

## Putting the tools into practice – Beef

R. Purcell

*“Elouera”, Brungle, NSW*



“Elouera” is located near Brungle, 25km south-east of Gundagai. Average annual rainfall is 750mm. The country is undulating to hilly, with some creek flats. Soil types range from red clay loams on the ridges and hills to black clay loams on the flats. pH of the red and black soils is approximately 4.5 to 5.0 (CaCl<sub>2</sub>), with pipeclay in some areas at pH 4.0 to 4.5 (CaCl<sub>2</sub>).

The main enterprises on “Elouera” are beef cattle breeding and fattening, growing steers and surplus heifers to at least 400kg. The stocking rate is 17 DSE/ha, with a break even cost of production of 0.845c/kg beef (1998-99).

### Feed base

23% (406ha) of “Elouera” is hilly country with useful stands of redgrass and microlaena. This area is inaccessible to a boomspray and receives no fertiliser. 36% (630ha) of the property is undulating and consists of degraded annual pasture. These areas also receive no super, but are limed and sprayed for weed control. A further 720ha of undulating country (41% of the property) is sown down to perennial pastures (80ha each year) including phalaris, cocksfoot, tall fescue, sub clover and white clover. Single super is applied to these pastures at 125kg/ha annually, gradually increasing to 200kg/ha. No fodder crops, fodder conservation or supplementary feeding are used.

### Feed gap

The calendar of operations has been structured to address the main feed gap between January and April, with cattle being turned off prior to February. Weaning also takes place in February and calving is delayed until May. Despite the harsh autumn this year, the cattle are still running at a fat score of 4.

Compared with annuals, perennial pastures have extended the growing season well into January and further, if rainfall permits. The deep rooted perennials also make more efficient use of soil moisture.

### Farm output

We are currently running 17 000 DSE. The goal is to increase this number to 25 000 DSE in 8 to 10 years, when all possible country is sown down to perennial pasture. As a result, the breeding herd should increase from 640 in 2000, up to 1000 cows (currently 780). Past experience has shown this is possible using 125 kg/ha single super each year!

We also plan to apply 250 kg/ha single super annually on the higher producing country. This should allow us to run 1200 breeding cows and turn off steers and surplus heifers in fat condition (fat score 3-4, muscle score B-C) at 18-24 months of age.

### Management system

17 000 DSE are worked using 1.6 labour units. Contractors are used for some weed spraying and all cartage, although weed control is the most significant component of labour.

We are currently adopting a stock movement technique, which reduces labour requirements. When stock are ready to be moved to another paddock, the gates are opened and stock move in at their own will. We only go back a day later to move the ‘stragglers’ into the new paddock. I have been surprised at how the cattle know when the gates are open.

Management decisions are based on a range of tools, including the application of Prograze principles to grazing management and Property Management Planning principles to whole farm management. Other assessments to aid management decisions include:

- Weighing cattle
- Weekly pasture assessment for quality and quantity
- Rotational grazing as much as possible
- Monitoring stocking rates and being proactive in setting them
- Using feedback kill sheets from the abattoir to be able to produce to market requirements

#### **Future challenges**

- *Soil pH* – increase acid soils to at least 4.6 CaCl<sub>2</sub>.
- *Decreasing viability of hill country* due to weed invasion and ageing fencing - re-establish native vegetation on lower producing areas.
- *Pasture improvement* – continue to sow perennial pastures on all country that is accessible to a boomspray. Subdivide paddocks to maximise pasture utilisation.
- *Rising fixed costs.*

Calendar of operations - "Elouera", Brungle  
 Feed Curve - phalaris/sub, cocksfoot/sub, native grass (SW Slopes)

