

# SMART FARMER

SHEEP

## Holistic system benefits everyone

# 'Comfortable' method works

BY DENIS HOWARD

WHEN things are not working the way you want, you have to make a change and at Moffitts Farm, near Romsey, 60 kilometres north of Melbourne, they needed a different approach to producing Wiltipoll prime lambs.

Julie Francis and family have transformed an ordinary farm with low biodiversity and poor pastures into a grazing enterprise that is a "comfortable" fit for an increasing number of wildlife while ensuring moderate productivity per hectare.

They approach the running of the 50-hectare property, which carries anywhere between 110 and 230 total sheep depending on the season, with a holistic system they call Comfortable Farming.

Julie said they call it such, as it works with nature's cycles and is "comfortable

for everyone".

"Our approach removes any stress for us as farmers, puts no stress on the animals, and puts no stress on the environment," Julie said.

"It is a comfortable situation for the farmer as we don't run out of feed.

"We have 100 per cent ground cover in multi-species perennial pastures all year round. We constantly rotate sheep around paddocks moving them when there is a minimum of 1200 kilograms of green dry matter per hectare.

"In spring and early summer, some paddocks end up with up to 5000kg of green dry matter per hectare and are what we call living haystacks. We are never cutting pastures for hay or silage, we keep this grass standing.

"The first four months of this year we only had 16 per cent of the average rainfall for that time. Despite that,



**WELL FED:** Moffitts Farm's system sees them rotate sheep off pasture once it gets down to 1200kg of green dry matter.

we still had pastures, which meant no weed infestations, and did not need to feed out.

"In rare, very dry times

we need to supplement the weaned lambs protein and energy intake but the ewes maintain body condition on

the living haystacks.

"It is a system which looks after itself and that makes it comfortable for us."

Julie said while this rotational grazing approach was conducive to stress-free farming, it was also beneficial for the sheep.

"The sheep get to live in a paddock micro-climate which suits them ideally," she said.

"Even though we are in an exposed area with cold winds and altitude (470 metres), because the lambs are being born in the longer grass there is virtually no wind chill factor and they have an excellent survival rate. Our lamb weaning percentage is about 140 to 145 per cent, which is really good.

"There are also benefits to the overall herd health. We do fecal egg counts and they usually come in below the level for drenching because worm larvae only go a couple of centimetres up a stalk of grass and our animals are eating much higher up the grass."