocks, Simon has shifted his focus to spring-sown chicory and white clover, using the mix as a weed-cleaning phase before re-establishing perennial ryegrass. He previously included plantain for extra winter feed but removed it due to limited herbicide options for broadleaf weed control in clover-based mixes.

"I found the paddocks were getting too dirty with weeds," he said. "Summer feed was needed more, so I will need to reduce lambing ewe stocking rates in winter.

Simon has trialled brassicas in the past, achieving growth rates of 200–300g/day but early weight loss during the adjustment phase and issues with photosensitisation made the system less appealing.

Today, chicory and clover provide the flexibility, weed control and soil benefits he needs.

Benefits

By late October, Simon's lambs were already exceeding target growth rates.

"This year, lambs on a two-year-old chicory, plantain and clover paddock averaged 360g/day," he said.

“On the high-density clover mix, lambs gained 310g/day in the first 21 days post-weaning. Great results all round for the first few weeks off mum.”

While his best perennial ryegrass–clover paddocks can reach 300g/day, straight ryegrass tends to drop to 200+g/day as quality declines.

“By the first of December, when the season cuts out, growth rates plateau on ryegrass and I’m generally not in a position to sell high amounts of hooked lambs at 55–60kg. I normally sell a portion of both store and hooked lambs depending on the season. Having chicory provides greater flexibility in the decision-making process regarding how many I might need to sell by store versus hook.”



Image 2 “Snow in summer.” Simon Gabb in his August-sown chicory and white clover paddock where clover has the jump on chicory. (Photo taken November 17 2025, by Lisa Miller, Southern Farming Systems).

Chicory reliably produces for two years, sometimes three depending on the season, before weed pressure forces a resow.

“Deciding whether to try and grow it one more year was the hardest decision, but generally it's thinned out and the weed competition is too great. You have to stay focussed on your vision of why you are growing it in the first place. To grow a feed wedge and finish livestock on,” he said.

At \$400–\$500/ha to establish chicory and white clover, Simon says the costs are spread over at least two years, which includes contract sowing,

seed costs, chemical, fertiliser and sometimes slug bait.

Simon said, “Back of envelope figures, if I stock at 30 lambs/ha for 30 days, growing at 300g/d/head, then at \$10/kg of cwt, that’s \$1200/ha. I’m in front after just 30 days.”

With the potential to also provide quality feed over summer, the approach also sets up future pastures. Spring-sown white clover establishes strongly and provides a base into which ryegrass can be drilled in autumn.

“Autumn sown clover got knocked around when I sprayed broadleaf weeds in winter but the established spring sown clover handles it well.”

Utilisation

With high-quality feed on hand, utilisation becomes the next challenge. Simon uses a mix of rotational grazing, temporary electric fencing and set-stocking for 8–10 weeks.

Because the chicory–clover mix holds quality for longer, he doesn’t need to rush lambs onto it. Instead, he can prioritise grazing taller perennial ryegrass paddocks to maintain clover content.

Flexibility

Having a grazing enterprise gives Simon the flexibility to manage risk with destocking or the potential to seek out opportunities for trading stock.

“As young farmers, we tend to undervalue having flexibility and diversity in our businesses. Grazing enterprises give us options. They can return as well as crops, but with less risk.”

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