

AN INITIATIVE OF

*Making More From Sheep*



# Making ewes work for you

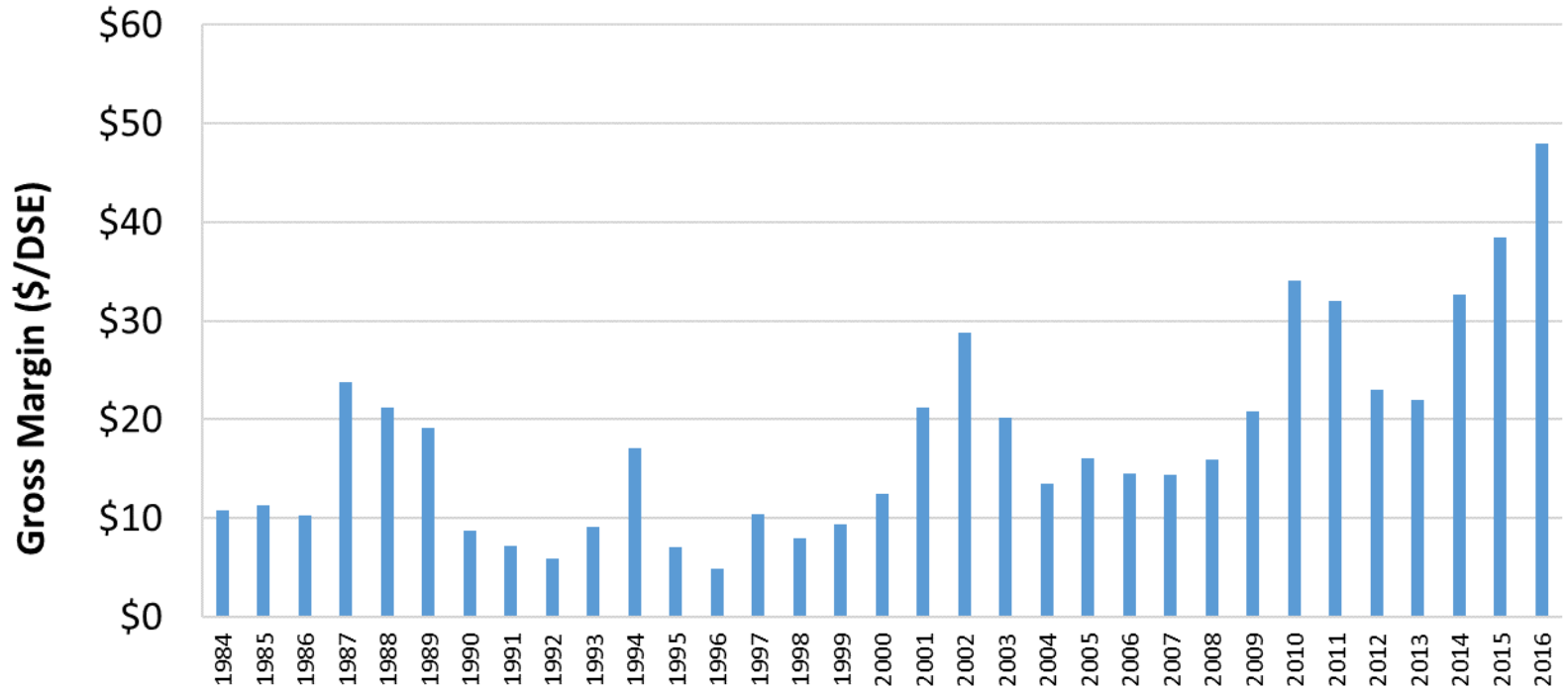
## Andrew Thompson



EVENT SUPPORTERS:



# A good time to have sheep!



# Top performers produce more lambs

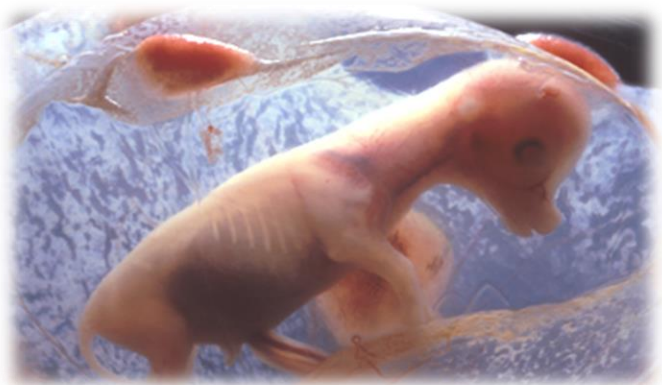
- Higher stocking rate (+7%)
- **Higher weaning rate (+9%)**
- Higher lamb production/ha (+16%)
- Higher price for sale sheep (+10%)

2008-2012

**78% of the variation in gross margin between farms attributed to differences in livestock trading profit**



## Room for improvement – lamb survival



**120 Foetuses**

**87**



**Lambs  
marked**



**33**

**Lambs  
lost  
(28%)**

**Single survival - 85%**

**Twin survival - 60%**

# Focusing on twin lamb survival also makes good economic sense

Value of increasing <u>scanning rate</u> by 10%	\$/ewe
At 55% twin survival (+2.9 lambs/100 ewes)	\$2.90
At 75% twin survival (+5.4 lambs/100 ewes)	\$5.40

Value of increasing <u>twin lamb survival</u> by 10%	\$/ twin ewe
An extra 20 lambs per 100 twin-ewes	\$20.00

# Four MUST do's for improving lamb survival

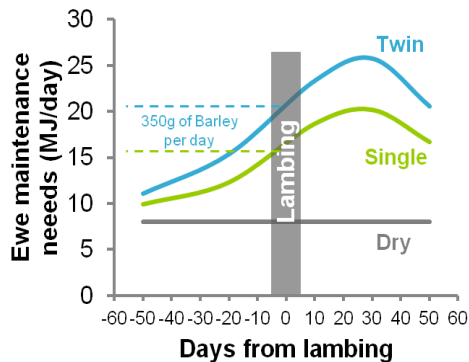
Condition score



Scan for multiples



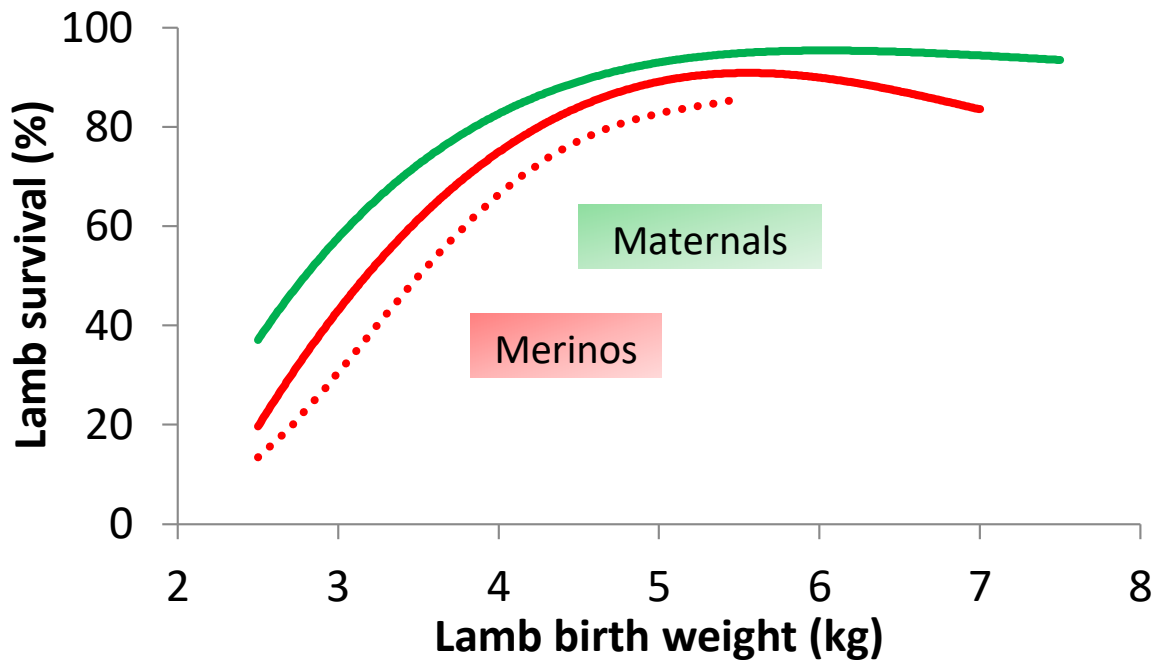
Allocate feed based on energy requirements



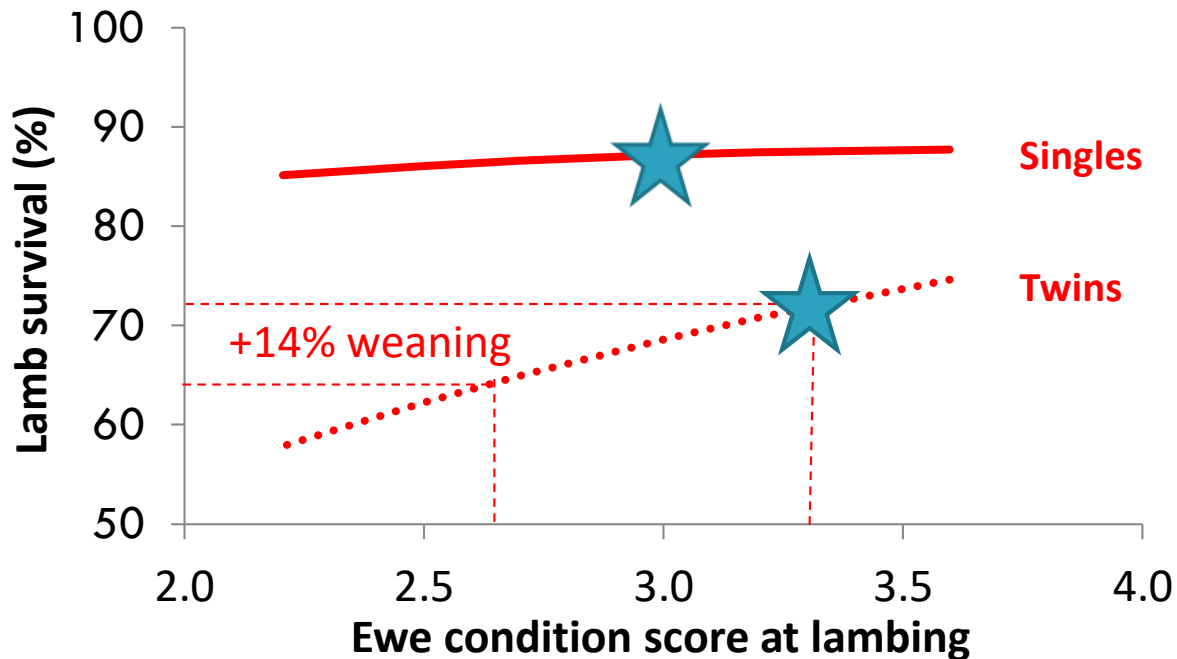
Smaller mobs and shelter for lambing



# Managing lamb birth weight to increase survival

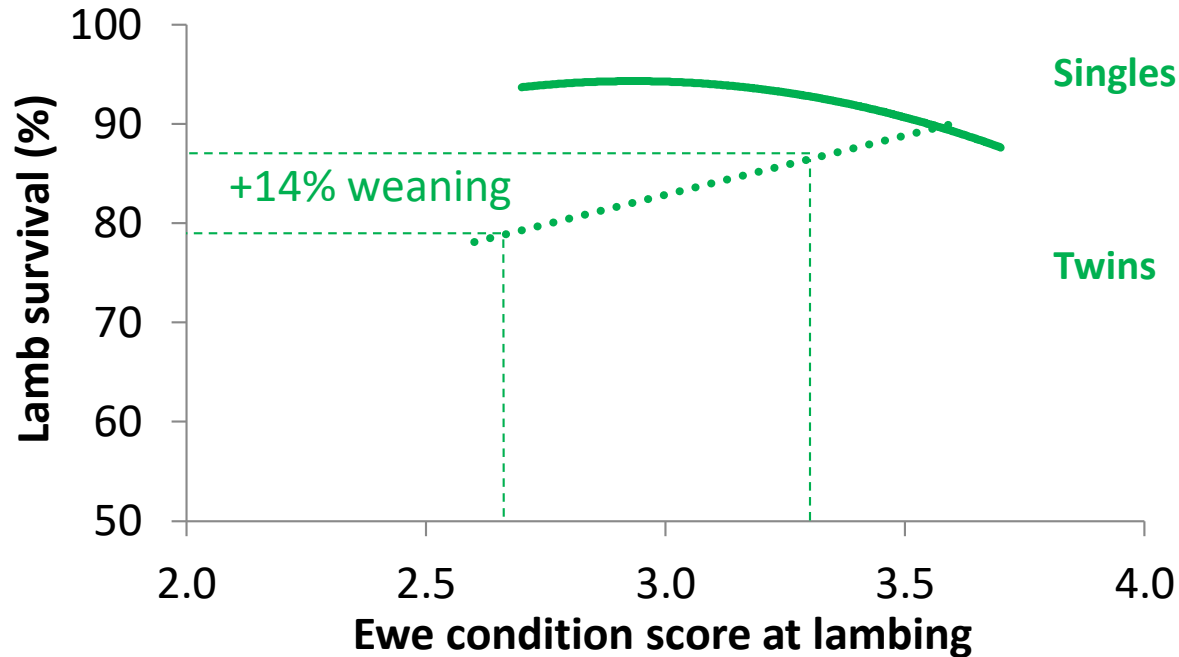


# Preferentially allocate feed to twins - Merinos





# Preferentially allocate feed to twins – especially Maternals



# Key condition score targets

- Flock average CS 3+ at joining, but.....
- CS at lambing is far more important than CS at joining
- Flock average CS 3+ at lambing but twin ewes should ideally be 0.3 to 0.5 CS fatter than single bearing ewes
- CS targets apply even in poor seasons

# MUST do vs HOW to?

- **Knowledge** gap versus **implementation** gap
- Knowledge, skills and confidence – BFWF and LTEM
  - Pasture and condition score assessment
  - Feed budgeting
- Support from local consultants and wool brokers/agents
- Pregnancy scanning contractors

# Lifetime Ewe Management

more lambs, better wool, healthy ewes



## Practice

## Proportion of participants

Pre-LTEM

Post-LTEM

Condition score ewes

8

91

Pregnancy scan for multiples

29

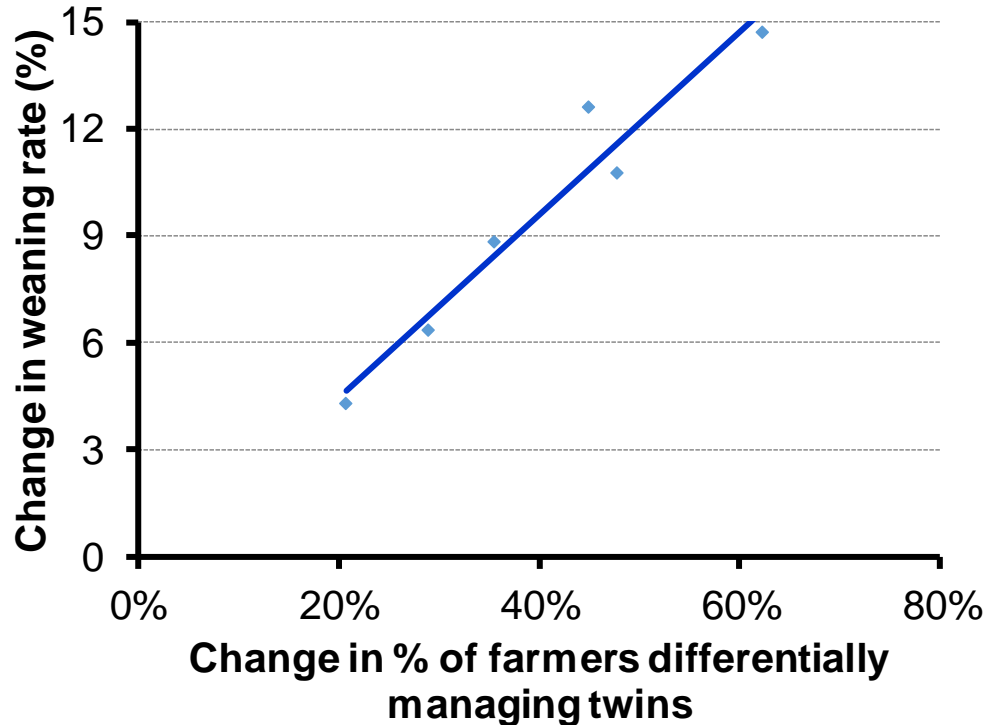
67

Manage single/twins separately

22

64

## It is more than just nutrition.....



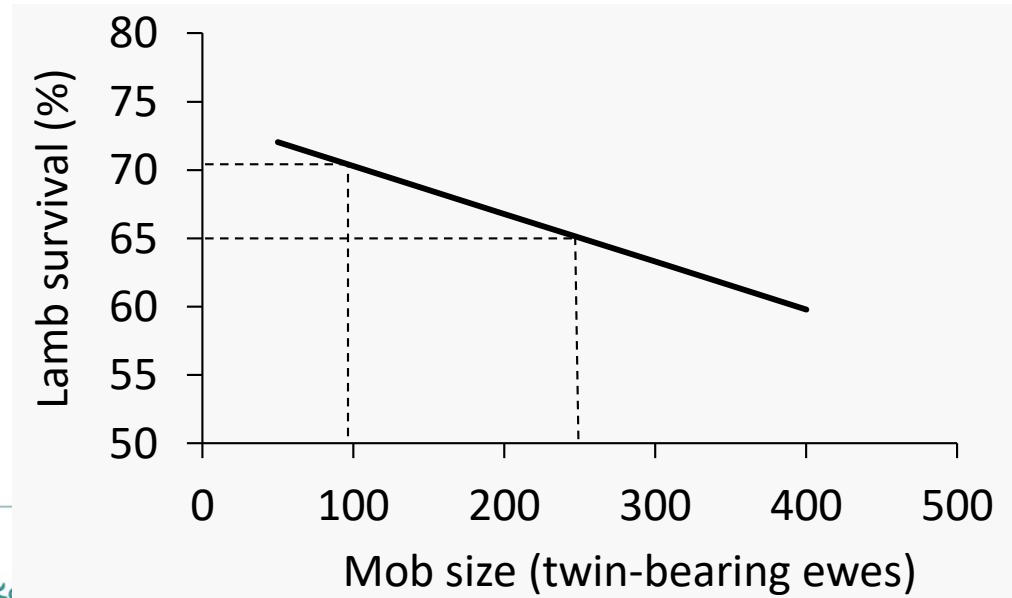
**LTEM participants that adopted scanning for multiples & differential management increased whole farm weaning rate by 14%**

# Pregnancy scanning

- Creates the motivation – *'If you don't scan you don't know'*
- Not worth scanning for wet/dry if less than 5% dries or for twins if less than 10-15% twins
- The value of scanning is related to improvement in twin lamb survival and increases with a poor season
- 40-45 days after rams out (76 c/ewe vs 57c/ewe for wet/dry)
- Don't be put off by a bad experience with scanner accuracy

# Mob size and stocking rate at lambing

- Mob size has a greater effect on lamb survival than stocking rate
- Similar responses across ewe breeds



## Bestwool Bestlamb

- 5% decrease in lamb survival (10% weaning rate) between 100 & 250 twin bearing ewes
- Equivalent effects on lamb survival as an extra 0.3 to 0.4 CS at lambing

# On-farm validation of mob size impacts

- 70 sites on commercial farms (only 21 completed)

Survival of twin-born lambs			
Mob size (number of ewes)		High (231)	Low (92)
Stocking rate (ewes/ha)	High (7.8)	<b>71.5</b>	74.5
	Low (5.4)	73.4	<b>76.2</b>

- On-farm data from 300-400 producers



# Lamb marking is your yield mapping day

- Record lamb marking results against each paddock – don't box-up mobs pre-marking if possible
- Identify lambs born as singles and twins
- Wet-dry ewes every year and cull non-performers if possible

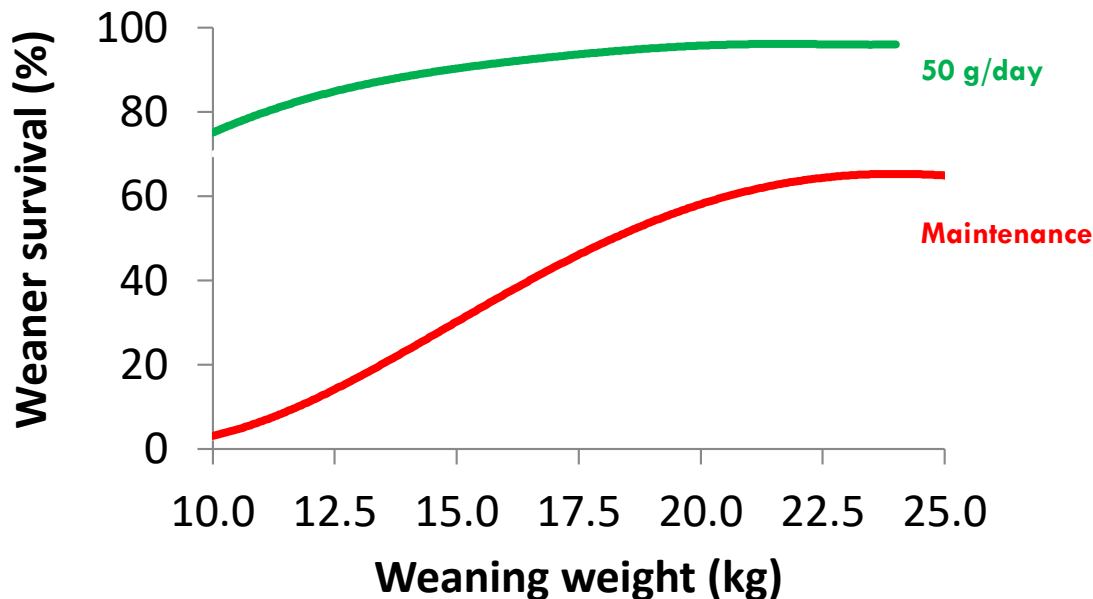
## Cull non-performers – adult ewes

Performance this year	Weaning rate (%) next year
Dry at scanning	51
Failed to rear any lambs	72
Single born and reared	97
Twin born and reared at least one lamb	105

# What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Feed ewes supplements if needed during lactation – minimise adverse carryover impacts into 2018
- Don't delay weaning - imprint feed and wean at 13 weeks from rams in
- Aim to wean at 40% of mature weight
  - Draft out the 'tail'
  - Preferentially feed to get to 40% as quickly as possible

# 'At risk' weaners are the highest priority to feed



## Targets

Feed to gain 1 to 1.5 kg/month

Big down side and little upside

Supplement weaners and use paddock feed for ewes

Monitor liveweight and adjust feeding

# What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Sell low priority stock
  - Wether weaners
  - Older ewes; 6 yr olds [ewe mortality doubles between 6 and 7 years old]
  - Adult ewes that will be too skinny to mate in 2018 (CS 2.3)
  - Adult ewes that failed to rear in 2017

# What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Separating ewes on condition score at weaning and allocating feed appropriately is a high value strategy this year
- Confinement feeding where possible
  - Cost feed per unit energy on farm (c/MJ)
  - Saves 1-2 MJ/day (100 g lupins/day)
  - Less wastage
  - Labour efficient
  - Protecting your paddocks

# What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Condition score targets
  - If kept, adult ewes that are likely to be too thin to mate (CS < 2.3) in 2018 – feed to CS 2.7+
  - Maidens and skinny ewes (CS 2.5) especially if they had twins in 2017 – feed to CS 2.7+
  - Adult ewes in CS 3 – feed to maintain

# Take home messages

- To improve weaning rates focus on twin lamb survival
  - Additive small effects
  - Dependent on scanning for multiples and differential management
- Wean early and look after weaners especially 'high risk tail'
- Segregate ewes on CS at weaning, set CS targets for joining and feed!
- Multiple workshops and learning programs available targeting reproduction and local support



# Workshops and learning programs

- Bred Well Fed Well
- Lifetime Ewe Management
- Realising Performance Potential
- Profitable Grazing Systems