

Building the flock while improving the crop at Yeringa

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profile

Greg and Lyn Yates

Location: Yeringa Park Estate, Trayning

Farm size: 5600 hectares

Enterprise: 1200 sheep, 2700 ha of crop

Average rainfall: 330 mm, growing season average: 240 mm

Soil types: Everything from red clay to sand plain to wadjil



This case study is brought to you through the Grain and Graze 2 project thanks to funding received from GRDC. The Western Australian component of Grain & Graze 2 has a long-term goal of significantly increasing water use efficiency in mixed crop/livestock systems.

Farm system

The century-old farm between Trayning and Bencubbin has been well managed by the Yates family and is today a well-balanced no-till, wheat and sheep enterprise.

This season there has been many hits and misses with weather, grain yield and quality throughout the State and, apart from a dry spell in August, Greg has had mostly hits so far. His Yitpi is averaging just less than two tonnes per hectare and going into classification Hard 1 (H1) at delivery; just sneaking through with weights. The Fortune wheat is going over 2 t/ha so far and has all gone Noodle1.

Greg believes the low hectolitre weight is due to little rainfall in September, as well as the fungal disease Yellow Spot which burdened many WA Yitpi crops earlier in the year. Yellow Spot affected leaves and then the dry spell added to the pressure.

‘One of our Yitpi loads went H2 but if we get a few more loads of H1 we can load optimise it,’ he explained.

Cropping

This year the Yates’s have cropped 2400 ha of Yitpi, Wyalkatchem, Magenta and Fortune wheat and 300 ha of lupins. Greg also grows Baroota Wonder wheat for hay production for his sheep. He said it was better than growing oats and, if the season turned bad, he could deliver the grain for profit. Baroota is a high yielding feed wheat that matures later than oats which helps to spread the risk of weather damage at baling.

Greg started dry seeding in the middle of May with a Flexi-Coil 45 ft seeder-bar and press wheels. Being a no-tiller, he said the 15-year-old 820 Flexi-Coil always went well through thick stubbles. Seeding rates were 60 kg/ha for wheat put in with 1.5–2 L/ha of trifluralin and 50 kg of DAP down the tube. During early tillering Greg spread about 40–50 kg of Urea, which matched up well with a front of rain.

Weed management on the farm includes spray topping in summer, pre-emergent sprays, and grazing. In the past five years it has been becoming harder to wipe out ryegrass and radish in some areas of the farm due to chemical resistance and weather pressures.

Sheep

Yeringa Park Estate has always been a Merino-based farm, however in the past seven years Greg has incorporated different sheep breeds for the meat market. He is currently building on his 800 ewe flock and wants to breed at least 1200 each year. He even joined some old cull ewes with SAMP rams in October to get numbers up. He also has two White Suffolk and two Poll Dorset rams which he will mate with the SAMP ewes for fast-growing lambs with good wool.

Greg tries to maintain the lambing rate at around 104 per cent and hopes to increase it by integrating the different breeds. He joins the ewes to drop in April; however the SAMP lambs are due in March and will be ready while supply is likely to be down. Shearing occurs late August where 6–7 kg of 21-micron wool is typically yielded.

Like many wheat and sheep farmers Greg knows the trade-offs of having sheep. They help with weeds by being able to leave paddocks out of the crop rotation, allowing Greg to rely less on chemicals but sheep can degrade soils. And in dry years there are many disadvantages.

'I can see why people want to just crop. It's easier to crop on a stubble paddock, but weed control, spray topping and pasture manipulation are benefits worth having and the prices are good.'

To reduce the impact of sheep on the farm system lambs are dropped early so they are all on ground before seeding, capturing early markets.

Grazing management

The average mob size is around 350 ewes and paddocks are 80–90 ha. Water is sourced from dams and scheme water which they rely on a fair bit. Greg checks every paddock for suitability before grazing, however last year there was no choice but to let the sheep graze paddocks hard as feed was short. Greg used pellets when the ground got too bare.

Greg has started using lick feeders with four being used at the moment and he plans to get more. When ewes are lambing in autumn, lupins are kept on hand to make sure they are fed well. When seeding Greg opts to hand-feed the sheep hay and lupins as they usually have lambs by then.

BELOW: The Yates's two New Holland headers working together in the Fortune crop.

INSET: Their young sheepdog Fifi.

BELOW RIGHT: Ewes drinking from a dam.



Local carting contractor Marchant Transport emptying a field bin.



Soil condition

Sandy soils that have been grazed before seeding have shown signs of compaction if wet, however the fault is not a huge issue on the farm. Paddocks are usually left with reasonable cover all the time and stubbles are not cut too short, burnt or baled. Greg has occasionally cultivated or ‘tickled up’ paddocks which have been a problem for weeds.

‘I don’t like to cultivate—but last year I did on a leased farm with a history of bad weeds. Unless the paddock is too bare I might cultivate but I don’t like to because it encourages summer weeds.’

Disease presence

Fungal disease Yellow Spot was present in the Yitpi from August this year. Greg sprayed propiconazole (Tilt) at the flagleaf stage in August which stopped the disease from spreading but Greg suspects it did affect yield.

‘The dry August suppressed the Yellow Spot as well as the crop. We had a dry September but rain in October, which was lucky because the crops sprang back and the fungicide application stopped the Yellow Spot from flaring back up.’

Greg was considering getting rid of the Yitpi, however if his deliveries got a good return it would most likely stay in the rotation.

‘Yitpi was bad for Yellow Spot but it’s just a matter of being prepared to go out and spray it. It’s looking to get good yields so it may go back in the silo for next year.’

He also noticed some Septoria on the Fortune wheat though not enough to warrant spraying. There was talk of stem rust in the area but none was found on his farm.

The future

Next year Greg plans to try new wheat varieties on his farm including Mace and Cobra and continue building the sheep flock. In the more distant future he plans to add to the size of the farm gradually, depending on family plans and land availability in the area.



ABOVE: Greg’s weather station.



BELOW: Ben Yates checking yield potential a few weeks before harvest.