

Introduction

'Grazing systems are made up of several components. The climate, the soil, plants, animals, parasites and diseases all combine and affect animal production. The farmer, whose objectives are central to any decisions that are to be made, is the driving force behind the system. The profitability of the enterprise he manages depends upon his efficiency of management, the current costs and prices associated directly with the enterprise, and also the state of the economy of his own country and of those countries which trade with it.'

F.H.W Morley

This statement remains relevant today, and sheep farmers have embraced practices and philosophies to improve the productivity and efficiency of management of complex grazing systems, to protect the natural environment and to ensure good animal welfare in the face of challenges including commodity price variability and climate unpredictability.

Current significant challenges include the adaptation of sheep farming systems to climate variability and to consumer expectations for the welfare of sheep.

The objective of this book is to compile the wealth of research and knowledge on sheep farming in southern Australia and to provide it in readily accessible form to farmers, farm service providers and students of agriculture. It is a distillation of information on farm business management, marketing, pasture production, nutrition, disease control and prevention, reproductive management, genetic improvement and sheep welfare. It is intended as a first point of reference for a great number of aspects of the sheep farming system and, where relevant, it directs the reader to further sources of information.

'*Efficiency of management*' is the one factor over which the farmer has direct control. This book provides the background knowledge that can help inform decisions to improve efficiency of management.