

DIGIFARM PROJECT: Optiweigh Demonstration Site, Boggabri

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.



IMAGE 1: Walk over Weigh (WoW) unit set up around a watering point.

How does it work?

The Optiweigh 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 Walk over Weigh (WoW) unit is designed as a static unit that is assembled in the paddock with cattle yard panels, generally around a water point. Cattle have their EID tag scanned while simultaneously being weighed as they walk across the scales each day, sometimes multiple times a day, giving an accurate daily weight for each animal in the mob.

An Optiweigh and a WoW unit are currently in a side-by-side trial in a commercial grazing and trading operation at Boggabri that is owned and operated by the Avendano family. This is a great opportunity to evaluate the data output each unit gives from the same mob, and to provide real world comparisons of the two units which we hope will help producers considering investing in an in-paddock weigh system, determine which unit has the potential to provide the best ROI for their operation.

This demonstration site has provided us with a unique opportunity to compare the two in-paddock weighing systems, side by side in a real world environment.

Pros/cons

We are in the early stages of this demonstration site, the purpose of having the units running side by side in the same paddock, and with the same group of animals is to look at the opportunities and any potential shortcomings of each technology within the varying enterprise and grazing mixes run at the

Avendano's. We will have more to report on this as the project progresses into 2022.



IMAGE 2: Optiweigh unit in use with a mob of cattle

Farmer/advisor experience using the technology

The ability to input visual ID tags and link weights back to management software has been very useful for the both of the units and creates ease in the day-to-day monitoring and performance of the animals.

Having used the WoW unit for a period of time before the Optiweigh arrived on farm, Matt commented that the additional time and labour units required to move the WoW in rotation with the cattle was outweighed by the value he was getting from the data on the trade steers, and his ability to closely monitor performance and forward plan.

Matt is looking forward to seeing how the two units can be utilised within the different facets of his business, and to see what value and differences he can derive from using the Optiweigh, as a commercial available and ready to go product, compared to the WoW whose software and data output is still undergoing development by the University of Sydney.

What's next?

We are in the early stages of this project demonstration site, some of the future questions we will be looking to answer include:

- 1) Can we develop scenario planning to help producers looking to invest in the technology decide which unit is right for their enterprise?
- 2) Are we able to use the WoW to detect early signs of sub-clinical disease in trade and feeder animals?
- 3) How does ease of movement and added time/labour cost of the WoW vs Optiweigh factor in the user experience and value of the data output?
- 4) Are there any benefits/shortcomings in the user output generated from each of the systems? And how can the data collected be used to influence decision making and set trigger points for grazing management?



IMAGE 3: The WoW and Optiweigh units set up at the Avendano's property near Boggabri.

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