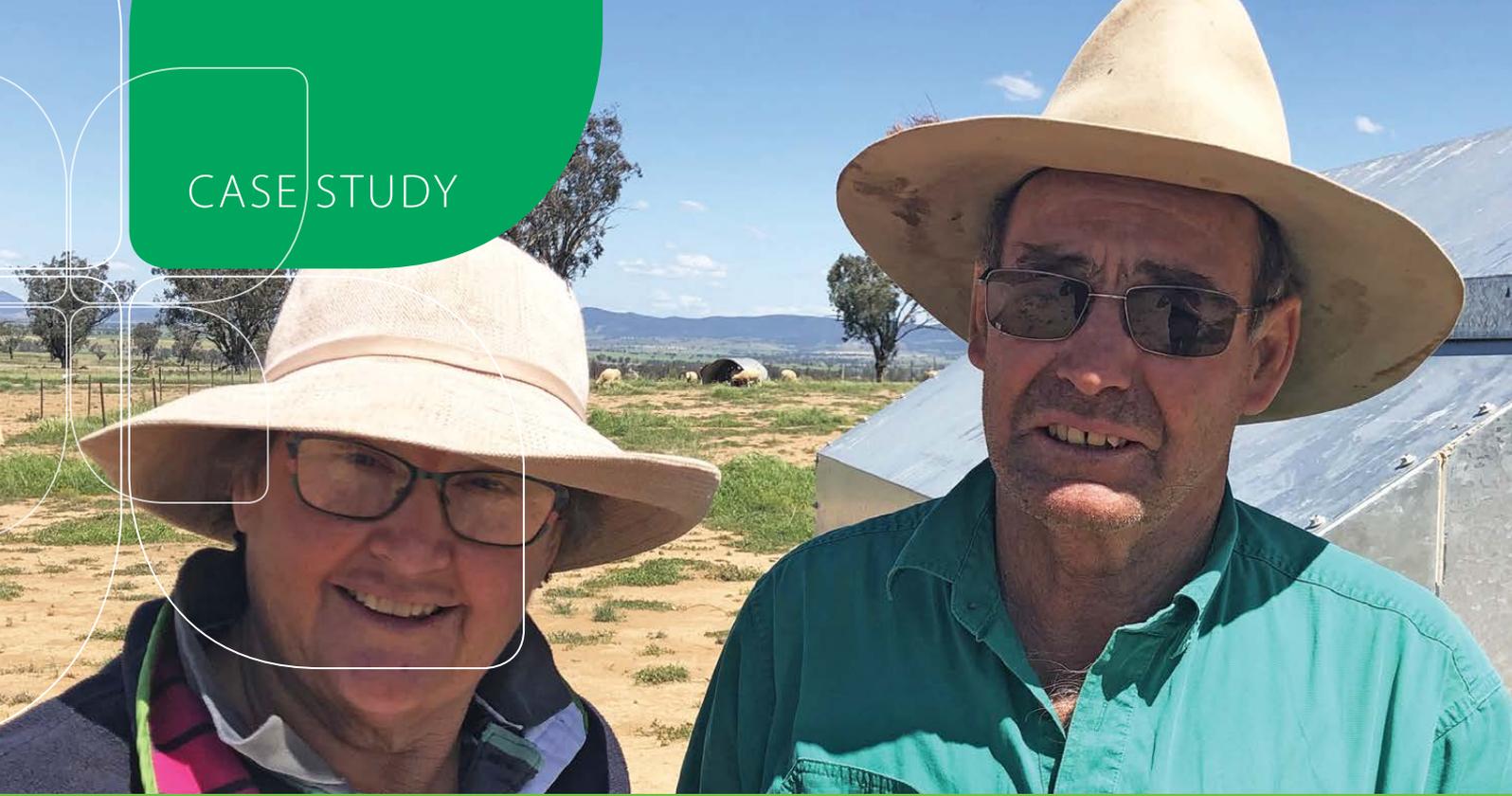


## CASE STUDY



# Being prepared and planning for drought

### Snapshot

**Producer:**

Laurie and John Chaffey  
(pictured)  
'Weerona', Somerton  
45kms south of Tamworth

**Area:** 2,500ha  
Mixed farming enterprise,  
beef cattle, sheep and  
cropping



### Background

Through lessons learnt and their practical experience dealing with previous dry times, Laurie and John Chaffey took a proactive approach to drought preparedness that helped them survive the recent drought. Their forward planning and practical management strategies helped their beef, sheep and cropping enterprise stay in production.

The Chaffeys knew that whilst you can never fully be prepared for extended drought periods, taking the time to develop a plan, implementing that plan and staying the course when the time came would help them best manage the adverse seasonal conditions.

### What was involved

The Chaffeys developed their plans based on carefully assessing what the feed requirements would be for their livestock during drought conditions, with a focus on production rather than just maintenance feeding of stock. Over many years, the Chaffeys have always aimed to have a certain amount of stored feed on hand, to keep livestock going for at least two seasons if dry times occurred, without relying on existing pastures.

Going into the drought, they had grain stored on-farm, including oats that had been stored underground for more than 20 years, and also grain stored in the silo system. They had a reserve of hay available and added cottonseed purchased off-farm to add nutritional value to the roughage when supplementary feeding.

Laurie and John carefully considered what existing resources were on hand and assessed the financial bottom line for implementing different courses of action in their planning process. They enacted their plans using a step

by step approach, realistically reviewing their progress at each stage and reassessing and adapting their strategies as needed to stay on track.

They gradually reduced livestock numbers as the drought continued, regularly assessing the situation every few months, and made further decisions based on the seasonal conditions.

Cow numbers were selectively reduced slowly in stages as the drought progressed. Any non-performing cows were sold first and, as conditions worsened, they eventually sold cows that were not going to calve within a six week calving window in consultation with their local vet.

They started an early weaning program for calves at around 160kg, which helped the cows keep their condition, managing the weaners separately to meet their nutritional requirements.

After carefully considering their budget, the Chaffeys realised that selling young cattle during the drought was a better option rather than finishing for the market as they usually would as they didn't have the feed resources and, it was too labour intensive for them to manage.

Sheep numbers were also reduced, with the whether portion of their flock sold off after shearing. They did, however, decide to keep their core breeding flock of Merino ewes and continued to sell off fattened lambs after confinement feeding in 'sacrifice' paddocks.

These confinement areas enabled them to manage ewe nutrition at crucial times such as pre-joining and pre-lambing and kept the ewes at the right score condition, which saw a much higher lamb survival rate. It also enabled the Chaffeys to maintain critical groundcover (as best they could given the conditions) and avoid placing excessive grazing pressure on pastures.

## Benefits

Being prepared for drought and having a step by step plan of action gives you the capability to respond to seasonal conditions in the best possible way. Developing a plan which is based on a realistic assessment of the situation and not underestimating the resources available is integral to the success of any farming enterprise. Making decisions that take into consideration the economic merit of each management option and balancing this with the objectives and budget of your plan helps the business stay financially viable for the long term.

Although full productivity cannot be achieved, a level of productivity is still possible so that when the drought is over, you have something to build on and keep the enterprise going.

## Summary

When drought occurs, being prepared and having the capability to respond to seasonal conditions will help ensure the long term success of a farming enterprise. Have a plan, act early, reassess regularly, and revise and adapt your plan as each step is implemented for the best possible outcome.

Kate McCarthy | Land Services Officer - Livestock | 0428 043 243

## Key learning and advice

Plan with the very best information available to you, seek support and advice from knowledgeable sources.

Reassess periodically, adapt to the conditions to keep on track and stick to your plan.

Take time out for yourself and your family to manage your mental well-being.

Focusing on animal nutrition is important. Pregnancy testing cows can be a great tool to help ensure cows were given the correct nutrition at various stages of pregnancy.



**Local Land Services**

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