

Welcome to [ASK] - Always Seeking Knowledge!
ASK #23 - Dealing with the drought, and Kachana: June 23, 2006
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In this abbreviated issue you will find there are just two subjects:

- 1. Drought strategies**
- 2. The Kachana challenge**

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Drought strategies

It is now very clear that a good many people are in trouble in Australia because of drought on both the East and West coasts. Some people have a grass drought, whilst some have a stock water drought. Some have both.

It might be helpful to recall a few points about drought strategies. For me, the number one thing to remember is:

1. At some stage, despite all of your planning and strategies...

If it still doesn't rain ... and it still doesn't rain ... and it still doesn't rain ... the situation may become so difficult that your stock simply have to go. If that happens to you, make the decision early enough that you can actually do it and not have a calving or lambing disaster.

Like King Canute, you cannot hold off the inevitable. Don't set unreasonable expectations, such as, "It can't happen to me". *It can happen to you!!*

Every day, recheck and ask yourself: should the decision be made to quit, today?

Difficult as it may be to accept financially and even socially, at some stage you may have to make the decision, or risk animal deaths or negative performance. Worse still, hanging on might cost feed, and that erodes your equity in the animals.

Many people have been caught feeding till the value of the animals has been consumed in feed, and then the animals died anyway.

George Gundry and Brian Marshall, both Holistic Management Educators, have been through this scenario. For both of them it was a 100% de-stocking, and both of them say it was an experience they didn't enjoy but that they have come out the other side better than they expected.

2. Before you get to destocking though, there are some things you can do...

- You can box mobs together. All other things being equal, the optimum number of mobs in a drought is ONE MOB. Get as close to that number of mobs as you can, and be creative about how you do it.
- Remember to PLAN for movement of your stock to be made as often as you practically can. Daily or more often is the optimum.
- Regular moves are important for ALL of the animals involved in the moves - it gives them "HOPE" and you "CONFIDENCE".
- Imagine how little hope there is, in an animals' mind, if all it has to eat every day is a diminishing supply of feed that has been walked on, urinated on and dunged on for

many days .. or even for many weeks Not much joy in that for man or beast. Animals give up and die unnecessarily.

- In addition, on regular, preferably daily moves, you will be staggered at what the animals can see available to them on the ground that we mere humans cannot see - eg freshly dropped twigs, leaves and branches.
- I have seen stock survive under very difficult conditions when their owners have adopted the philosophy of giving them access to "fresh new dirt **every day**"
- If you are in an annual based pasture regime, you may have some juggling to do between damaging and not damaging little seedlings. In the event of some rain you may need to assess whether you can risk losing a germination of seedlings through moving faster than the recovery rate of the plants, simply to keep giving the animals some hope.
- If you are moving faster than the plant recovery rate you are in a vortex, and you **must** pull out of it as fast as possible, before there is real damage to the plants once there is a proper break.
- On the other hand if you have some land scheduled for cropping this year you can choose to create a vortex on that cropping land by deliberately moving faster than the recovery rate. You can also save some chemicals!

3. If push comes to shove, and you have to handle and feed animals through calving or lambing

I have talked with a number of farmers stuck in this dilemma. Here are some of the conclusions:

- Difficult though it may be, the way to grow grass both whilst it is droughty - and immediately after a fall of rain - is to continue to minimise the number of mobs.
- If you are feeding out hay or grain make the trails as long as possible.
- Move the animals right on daybreak, whilst they are both up **and** mothered up
- Make the gateways as **W-I-D-E** as possible. Cut the fences if you need to! Thousands of sheep and lambs pouring through a 12 foot gate is an absolute recipe for disaster.

4. Finally

This may particularly apply in WA: If it hasn't rained in the next 6 weeks then the unpalatable truth is you may have to consider sacrificing the lamb crop in order to keep your ewes alive. Feed is becoming scarce and impossible to buy at ANY price. Calves may need to be weaned and put into a feedlot. The next period of time is both critical and potentially unpleasant for many people.

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Kachana

I have been having long discussions with Chris Henggeler at Kachana Station, near Kunnanurra. I am not sure how many people are aware of what has been going on in this remote outpost, but it is pretty important work. To see what they have been doing, take the time to visit www.kachana.com

You will see that as part of what has happened on Kachana each year - since 2001 - Chris and Jacqui Henggeler and Danny and Regula Waser have been holding their annual "Landscape Management Workshops". Each year they get bigger.

This year they are seeking even more attendees from those amongst us who live in comparative comfort South of the Tropic of Capricorn. The dates for the Landscape Management Workshop this year are September 6, 7 and 8.

If you are contemplating a trip somewhere this year, and want to combine camping and learning, you might give this some serious thought. It is very remote, the program is intensive. Let me quote from their web site www.kachana.com

A three-day first-hand learning experience in an outdoor classroom in the heart of the Kimberley outback:

Join us in exploring the "human influences" on Landscape Functions with Patty Martin, a former major of Quincy, Washington whose mission it is to promote Safe Food and Fertilizer...

PLEASE NOTE: Kachana Pastoral Company is a small private company with 20 years of field experience in upper- catchment management. We focus on tangible results.

Our annual Kachana Workshops and spreading the message about the 'win win win opportunities' associated with restorative land-care are a non-profit service we offer to society. We need your public support and/or sponsorship, or sufficient firm bookings by 15th July to be able to justify the staging of this Kachana Landscape Management Workshop.

If you do nothing else, please give Chris and Jacqui a call on (08) 9161 4346 and have a chat to them. Give them some support - the work they do benefits us all.

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Regards, and keep well

Bruce Ward