

DIGIFARM PROJECT: Walk over Weigh (WoW) Demonstration Site, Warialda

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) set-up showing the panel reader on the right side, solar panels and box for telemetry equipment on the top.

How does it work?

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.

Within this trial, the University of Sydney is also trialing a new software package that they have developed to analyse the data output from the WoW, to produce a user friendly report that will give a snapshot of animal performance and value within a weekly time period.

For this demonstration site, the WoW unit was used in a mob of maiden heifers that the property owner, Ken Barnett had retained as future breeders.

Time saving – by Ken's own admission, he is very time poor, like most farmers! The WoW lets him know what the animals are doing without having to muster them and weigh them.

Pros/cons

Ken's paddocks have multiple water sources, a dam and troughs, which is not ideal for the set-up of the WoW unit which relies on animals accessing a designated water point to generate accurate daily weight and performance data.

In this instance, Ken was interested in using the in-paddock system to monitor his mob of heifers to ensure they were continuing on an upward growth trajectory, but didn't necessarily require daily individual monitoring of performance. In this instance, an Optiweigh would have been ideal for collecting the data required and allowing for easier movement with the mob as they changed paddocks.

A positive outcome from the WoW was education of the heifers; Ken noted a marked difference in handling and reduced stress in the yards. Ken believes that the cattle having to go over the WoW platform constantly and into a yard led to increased exposure and education, which in turn reduced their stress and flightiness when handled in the yards.



IMAGE 2: WoW set-up around a water point at the Barnett's with heifers at the entrance.



IMAGE 3: A heifer walking through, and being weighed by the WoW.

Farmer/advisor experience using the technology

Ken was very positive about the WoW and confident that the cost of the unit would repay itself in time saved and kilograms lost while taking the cattle to the yards to be weighed alone, let alone the value the data provides to decision making to maximise returns for animals sold.

His feeling is that the unit would be excellent for steers and production animals however, if it was a permanent addition to his farm he would look to redo the oats country to set up a cell/rotation type system in a wagon wheel design around the unit. This would allow him to maximise production from the oats/forage, and also to allow for accurate numbers and daily recording of every animal for turn off.

The power being that he could closely monitor performance of his animals to reach maximum weight for the feedlot without going over and being penalised.

What's next?

The WoW unit will stay on farm at Ken's property into 2022 and we will be looking to trial it with other mobs of animals, hopefully trade stock, to see the comparison in use with the heifers and overall value from the unit.

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