

## 2. MATCHING LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION AND PASTURE PRODUCTION

### The annual management calendar and pasture utilisation

The first and most important management technique to optimise pasture use is to ensure that the period of maximum pasture growth is aligned with the period of maximum livestock feed requirements. Two pieces of information are required to enable you to do this:

- When is pasture growth at its maximum?
- When does the feed demand of the enterprise peak?

Any factor which affects feed demand patterns needs to be carefully considered. Wherever possible, any increase in feed demand should be timed to minimise the effect on the total number of sheep or cattle which can be run. In many flocks and herds, the most important factor which can be manipulated is lambing or calving time. Others include the time of shearing and the timing of livestock sales and purchases.

### Effect of lambing time on feed demand and pasture utilisation

For most southern temperate sheep enterprises, peak feed demand occurs during the period of lambing. Graph 2.1 and Graph 2.2 compare the feed requirements of different lambing times against a typical pasture growth pattern. They show that lambing at any time other than late winter/spring will not enable you to align peak feed demand with peak feed production.

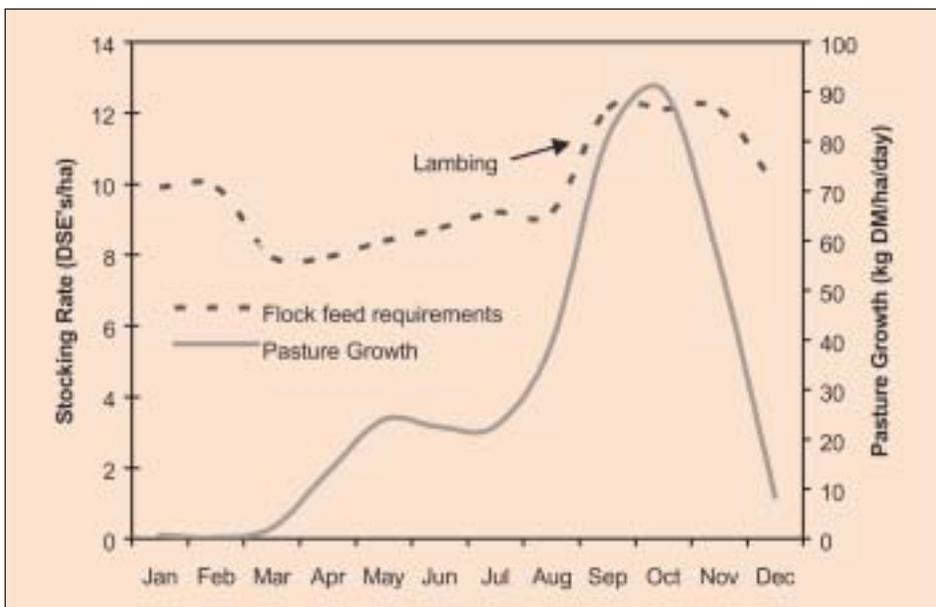
#### SECTION KEY MESSAGES

*In most cases, it is far more profitable to align peak feed demand to peak pasture production.*

*Do your sums on the timing of surplus sheep sales, especially if the sheep will require some finishing for market.*

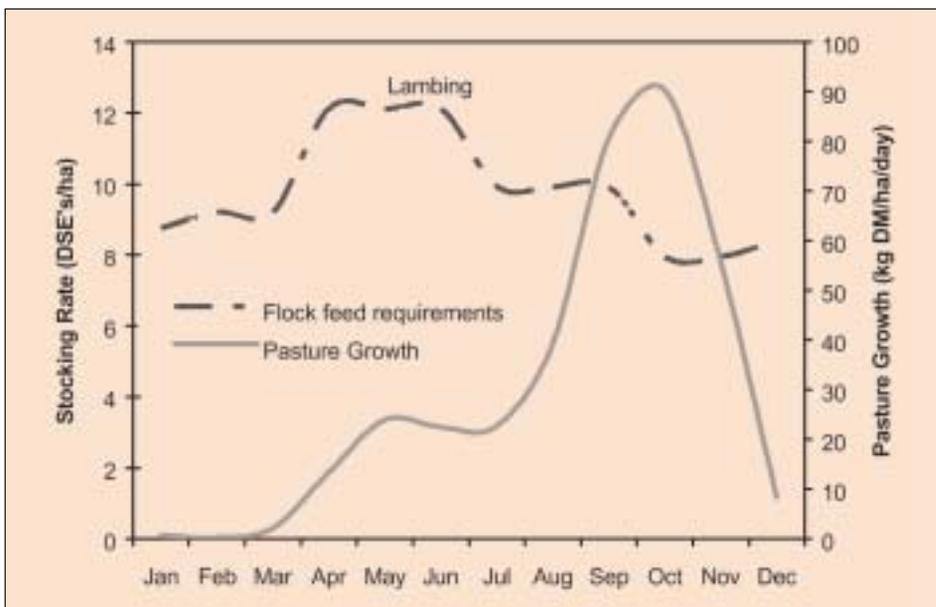
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**Graph 2.1: Spring lambing flock feed requirements versus pasture growth**



Source: HSA AgInsights - How to Graze High Profit Pastures 2001

**Graph 2.2: Autumn lambing flock feed requirements versus pasture growth**



Source: HSA AgInsights - How to Graze High Profit Pastures 2001

If your peak feed demand does not occur at the same time as your peak pasture growth, you have an inefficient system. This inefficient system will have higher production costs because to maintain the system you either have to supplementary feed, or reduce the total number of stock you run. The supplementary feed can be home grown and conserved in the spring or purchased. Whichever option you use, it costs money. Even the most efficient systems of conserving pasture cost at least \$40 per tonne of dry matter.

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Inefficient systems have higher production costs because of the need to either reduce stock numbers or supplementary feed.

To justify operating an inefficient system with a higher cost of production, you need to ensure that you are receiving sufficient market premium to cover the higher cost. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. For example, for wool and surplus sheep production there are very few seasonal premiums to be gained. This means that winter/spring lambing is mandatory to achieve optimal levels of production in southern temperate Australia.

In other regions the same principles apply when it comes to managing feed demand and supply.

The period of peak feed demand in your flock needs to be as closely aligned as possible with the period of peak feed supply. For some areas that may mean a winter lambing. Rarely will it mean an autumn lambing. In summer rainfall areas spring lambs also normally provide the optimum system.

## Timing of sheep sales

To obtain good prices for surplus sheep they need to be presented well as stores or weigh well if they are to go to slaughter.

There are cheap ways and expensive ways to produce well-presented sheep.

It is expensive to do it out of season because it can be achieved in one of two ways:

- By supplementary feeding.
- By below normal stocking rates.

Both of these methods are high cost and as mentioned above, rarely are the premiums sufficient to warrant the high cost. An alternative method is to turn stock off when they are normally fat, for example at the end of spring or early summer. The spring flush is often under-utilised so fattening sheep on that feed is low cost. With such an approach, stock can still be presented well and receive good prices but you get to retain more of the sale price because it hasn't come at the expense of supplementary feeding.

If you are targeting out of season price premiums be sure that the cost of attaining those premiums is less than the premium.

The premiums usually occur for good reason - there is a shortage of supply at that time of year because it is not easy to keep stock in prime condition. Do your sums carefully.

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