

Grazing management principles: Case study – The Mosely family

Increased profit, better groundcover and less stress

Flexibility and new ideas are helping the Mosely family increase the triple bottom line on their Cobar properties, Etiwanda and Manuka.

Key components of the Mosely family enterprise:

- **using grazing charts and planned rest periods (at least 150 days or longer in dry periods)**
- **flexibility in stock numbers and types -**
 - numbers can be reduced by 50% in dry conditions
 - running sheep, cattle and goats
- **turning problems into resources - e.g. invasive native scrub, bush goats**
- **encouraging and maintaining native, perennial pasture species**
- **periodic disturbance with machinery and livestock**
- **planning for desired lifestyle**
- **business management training.**

Located about 90 km south of Cobar on 26,000 hectares in country that is often considered unproductive, Andrew and Megan with Andrew's parents Stuart and Nancy are improving their finances, their environment, and their lifestyle.

A family-run business, the Mosely enterprise includes three complementary red meat grazing components - White Dorper sheep, meat goats and cattle - and a White Dorper stud with ram sales held annually.

As all three livestock groups run together, the distinctive grazing habits and impacts of the 'flerd' (flocks and herds) give the Moselys improved opportunities to manage pasture and scrub. Once considered a problem, the bush goats are now a valuable resource, especially as they can be used to control invasive native scrub (INS).

The variety of stock used in the enterprise also helps the Moselys to cope with changes in seasonal conditions. While the long-term goal is to run about 100 cows, 2,000 meat goat does and 5,000 White Dorper ewes, 50% of the total herd can be offloaded if dry conditions persist.

First to go are the bush goats, followed by the cattle. This flexibility means that the property has a buffer to cope with variable seasonal conditions. South African Boer goats have been added to the bush goat operation, resulting in a reduced turn-off age of meat kids and added weight and yield of the goat carcasses.

Figure 1: Perennial grass growth in foreground contrasts with untreated INS country in background of this photograph from Etiwanda (All photos supplied by the Mosely family).



The start to Andrew and Megan's methods of grazing was a holistic management training course, completed in 1997 through their local Landcare group.

"This training challenged our thinking and started us down the path we are on today," Andrew said. This was followed in 2006 with a GrazingforProfit™ course, which introduced the Moselys to planned grazing practices and how to use their stock – or their 'Four Legged Organic Soil Builders' – as non-mechanical tools to improve land condition.

Fencing is a critical component of the planned grazing practices. Both Hingejoint® and Westonfencing® have been used extensively throughout the property, allowing the Moselys to control total grazing pressure (TGP).

Using grazing charts, the movement of stock around the property is planned up to 10 months in advance. A current practice is for each paddock to have about 120 days of rest between grazings. The plan is to extend this to 150-180 days by further dividing paddocks, allowing greater grazing control. The Moselys implemented their grazing regime by fencing to achieve improved groundcover outcomes.

The Moselys have also converted a chisel plough into a direct drill, single chute planter. This planter now plays a key role in the improvement of soil health on Etiwanda. After clearing and stick raking, the planter is used to direct drill oats. The crop then provides cover for germinating native grasses, which in turn helps to increase groundcover, surface mulching and overall soil health. This increases the infiltration of rainfall and effectiveness of any rainfall events. In just two years, soil tests have shown that the soil carbon content had risen from 0.6% to 0.88%.

The Moselys have not planted any pasture seed but have instead re-created conditions needed for the native perennial species to establish and flourish. The Moselys manage their grazing to keep these native species alive through dry spells. Species include box grass, native digitaria (e.g. cotton panic, finger panic and silky umbrella), as well as native panics (e.g. hairy and cane) and windmill grass among others.

While the costs of the activities and infrastructure on Etiwanda have been high, Megan believes that the family is reaping the rewards. "Every planned move has a big impact on our ability to change things for the better," she said.

"We can be pro-active and not re-active...We have a feeling of being in control and we actively run the business. It doesn't run us."

Megan Mosely

The projects undertaken in the past have led to increases in productivity, profitability, reduced costs and workloads and a more relaxed and less stressful lifestyle.

"This improved profitability is confirmed by our financial benchmarking results which show that we consistently rank in the top 10% of producers for return on assets managed," Andrew said.

Figure 2: Perennial grass regeneration from INS country on Etiwanda.



Figure 3: Untreated country on Etiwanda.



The assistance of the Mosely family in compiling this case study is gratefully acknowledged.

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