Managing water, feed & risk through confinement feeding

For Springdale mixed farmer Ben, stock confinement feeding areas have become an essential part of managing seasonal variability, protecting pastures and maintaining livestock performance during dry times.

BACKGROUND

Running 3,500 ewes alongside a cropping enterprise east of Temora, Ben Kotzur has firsthand experience managing livestock through challenging seasons.

With support from Local Land Services' Drought Adoption Officer Geoff Minchin, he has accessed practical advice and local expertise to improve infrastructure, support key business decisions and strengthen the resilience of his farming operation.

Funded through the Future Drought Fund via the Southern NSW Innovation Hub, the Drought Adoption Officer program connects producers with experienced local advisors who provide tailored technical support and practical solutions.

INVESTING IN PREPAREDNESS

The Kotzur family built their first stock confinement feeding area about a decade ago and quickly recognised its value.

"We just knew we had to do it," Ben said of the decision to build a second confinement area more recently. *"We'd seen the benefits from having one."*

Confinement feeding areas reduce pressure on paddocks, help maintain groundcover and provide greater certainty around feed and water supply during dry periods.

The need for additional infrastructure became increasingly apparent during the dry conditions of late 2024 and throughout 2025.

"The whole of 2025 was a pretty tricky year to manage," Ben said.

By early 2026, paddock water supplies were under increasing pressure, reinforcing the value of having systems in place to support livestock while protecting the broader farm.

"The confinement areas help us with ensuring that the stock have reliable and quality drinking water as well as feed stability," he said.

ACCESS TO EXPERTISE SUPPORTS BETTER OUTCOMES

When planning the second confinement feeding area, Ben had already identified a potential location. However, integrating it with planned yard upgrades, a shearing shed redevelopment and existing infrastructure created design challenges.

This is where Geoff's support proved valuable.

"We had the location sort of pegged out roughly and then he came out to the farm to take a look," Ben said. *"We decided as a result to move it a little."*

Working together, Ben and Geoff refined the layout to accommodate existing infrastructure and future plans while maximising functionality.

The project demonstrates how Drought Adoption Officers help producers assess options, share knowledge and make informed decisions suited to their businesses.

Over the past two years, Geoff has also provided support on broader management decisions, including feeding programs and stocking strategies during challenging seasonal conditions.

Geoff's knowledge is pretty good, and he definitely helped us with the specifics of how to implement and locate this new set-up.

BEN KOTZUR
SHEEP FARMER | TEMORA
on the support from Drought Adoption Officer Geoff Minchin

OUR IMPACT

SOUTHERN NSW Innovation Hub



MANAGING LIVESTOCK THROUGH VARIABLE SEASONS

Today, the Kotzur operation uses its confinement feeding areas strategically to manage seasonal risk, maintain water quality and support livestock performance.

During recent dry conditions, pregnant ewes have been placed in confinement after scanning to ensure consistent nutrition and access to quality water.

"So we know exactly what we're feeding them, and that the water they're drinking is clean," Ben said.

Using measured feeding systems, Ben can accurately manage grain rations and ensure twin- and triplet-bearing ewes receive the nutrition they need.

The system also makes day-to-day stock management easier.

"We can keep an eye on them all."

Having two confinement feeding areas provides additional flexibility, reducing the need to move stock long distances in search of feed and water while helping protect pasture resources during dry periods.

THE VALUE OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

For Ben, one of the greatest benefits of working with Geoff is having access to someone who understands the local region.

"It's really valuable to have people like Geoff working at Local Land Services because they want to work with you – to help you, help us improve," he said.

Importantly, Ben sees the relationship as one based on support and collaboration.

"He's not about telling us what we're doing wrong but supporting us to do it better and get more productivity out of our operation."

Geoff's farming background and long-standing knowledge of the district provide additional confidence when discussing ideas and weighing up options.

"The fact that he's a farmer himself really helps – he gets it. Plus he's got long-term local knowledge having been here a long time."

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SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES

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