

# Hitting stock weight targets to maximise returns

## Producer case study: Jordy Sheahan

### Background

Jordy Sheahan farms in Victoria's Mallee, alongside his parents, Richard and Dianne, and siblings Brent, Toby, Georgia, Tessa, Ella, and their families.

The farm business, Morningquest, encompasses a diverse range of operations including cropping, hay production, freight, and livestock. With bases in both Quambatook and Dumosa, the farm spans over 100 kilometers.

While cropping remains the backbone of the operation, in 2020, the Sheahans built a 10,000-head feedlot at their Quambatook property as a strategy to improve drought preparedness.

Today, they run up to 8,000 head of cross-bred lambs in containment, with one full-time staff member dedicated solely to managing this aspect of the business.

### Leveraging livestock expertise

The Sheahans leverage the expertise of a livestock agent to support the purchase of their lambs. Jordy describes "affordable, quality lambs" as the most desirable when purchasing. The processing companies they work with aim for a particular target carcass weight.

### Implementing eID for traceability

Jordy recalls the initial frustration with the introduction of electronic identification (eID), which added an additional cost to an already tight-margin operation.

However, recognising that compliance was mandatory, the Sheahans chose to capitalise on the opportunities provided by eID, such as the ability to trace individual animals.

To further maximize returns, in 2022, the Sheahans invested in a Tru-Test Prattley 5-way auto drafter.



Image 1 Jordy Sheahan

### Weigh Scale use

The weigh scales are an integral tool at Morningquest, allowing for regular weighing of stock. This data is crucial for making informed culling decisions, ensuring that only the best-performing animals are retained, and those that

do not meet growth targets are culled. This practice helps maintain the overall quality and profitability of their livestock operation.

## Challenges

Jordy welcomes the introduction of a national mandatory individual electronic identification system, as the Sheahans identified early on that discrepancies between compliance regulations in different states meant eIDs needed to be managed differently based on the source of the mob. For example, lambs purchased from NSW often needed to be tagged with the eID upon arrival at Morningquest, unlike those from Victoria that already complied. While possible, this added an additional cost and required greater labor units that were not otherwise budgeted for.

Jordy acknowledges that staff also have to allow for slightly more time when drafting, compared to no weigh scales. Upon implementation, the Sheahans made some small engineering changes to the yards to streamline the five-weight drafting process. While this has helped in encouraging the sheep to run through, it does require careful management to ensure efficiency.

## Future Opportunities

Going forward, Sheahans may explore the option to pen livestock based on growth rates. By utilising the data provided by eID and the auto drafter, they can group lambs with similar growth rates together, optimizing feed efficiency and achieving target weights more consistently.

## Maximising efficiency

Jordy states, ***“you can’t manage what you can’t measure,”*** and considers the eID weigh scale system just another way of improving efficiency on the farm to capitalize on the good times and weather the ordinary times.

***“The sheep job can be somewhat up and down – weigh scales allow us to control what we can control, providing some stability in an otherwise unpredictable environment.”***

With hindsight, Jordy explains that the purchase has paid for itself and despite their initial hesitation due to the added cost and labor of eID technology, long-term, they see greater profit margins from their ability to hit the desired weight.

### For further information:

Grace Hosking, Birchip Cropping Group **T** (03) 5492 2787 **M** 0467 518 441 **E** [grace.hosking@bcg.org.au](mailto:grace.hosking@bcg.org.au)