KoolCollect

Box Plains

LOCATION
Tarwin Lower, VIC

FARM
455 Hectares
1100 Steers

EQUIPMENT
KoolCollect
Panel Reader
Scales

"Without KoolCollect, giving accurate, instant information, and providing an easy drafting capability, trying to manage a difficult season would have been almost impossible."

Using KoolCollect to monitor weight gain and target optimum marketing for a bullock fattening operation.

Box Plains is a 455-hectare bullock fattening operation in Tarwin Lower, Victoria. High rainfall in this part of South Gippsland, combined with close management of a rotational grazing programme and biannual Super/Potash applications allows for maximum production of grass. The property is run by 2 staff from a neighbouring property and carries 1100 steers from weaning to finished bullocks at 300+ kilograms dressed weight in

twelve months without any supplementary feeding.

The animals at Box Plains are Hereford, Angus and Hereford/Angus cross and are sourced from the Koolomurt calf drop plus bought in steers from the weaner sales at Naracoorte, Hamilton and Casterton. The purchased cattle are from the heavier end of the sales, from 330 to 390 kilograms. Animals are kept in a single mob with water supplied through damns and bore water troughs in each paddock.

The key challenge at Box Plains is to maintain a feed base ahead of the

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"KoolCollect won't run your farm for you, but it does allow you to run your farm with a lot more knowledge and greater efficiency."

cattle so that they are doing well at all times. Additionally, disease must be kept in check to ensure animals gain weight as expected. The property has experienced a disease issue in the Autumn, which causes liver failure and death in varying numbers, and is difficult to treat. Photosensitisation is visible in severe cases. Many experts have looked at this problem, but there is no silver bullet cure for the issue which appears to result from a combination if ryegrass and fungal problems. Keeping the worm burden low, and supplying good feed limits this problem. Affected cattle can be treated with antibiotic if treated in time, but this is a last resort, as such animals are then ineligible for our customers. Affected cattle are drafted off for separate treatment.

In order to monitor the operation and ensure animals are performing well and any disease is caught early cattle are all read and weighed every time they come through the yard. Scales are suspended under the crush, with the load cells out of harm's way on top and the data is recorded in KoolCollect from Sapien Technology. The first read is

recorded on receipt at the property, providing a baseline for comparison. Subsequent weigh-ins are monitored in real-time using the display which tells operators which animal they are looking at instantly, and the critical weight and weight gain figures.

According to John Wyld, Box Plains owner, the display "gives us an accurate measure of the individual animal's performance and health regularly. Without the instant display, especially the weight graph, we would not know what is going on in terms of gain and stock health, and whether animals should be drafted off for extra treatment. It is a constant surprise to see what appears to be a healthy animal actually losing weight and in need of worm treatment, compared to a smaller animal, which is gaining well, and should be left alone. Without the instant read-out, this would be impossible."

Apart from ensuring optimum weight gain the other key function of the Box Plains fattening operation is to obtain the best price for the final product. This is achieved by accurately predicting

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the finishing time-frames and engaging with customers early regarding the dates of turn-off. The steers are assessed in late Winter and by October, John can talk to his customers regarding the dates of turn-off. Using KoolCollect data, and experience, the numbers and dates when the bullocks will reach their target weights is predicted and delivery dates are booked through to February. This suits both parties very well, and has worked remarkably well in the past.

The Spring of 2015 turned out to be different with little rain falling. The grass looked good in November, however, the dispatch weigh-in for the first loads in December revealed that the weight gain had simply slowed down, a significant problem. In fact, the seasonal February slow-down of gain had arrived in December.

To address the issue weights were reviewed, and the most appropriate cattle were drafted for delivery to a feedlot to be delivered for mid-January. These cattle were subsequently delivered, and hit the optimum weight for their price grid, salvaging a good return from what could have been a bad situation. This relieved Box Plains of the bulk of the remaining steers.

The cattle that were too heavy for the optimum feedlot price were specially looked after to maintain weight gain and have been successfully delivered during January and February which is a huge relief for John. "Without KoolCollect, giving accurate, instant information, and providing The cattle that were too heavy for an easy drafting capability, trying to manage a difficult season would have been almost impossible. Instead, we have been confident to successfully market our cattle, whilst maintaining our program, taking delivery of 1,000 weaner steers from early December to mid-January."

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