

## GRAIN & GRAZE 2 CASE STUDY

# Increasing stock density by increasing crop area

*Written by Richard Quinlan, Planform  
(May 2013)*

### Profile

**Kristin and Tracy Lefroy**

**Location:** "Cranmore Farming", Miling (20 km east of Moora)

**Farm Size:** 7000ha

**Annual Rainfall:** 400 mm

**Soil Type:** Sandy loams and clay loams

**Enterprises:** 70% crop, 30% cattle and sheep

**Sheep studs are also joining the ranks in grazing crops and moving to high crop percentages, but this move doesn't have to come at the expense of the grazing enterprise.**

Kristin and Tracy Lefroy of Cranmore Farming are planning to grow 3700ha of barley, wheat and canola in 2013. Kristen said barley is the best crop as it tends to yield 500kg/ha better than wheat, no matter what the yield was.

"For us it works the best, but canola is becoming increasingly important due to the weed control options it has," he said. They crop 70% of the farm despite running 4000 ewes and 150 cattle. But things haven't always been like this.

In the past a cropping percentage of 20% was considered the norm for Cranmore Farming. "Rocky outcrops and low lying creeks mean that the grazing side of the enterprise will always be important," said Kristin.

### More crop, more stock

Over the last 10 years the cropping area has risen significantly, however this hasn't necessarily come at the expense of the grazing enterprise. Kristin said they have been able to increase their stocking rate through the help of the cropping business.





“While participating in the Sheep’s Back program a number of years ago, it became evident that people with higher cropping percentages were able to reduce their hand feeding costs.

The stubbles were able to supply some of the roughage the animals required in autumn,” Kristin said.

Through the better use of stubbles and better grazing management, Cranmore was able to lift their carrying capacity to 9DSE+. The planting of saltbush on the river flats has also helped achieve this by reducing the autumn feed gap.

The droughts over the last five years have cut this back to 7.5 DSE, but Kristin is confident he can lift it back up to 9DSE or above by better management of his grazing systems. He is still unsure where cattle fit into his grazing enterprise. They do work better on the rocky country but fence maintenance and handling issues create more work. “For the moment they are staying,” he said.

*Kristin believes if you do what you have always done you will get what you have always got. Hence he was looking for new management techniques to turn 9DSE or greater into a reality.*

## Grazing crops introduced

One technique he trialled last year was grazing some of his cropping program early in the season to take the pressure off his emerging pastures.

Kristin has seen real benefits in grazing crops as they allow pasture paddocks to be spelled early in the season. “Even one week can make the difference between a performing pasture and a non performing pasture,” he said.

In 2012 as part of the Grain & Graze 2 program, Kristin grazed a number of wheat paddocks to assess how the technique would work on his farm. One of the grazed paddocks was 63ha and was compared to a paddock next door that had a similar seeding date, fertiliser and chemical regime, but it wasn’t grazed.

The sheep and cattle were moved into the paddock on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July when the crop was at the 3.5 leaf stage and removed on the 10<sup>th</sup> July. The paddock was grazed early and lightly which is the recommended practice and Kristin said there were no visual effects from grazing.



*PHOTOS: Grazed (left) Mace wheat compare to ungrazed (below) following 7 days of grazing with sheep and cattle.*



The results showed that grazing his wheat crops early in the season resulted in little or no yield penalty (i.e. less than 100kg/ha yield penalty) and it allowed Kristin to spell his pasture paddocks so they could recover and grow.

The paddock in question was grazed with 70 cows and calves and 250 dry ewes which resulted in a total of 137 DSE grazing days/ha and equated to a grazing value of \$15.50/ha. Although this was not a big saving, it did allow him to defer grazing his pasture paddocks.

Kristin said the start of the season was dry last year and the pasture paddocks suffered. By taking the pressure off these paddocks they were able to get a way a little. I believe this is where we realise the real value in grazing crops.”

He said they are happy with their cropping percentage and if anything they will increase stock numbers without increasing pasture area, through better crop and pasture integration.

In 2013, the Lefroy’s will continue to experiment with grazing crops. They plan to graze a canola crop with a large mob (1000 head or so) of hoggets and then move them onto a wheat crop for a short period of time, if conditions stay dry and pasture growth rate is slowed.

Kristin said an early break to the season this year has resulted in better pasture growth than usual which in turn has taken the pressure off the need to graze crops.

“It is good to have grazing crops as an option when early feed levels are low and it does take the pressure off the grazing enterprise”, Kristin said.



*ABOVE: A Moora Miling Pasture Improvement Group (MMPIG) field walk which viewed the grazing wheat trial at Cranmore.*



*ABOVE: The Lefroy’s have continued to graze crops in 2013, with sheep pictured in canola.*

## Acknowledgments



The Grain & Graze 2 project is supported by GRDC and DAFF through funding from the Australian Government’s Caring for our Country Programme.



CARING  
FOR  
OUR  
COUNTRY

[www.westernaustralia.grainandgraze.com.au](http://www.westernaustralia.grainandgraze.com.au)  
[www.facebook.com/GrainandGraze](https://www.facebook.com/GrainandGraze)

**GRDC**  
Grains  
Research &  
Development  
Corporation