

Sacrifice paddocks and stock containment help achieve pasture targets

Producer case study: Ben and Meera Cameron

Location	Skipton, Victoria
Area	2,200 ha
Enterprise	Prime lamb production, fine wool Merino, beef cattle breeding and cropping.
Livestock	300 Angus Breeders, 4,400 Composite ewes, and 1,500 Merino ewes
Pastures	Mix of phalaris, ryegrass, sub clover pastures, annual fodders and some unimproved native grasses.
Soils	Basalt plains, clay loam over an impervious clay base, stony rises running into grey clays and heavy clay swamps
Rainfall	550mm

Meera and Ben Cameron, with Meera's parents Vern and Rathi Dawson, run a mixed farm at Skipton in Western Victoria.

In a typical year, Ben can graze crop stubbles and dry standing pastures until March, when paddocks need to be made available for the cropping program or pasture dry matter has been reduced. Ewes are then moved to containment or sacrifice paddocks, with their feed supplemented with grain and straw, until the autumn break. Cattle have sufficient feed on some low-lying, heavier soil types until winter.

Starting with sacrifice paddocks

In previous years, stock were moved into small sacrifice paddocks scattered throughout the farm with the major motivation being to keep stock off pastures. This protected pastures from overgrazing and erosion in their undulating country, but also to optimised growth.

"It helps to build green leaf area, so they grow more rapidly before starting rotational grazing," Ben said.

"Rotations and mob sizes were carefully planned, aiming to have 1,500 kg DM/ha for

ewes with twins and about 1,200 kg for singles at the point of lambing in July," he said.

The sacrifice paddocks were small holding paddocks scattered throughout the farm and helped them achieve their pasture management aims, until the family decided in spring 2024 to build dedicated stock containment yards.

"While the sacrifice paddocks worked well, we just found they were inefficient and it was challenging to get around the farm to feed out in each one," said Meera.



Image 1 Ben and Meera Cameron

Containment design

Coincidentally, spring 2024 failed and the stock containment has been operational since January 2025, with feeding starting two months earlier than normal.

The decisions around building stock containment yards were made over five years, with the family discussing designs, location and grabbing every opportunity to look at what was working for others.

They decided to build their containment on a site that was “a bit stony” to offer stock some dry ground relief once the autumn break occurred and was close to their existing yards and feed sources.

They currently have 90% of the flock in containment, the majority in the dedicated containment pens, with a few additional sacrifice paddocks operational.

“Now it takes only two hours to feed stock in containment – one hour to feed grain and one hour to feed straw or hay – instead of most of the day,” Meera said.

A large laneway flows up the middle with pens on either side, and stock move into the laneway once the gate opens, returning once grain is fed.

There may be a few tweaks in future, such as having dedicated pens for sheep and cattle, reducing the trough size for sheep to minimise water wastage, and creating shelter and shade.

Animal health

What surprised Ben most was the lack of animal health issues they experienced.

“I was nervous, especially about pink eye and pneumonia, but have had no issues despite a fair bit of dust.”

Going into containment, the stock were very healthy, and everything was drenched. Stock condition and health have been maintained whilst they have been in containment.

Pasture recovery

Having containment areas has assisted pasture recovery, and once pasture dry matter targets are reached, they will start the transition out of containment.

“The established pastures have bounced back and there is plenty of clover germinated, but perennial ryegrass and annual fodders sown this year are well behind,” Ben said.

Ewes with multiple lambs will be moved out first after scanning. They plan to run them in and out of containment over a week to help with their rumen adjustment before moving them into a rotation.

In future, they will add more pens, aiming to contain 100% of the stock when needed.

A key recommendation from Meera was to use a livestock consultant.

“We engaged a couple of livestock professionals who helped to confirm we were on the right track as we were juggling many different rations of different feed qualities.

You can’t rely on general rules of thumb when you are feeding so many livestock. They can give you a customised insight for your system.”

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