

DIGIFARM PROJECT: Optiweigh Demonstration Site, Willala

Background

The Digifarm Project is funded through the Australian Government Smarter Farming Partnerships which is run as part of the National Landcare Program. North West Local Land Services and the University of Sydney have teamed up to run a series of demonstration sites across the North West region to showcase the latest in agricultural technology and how it can be adopted into North West Farming Systems.

A component of the project is looking at livestock technologies, specifically in paddock systems for weighing cattle, and how the information collected can be best utilised to provide real time return on investment within local grazing systems.

This demonstration site was run at Alistair Donaldson's property near Willala, NSW. During the trial the Optiweigh was in with a mob of 70 Droughtmaster steers grazing a 12 month old stand of sub-tropical grasses on rotation; pastures were predominantly digit.

Alistair routinely provides ad lib access to loose lick throughout the year in a custom built lick trailer that can be easily moved between paddocks with the livestock.

How does it work

The Optiweigh system is an easily transportable in-paddock system that accurately measures and records the weight of cattle and performance of the mob over time.

It was developed by Bill Mitchell, a grazier from the New England who saw the need to monitor stock weight and daily gain from the paddock within their own grazing enterprise. For more information on the Optiweigh you can visit their website at <https://www.optiweigh.com.au/>.

A loose lick or molasses based lick block is generally used as an attractant in the unit to encourage and sustain attendance to the unit over time. The primary objective of this demonstration site was to determine if cattle who have ad lib access to loose lick readily available in the paddock will choose attend the Optiweigh, and how placement of the unit in reference to the lick provided will influence attendance.

If livestock feed supplements are being supplied, loose lick, lick blocks etc, place the Optiweigh unit near to where these are fed to encourage attendance at the unit.



Farmer/advisor experience using the technology

There is a degree of trial and error around which attractant will work the best and this may change depending on the preference and nutritional needs of the mob.

The daily email summary is an easy way to monitor attendance, and the need to top up or change the attractant without driving into the paddock to check.

The ability to track cattle performance and real time daily gain, in conjunction with pasture quality monitoring through feed tests was useful in predicting performance, not only for this mob, but for future mobs grazing similar pasture types.



What's next?

After completion of this trial site, the Optiweigh unit was moved to a property in Boggabri where it will be utilised in a side-by-side trial with a Walk Over Weigh (WoW) system as part of the Digifarm project.

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