

Monaro Seasonal Outlook (December 2011)

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Introduction

At the Monaro Farming systems AGM in September this year I presented a tactical analysis using Grassgro exploring the outlook for spring and some options for trading dry cows and wethers to take advantage of opportunities that the season presented. Now we are in December it is probably useful to see where in the range of projected outcomes the model now sits and also to again look forward for the next three months. This month I will focus on the Cocksfoot pasture system at Redcliff (Ned and Annie Katers). The system runs at 10.5 dse/ha with 4 merino ewes/ha (50kg SRW) lambing in August selling young sheep as hoggets.

Method

Grassgro has the capacity to perform tactical analyses based on the current pasture, animal and soil conditions by applying historical rainfall for the season of interest. The method presumes the expected weather for the period of interest is equally likely to be similar to weather for the same period in any year in the historical record. The analysis therefore is made up of a series of individual simulations using weather from each year in the historical record starting from the known current state of the farm system. Weather data is sourced from the Silo website data drill.

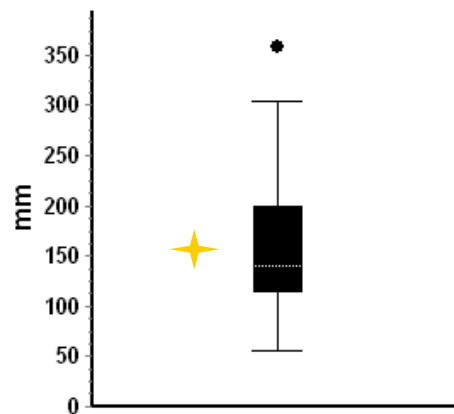
What actually happened this Spring.

Projections were made in early September but now we can look back at the weather that actually occurred and the impact on pastures and animals.

Figure one shows the actual rainfall received (represented by a star) was about average and slightly greater than the median for the spring total. However the distribution across the months was not uniform and September rainfall at Redcliff (14mm) was equal to the third lowest September total over the last 40 yrs.

October rainfall was also less than the median and distributes such that the only fall above 10mm occurred toward the end of the month. November rain totaled 108mm putting it in the top 25% of November totals.

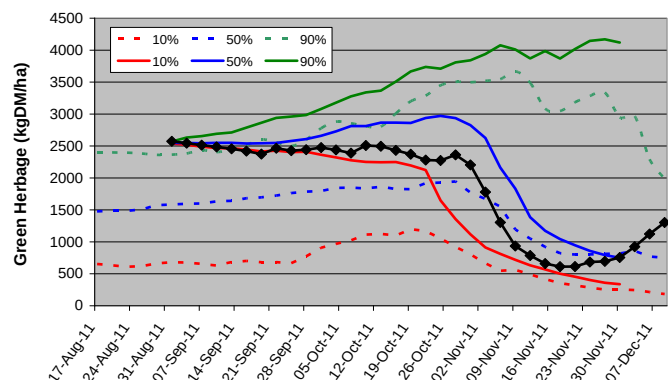
Figure 1. Boxplot of Spring rainfall totals for Redcliff between 1971 and 2011



Modeled Pasture growth

Projections from the 1st of September (Figure 2) based on historical weather patterns and an above average starting point for the system indicated a 90% chance that green herbage would remain above the median until the 23rd of October. The modeling using actual rainfall received shows that the green herbage remained above the long term median until the 5th of November. Clearly the drier than average start to spring pushed the real pasture growth toward the bottom end of the projected range however the good November rainfall generated another spurt of growth bringing green herbage mass back above the long term median by early December.

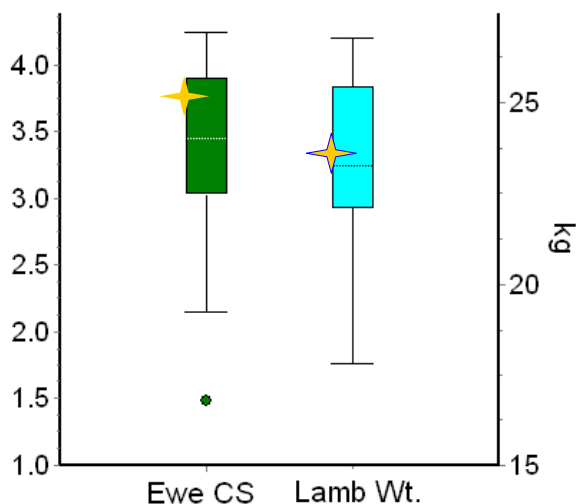
Figure 2. Actual spring green herbage mass (◆) for 2011 vs historical percentiles (- - -) and projected 2011 percentiles (----)



Animal Performance

Better than average pasture conditions through most of spring lead to good predicted animal performance. Figure 3 shows actual ewe condition score remained above the median at the end of spring. Predicted lamb body weight was around the median which was symptomatic of poor early spring growth and below average pasture digestibility in early spring.

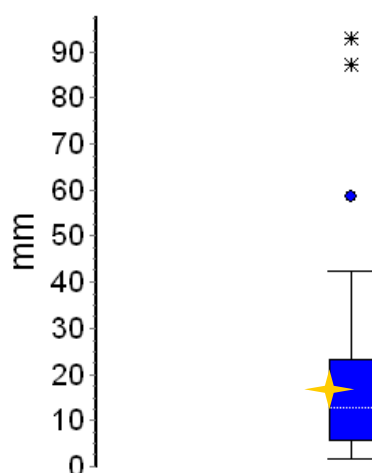
Figure 3. Ewe condition and wether lamb live weight at the end of spring 2011 compared to the long term distribution.



Summer Projections

The starting point for the summer projections is the 11th of December after some good early December rain. Figure 4 shows plant available water on 11/12/2011 is above the median suggesting that growth is active and could continue with additional rainfall.

Figure 4 Plant Available Water on the 12th of December as compared to the historical range.



Using the modeled animal, pasture and soil conditions as at the 11th of December, another 3 month tactical simulation was done to look at projected seasonal conditions through to the end of February.

Figure 5. Outlook for green herbage availability December to February

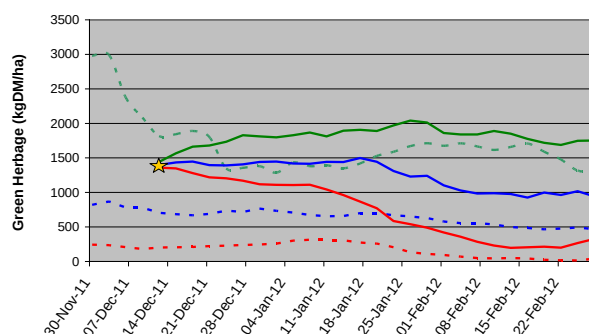
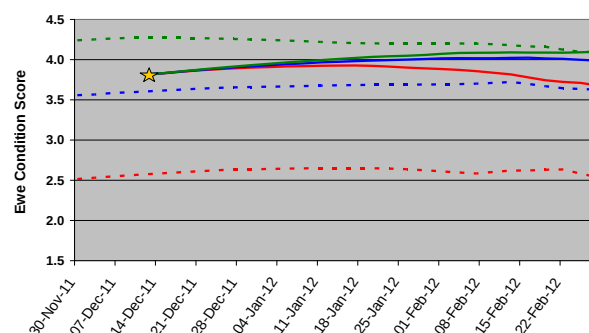


Figure 5 shows the projected green available herbage from now until the end of February. Dotted lines are the historical percentiles for each day of year while the solid lines are the projections for this season. Because we are starting well above the median there are even odds (50% chance) that green available herbage will remain above the 90th percentile until the middle of January. If we take the seasonal forecast into account (La Nina .. wetter than average) then in fact there is probably a greater than even chance of this occurring.

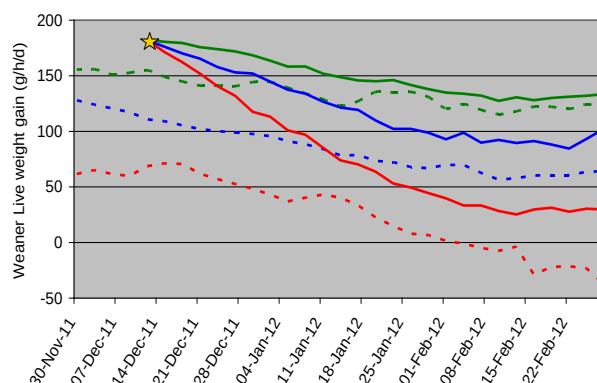
Ewe condition (Fig 6) also is unlikely to fall below the median at any time during the period and ewes should be in ideal joining condition by the end of February.

Figure 6. Outlook for Ewe condition Dec – Feb.



Due to potentially low feed quality by mid summer there is a small chance (10%) weaner weight gain could fall below the median by the middle of January and that weight gains could fall below 50g/h/d by the end of January (Figure 7)

Figure 7. Outlook for Weaner Live weight gain.



Despite this weaner live weights are highly likely to be above the median (> 30kg) and supplementary feed will not be required unless ewe weaners were to be joined first as lambs.

Options for the summer period.

There is generally surplus feed for the stocking rate being modeled however the quality of this feed is unlikely to be sufficient to trade and finish young stock.

A strategic short term trade with merino wethers would still be an option and it should be possible to increase the overall stocking rate by 50% without effecting the likely outcome for the existing ewes or their progeny. With a 50% increase in stocking rate the 10th percentile for ewe and weaner body weight is only about 1 kg lighter by the end of February.

Another option would be to trade dry breeding ewes with the intention of joining them early February allowing them to be sold as scanned in lamb in April so lightening off stocking rates again for winter.

Extra stock will also help in managing the late summer herbage mass in targeted paddocks (eg lambing paddocks) to encourage germination and establishment of clovers.

Animal Health.

If the seasonal projections seem too optimistic (especially with regard to weaner growth) it should be understood that the Grassgro tool does not model the impact of animal health breakdowns such as worm and flies. Management of worm burdens, in weaners especially, will be a challenge this year. It is likely that growth rates may be considerably lower than Grassgro predicts unless there is effective management of internal parasites.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (July 2010). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Recent events....

❖ MFS Soils Club Session -29th Nov 2011

Over 30 members recently attended a successful day at "Greenlake" shearing shed where Dr Richard Simpson (CSIRO) presented a detailed analysis and interpretation of MFS Soils collected in the bulk soil testing program in November. **For a copy of this analysis please contact Nancy Spoljaric.**



*Richard Simpson presenting at Greenlake, Nov 29th 2011

❖ CSIRO dual-purpose crop walk -20th Dec 2011

Approx. 40 producers from the Monaro attended a crop walk on Tuesday to look at the canola and cereal dual-purpose trials conducted at Delegate Station again this year. The trial results will be finalised in January 2012 when harvest is completed and yields can be assessed and gross margin data finalised. The trials in 2011 mainly focussed on controlling disease which is a major factor when considering a dual purpose cropping system. Comments to come out of the day included the critical importance of addressing weed & disease issues and the advantages of canola as both a forage crop and disease break tool. A final report will be available in Feb 2012.

❖ MFS traineeship program 2012 Update

The MFS traineeship has gathered momentum with over 46 applicants responding to the advertisement for two trainees to work with MFS host producers. Two successful applicants have been appointed and will start work from mid January 2012. MFS will be contacting all the host farms who expressed interest in employing a trainee in early Jan 2012 and finalising commitment and farmer schedules. This is a fantastic initiative that MFS can be proud of as it gives the opportunity for these enthusiastic, young people to gain skills and a long-term future in the agricultural grazing Industry.

Upcoming Events

- ❖ Possibility of **Stock / Dog Workshop** (Neil McDonald, South Australia) in Bombala. Neil is a highly renowned trainer in this field Australia wide and he is happy to come and do a workshop if we can get 15 people together. With FarmReady funding reimbursement the total cost for a 3 day workshop would be \$405pp. **If interested please contact Nancy or Sue Haslingden asap.** Neils website address is; <http://www.neilmcdonald.com.au/>.
- ❖ Doug Alcock would like to start two **"Top lamb crop"** groups in early 2012, one around Bombala and one around Cooma. The total cost of the course would be \$283 after FarmReady reimbursement. This training is held over six sessions and is aimed to help sheep producers take a more strategic approach to breeding ewe management in order to improve reproductive performance and lamb survival. See flyer attached.

Farm Related Injuries - *Exerts from a Report published by the Aust Centre for Agriculture Health and Safety.....*

Deaths

There were approximately 2361 print media articles received by the NFIDC from Media Monitors Australia during January to September 2011. A total of 40 on-farm deaths were reported for this period:

- Five (13%) of the 40 reported on-farm deaths were children aged 15yrs and under. Two of these cases involved children drowning in a dam (n=1) and a swimming pool (n=1).
- Quad bike related deaths (n=12) were reported most frequently. There were two additional quad bike related deaths that were reported in the media however location of event could not be determined.
- Media monitoring also captures non-farm quad bike related fatality. There were three fatal injury events that occurred off-farm that were reported in print media for this period. The total number of on-

and off farm deaths involving quad bikes has risen to 17.

Non-fatal Injury

There were an additional 59 non-fatal on-farm injury events reported in the Australian print media for the January 1 to September 30, 2011 period.

- Ten (17%) of the 59 injury events involved children aged 15yrs and under.
- Quad bike related injury (n=14) was most frequently reported. Followed by tractor related incidents (n=13).
- There were nine additional quad bike related injury events whereby location of incident could not be determined. There was also 15 additional quad bike related injuries that occurred off-farm that were captured by media monitoring.

Wimmera Mail Times, Wednesday 30 November 2011

Farmsafe Australia executive officer John Temperley says a safe farm is also a productive farm.

Mr Temperley said workplace accidents could be prevented through a professional attitude towards safety.

He said a professional approach did not necessarily mean lots of paperwork and signs, although both had their place and record keeping was important.

Instead, each person involved in a farm must have safety embedded in every work practice and every recreational activity that occurred on the farm.

"It's not enough to have a bunch of policies and procedures sitting in a folder somewhere, gathering dust," Mr Temperley said.

"The best and safest farms I've seen are the ones where everyone knows the safety procedures and where everyone communicates clearly ~ it's in the culture." He said the safest farms he had seen were also the most productive.

On behalf of the Board of MFS I would like to wish everyone a safe and relaxing Xmas and all the best for 2012. I would also like to thank all our sponsors and partners for their continued support throughout 2011 and especially the members of MFS for their support at events during 2011. Without all this support MFS would not be able to continue. Merry Xmas!

