

Submission – Animal Activism

Snapshot

East Gippsland is the second largest shire in the state by area at nearly Three million hectares. 72% of the area is heavily timbered crown land, much of which is National Parks.

In Australia, 60% of livestock grazing occurs on Rangelands. ie, land not suitable for other enterprises. I believe the figure for East Gippsland is approximately 50%.

Table 1. Number for farm businesses by agriculture industry in East Gippsland and Wellington LGA.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Agriculture Census 2015-16

	Beef	Dairy	Grains	Horticulture	Other agric	Sheep	Total
Wellington	271	363	7	9	44	76	770
East Gippsland	265	65	2	23	28	145	528
Total	536	428	10	32	72	221	1,299

East Gippsland as at June 2017:

Sheep numbers 246,890 (total Vic 15.2 Million, total Australia 72 million)

Cattle numbers 147,471 (total Vic 3.6 million, total Australia 26 million)

Source: MLA Market information published data (based on ABS data)

Systems

Over the years my farming system has constantly evolved. From low input in the 80's to High input in the 00's . today we are currently investigating and transitioning to a regenerative Agriculture system.

Grazing systems have also evolved from set stocking to highly intensive rotations based on leaf appearance rate of the grass.

The thought basis through any of these transitions has been to improve the sustainability, Profitability and most importantly, the welfare of my animals.

For instance, by aiming to graze the grass at the 3 leaf stage, not only do we maximise the intake of home grown fodder, we have also allowed the grass to develop the proper balance between calcium and Magnesium which controls metabolic diseases such as grass tetany and milk fever.

The Transition to a Regenerative Agriculture system (as espoused by Colin Seis and Charlie Maslin) enhances the grazing system by providing a wider range of dietary choices for the animal. This is

achieved by moving from the traditional ryegrass/clover system and putting up to 20 different species of grasses, legumes and leafy herbs into the pasture sward. This more biodynamic system allows animals to pick and chose which plants they wish to graze giving them a range of micro and macro nutrients to match the animals needs as it sees fit.

Handling practices have constantly evolved as well. While motorbikes, horses, utes and dogs are still used to move animals. The introduction of low stress stock handling practices have greatly enhanced the well-being of the animals. Animals can be moved from paddock to paddock just by calling out.

Human Interactions

The advent of yard weaning has seen animals much more accustomed to human interactions. The quiet movement of animals through the yards at weaning has given animals a greater trust of humans and allows for easier handling and less stress on the animals. Not all animals respond positively to this handling. Stirry animals are identified and removed from the main mob and are treated as a separate group. It only takes one or two stirry animals to make the whole mob jumpy.

While yard weaning has greatly enhanced the cattle/human bond. It does not mean all people can come close to all animals!

Animals know the smell and sound of there handlers and can become nervous and stressed by strangers.

Even on my own farm I have animals that will stand quietly and behave with one person yet become nervous and fidgety with another. In my dairy were cows are in contact with people twice a day, different cows behave differently with different people.

Farm animals are not Pets. The claim made by the RSPCA and others that all sentient animals can become completely trusting of humans to the point of being touched is false and poorly understood.

This is why farm invasion by animal activists is such a threatening process and stronger trespass laws are required.

Understanding animal behaviour and good animal welfare outcomes is intrinsically linked.

I like to milk in my dairy about 2 days every month. Watching cow behaviour allows me to monitor if my staff are performing the way that they should-

- are cows entering the shed to be milked willingly
- do they become nervous around any individual
- are the cows fidgety and stompy and try to kick the cups off

Observing the sequence the cows enter the shed tells me a lot as well, a changed sequence will tell me if a cow is on heat, unwell or had a bad experience in the shed.

Poddy Calves

Poddy calves for the dairy industry is a hot button issue.

Welfare of poddy calves is a major component of The Bega Cheese Milkcare Audit program.

The key components evolve around the 3 step calf plan and Dairy Australia welfare code. Breeches of the code are dealt by agencies with stronger regulatory roles such as RSPCA or DWELP

In a whole of life management plan. Cows are drenched and vaccinated at dry off to give an immune boost to both cows and calves.

At Birth all kept calves are given 4 litres of fresh colostrum in the first 24 hour of life.

Calves are dehorned vaccinated with 7in1, piliguard, coccidiosis and bovis (salmonella).

Calf /human interaction through to weaning is critical to foster a long term trustful relationship.

Any calves not kept are euthanised by captive bolt before they are 24 hours old.

Much is made of the sale of poddy calves at 5 days of age. At this age the calf is strong enough to travel, the navel cord is dried and the calf still has a strong immune response from the cow to protect it from various diseases such as ecoli etc. By day 10 the cow's immunity has significantly diminished and the calf's own immunity is not yet fully established to protect it from scours etc. Any attempt to lengthen the age of poddy calf sales will have unintended consequences.

Conclusion

The rise of animal activism has followed other causes such as environmentalism and climate change. It is hard for industry participants to understand what they are trying to achieve.

Sow stalls were introduced in the 1980's in response to sows rolling onto and killing piglets at birth. Free range egg production was reintroduced in response to Battery hens even though free range have greater feed water and disease challenges. In cattle feed pads and stock containment areas were introduced to protect the broader farm environment.

All changes to farm production systems have their detractors. Yet all changes were introduced to help improve the welfare of the animals. Yet somebody will see something somewhere they don't like.

Despite having one of the best health systems in the world, our hospitals are still full and mistakes still occur despite all the preventative measures available. The same could be said for our farmers!

Large scale farm invasions only increase poor welfare outcomes. There are plenty of policemen in the form of DWELP and RSPCA officers to patrol the beat if breaches of the animal welfare code is suspected.

Farm invasions should be seen for what it is, wholesale breaches in criminal activity which cannot be condoned.

Hypocrisy

I make no links between activists and Vegans, But, I have attached an article by Matthew Evans which point out the failings of the vegan system. This paper points out the brutal reality of mother nature and the food chain. Mother nature is extremely cruel. The wild dogs killing prey animals do not practice humane slaughter. All life forms predate on another life. Even the plants compete against each other.

Any attempt to change production of food by an overzealous and hypocritical view on a production system can only lead to further food insecurity and the risk of population upheaval if left unchecked.