

INNOVATION PROFILE



BUSINESS SNAPSHOT

OWNERS

Angus and Kelly Whyte

PROPERTY NAME

Wyndham Station

PROPERTY LOCATION

85km North of Wentworth on the Anabanch River, NSW

SIZE OF PROPERTY

12,500 hectares

BRIEF ENTERPRISE DESCRIPTION

A sheep and cattle operation utilising rotational grazing to manage pastures.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WORKING IN THE BUSINESS

2 people working in the business (1.2 full time equivalents)

AVERAGE ANNUAL RAINFALL

260mm

WHY THIS IS A PASTORAL ZONE INNOVATION

Handling pastoral sheep for husbandry activities is labour intensive and sometimes stressful or dangerous. Better handling techniques can save labour and stress while improving safety and production.



Low Stress Stock Handling

In 2001, Angus and Kelly implemented a rotational grazing system on Wyndham Station and increased the number of paddocks from 8 to 33. To effectively and evenly graze the paddocks, Angus and Kelly needed to increase their mob sizes. They achieved this by combining different age groups of livestock into a single mob that were previously kept separate.

The innovation profile outlines low stress stock handling.

Livestock handling techniques and principles for low stress stockmanship have been adopted on Wyndham Station to reduce the stress on both people and livestock.

Implementing the rotational grazing system required more fencing to be undertaken and increases to mob size. As a result, mobs are shifted more frequently between paddocks than a traditional set stocking system.



Figure 1: Sheep at a watering point on Wyndham Station.

WHAT WAS THE MOTIVATION TO CHANGE?

Angus and Kelly were motivated to change their livestock handling methods after the move to rotational grazing created some initial problems. Moving larger mobs of sheep, and containing both sheep and cattle within three wire fencing became problematic at Wyndham.

These problems led Angus and Kelly to investigate and implement low stress livestock handling techniques on their property.

HOW DOES THE INNOVATION WORK?

The main principle of low stress stock handling is to pressure the mob and reward them by releasing the pressure.

For example, the evening before lamb marking, lambs are drafted from the ewes and put into a yard within eyesight of each other. Angus or Kelly then work with the mob of lambs until they are settled in the presence of humans and are moving as a mob. The lambs are returned to their mothers after lamb marking. This process is used to imprint the lambs, which results in benefits later in life by reducing their stress in the presence of humans and when separated from their mothers at weaning time.

The processes of low stress stock handling are designed to desensitise the stock to stress, teach them to move from pressure rather than fear, control adrenalin and make smarter decisions. The animals are trained over time to feel secure as a 'mob' and become familiar with situations of insecurity.

KEY FEATURES

Key features of this innovation are the stockmanship techniques employed by the producer to desensitise the animal. These have been recognised by the beef cattle industry; however, the benefits are not as widely communicated or applied in the sheep industry.



Figure 2: Angus Whyte at a cell centre on Wyndham Station.

WHAT ARE THE KEY BENEFITS?

Low stress stock handling has helped overcome some of the difficulties created by rotational grazing including shifting larger groups of animals, and assists in containing the mob inside cost-effective three-wire fencing.

Low stress stock handling trains animals to move through existing yards and facilities, rather than investing in new yard designs and facilities to improve animal handling. By using some of the stockmanship skills taught through Low Stress Stock handling, stock can be taught to stay together in a mob better and fencing costs can be reduced.

The innovation makes stock work easier by building a relationship with the livestock, and training them to cope and remain calm in stressful situations. Angus and Kelly now enjoy stock work and believe that it takes less time with low stress stock handling.

Stressed animals are prone to production loss after animal handling and produce lower quality meat. This becomes less of an issue when low stress techniques are employed.

These techniques continue to improve the manageability of the mob, desensitise livestock, and promote low stress animals and people.

KEY MATERIAL REQUIRED FOR THE INNOVATION

Angus and Kelly attended a low stress stock handling school to learn the basic principles and techniques. They have since refined the application of this knowledge for their livestock management on Wyndham Station.

POTENTIAL CAUTION AND RISK

Angus and Kelly recommend that all members of the business who work with stock, apply low stress stock handling techniques. If this doesn't occur, it can be detrimental to the relationship you have built with your livestock.

LOOKING FORWARD

Angus wishes that he had paid more attention to and learnt the way older generations handled livestock, particularly with less infrastructure and innovative yard designs.

Looking forward, the Whyte's will continue to refine their stock handling techniques. They plan to increase mob size to achieve better grazing pressure and management. They are also investigating ways to build their relationship with livestock to be able to set boundaries without fences.

RESOURCES

Angus and Kelly hosted a Low Stress Stock Handling Workshop in 2003 to learn the techniques. Since the workshop they have employed consultants to further refine their low stress stock handling techniques and learnings.

The Whyte's invest time into training their stock to build the relationship between people and stock to desensitise them. They find this is time well spent, particularly when inducting new livestock onto the property, to allow them to relax into their new environment.

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Angus and Kelly invested into Low Stress Stock Handling training, and continue to invest time refining their skills in handling and training stock.

This innovation has saved costs in fencing materials and yard upgrades, as well as time spent undertaking sheep husbandry operations.

Low stress stock handling has made their animals less sensitive to stress which can improve meat quality at the time of slaughter.

Figure 3: Stock drinking at a cell centre.



Figure 4: Landscape at Wyndham Station.

Figure 5: Angus White and Nic Kentish from Land and Livestock discuss the processes of low stress stock handling.



THE FINAL WORD

'We didn't realise how much easier handling our livestock could be' said Angus Whyte, Wyndham Station NSW.

Bestprac acknowledges the contribution of Angus and Kelly Whyte in the development of this innovation profile. For further information about Wyndham Station, visit www.wyndhamstation.com.au

To view more innovation profiles, business cases and videos of innovations in the pastoral zone, visit the Bestprac website www.bestprac.info