

## Lamb Finishing Systems On The Monaro - Summary

- The profitability of retaining store cross bred lambs (Merino x Dorset) to grow out on three pasture systems (phalaris/subclover, lucerne, and brassica crop) was modelled with Grassgro, at the Bungarby site used for MFS seasonal outlooks.
- In all cases, retaining lambs rather than selling as stores at 31<sup>st</sup> December, increased farm profitability. The impact on gross margin per hectare over the whole enterprise (breeding plus finishing) is tabled below. Gross margins also account for sowing costs of finishing pastures.

System	Average Lamb Sale Weight	Total Enterprise Gross Margin	Gross Margin Increase v Store Lamb Production	Percentage of farm area required for finishing
Base – sell as stores 31 <sup>st</sup> Dec.	29 kg	\$161/ha		
Pasture based finishing (existing phalaris/subclover)	37 kg	\$236/ha	47%	Reduced ewe numbers from 3.4 to 3.3 ewes/ha (3%)
Lucerne	42 kg	\$266/ha	65%	17.5%
Brassica Forage Crop	48 kg	\$495/ha	207%	10%

- In the finishing systems, all lambs are sold by the end of April or sooner if they had reached 55kg liveweight. In poorer seasons lambs are sold when weight gains have been consistently less than 20 g/hd/day for two weeks. Retaining lambs did not require a reduction in ewe numbers in the pasture finishing system, as lambs were only retained while sufficient feed was available. In the lucerne and brassica systems, ewe numbers were reduced in proportion to the area taken up by these finishing pastures ie 17.5% for lucerne and 10% for brassica.
- The table above represents average performance over 55 years of climatic variation (1960-2015). However, retaining lambs improved farm profitability in the worst years, as well as in average years.
- Brassica outperformed lucerne due to superior dry matter production, with brassicas modelled to average 8 tonne DM/ha/year, with lucerne at 4.4 tonne DM/ha/yr. Pasture production was 5.8 t/ha/year. Producer experience would suggest brassica performance may be an overestimate, and lucerne performance an underestimate.
- This modelling suggests there is considerable scope for Monaro producers to increase farm profitability by retaining crossbred lambs, especially if finishing pastures are used (lucerne or brassica crops). Further work is required to measure dry matter production, digestibility, and lamb weight gains on various finishing pastures, to increase confidence around the profitability of the different systems.