

# Managing Animals

## IN EXTREMELY DRY CONDITIONS

More and more Tasmanians are enjoying the lifestyle of having a few acres, having a few animals, growing some of their own food and so on.

It is estimated that there are now around eight smallholder or hobby farmers for every commercial farmer in Tasmania. They range from people with a few backyard chooks and a vegie patch through to those who are making serious attempts to get at least part of their living from the land.

It is most important, not just for the smallholder or hobby farmers themselves but also for everyone else in the community, that all farmers - small, new and established commercial alike, take their biosecurity and animal welfare responsibilities seriously. The DPIPWE website provides some basic information to help you do just that<sup>1</sup>.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

These general principles have been obtained from the RSPCA<sup>2</sup>.

Those with a responsibility for the care of farm animals need to continue to ensure their animals' welfare during extended dry periods.

<sup>1</sup> [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-biosecurity/animal-welfare/hobby-farmers-and-smallholders#GeneralBiosecurityInformation](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-biosecurity/animal-welfare/hobby-farmers-and-smallholders#GeneralBiosecurityInformation)

<sup>2</sup> [http://kb.rspca.org.au/how-should-farm-animals-be-managed-during-drought\\_429.html](http://kb.rspca.org.au/how-should-farm-animals-be-managed-during-drought_429.html)

Some general principles that will help reduce the risk to the welfare of animals during dry conditions include the following:

- At all times, animals must have access to good quality drinking water, be provided with shade, and be able to shelter from extremes of weather.
- It is unacceptable for animals to be allowed to starve to death or die of thirst under any circumstance. Where there is any doubt as to the ability to provide animals with adequate feed and water, the decision to agist or sell must be made sooner rather than later and well before the animal is too weak to be moved.
- Daily monitoring is required to ensure sick or weak animals are quickly identified, treated or humanely euthanised.
- Any change of diet should be introduced gradually and animals closely monitored for any adverse reactions or reluctance to feed.
- Animals should not be allowed to consume toxic amounts of poisonous plants.
- Appropriate parasite control measures should be in place to minimise loss of condition in animals.
- If lactating animals are losing excessive body condition,

offspring should be weaned and provided with appropriate feed supplements.

- Care must be taken to avoid animals becoming trapped in drying dams and other water sources.
- Animals that are fit for transport but can no longer be fed and watered should be agisted, sold in the market or to an abattoir before their condition deteriorates.

### DUTY OF CARE

If you have animals, own animals or look after animals, you are responsible for their welfare. This applies whether your animals are pets or livestock. You may be deemed to have the care or charge of an animal if you are:

- The animal's owner
- Have control, possession or custody of the animal
- An operator of a commercial premises involving the animal
- A share farmer
- A chief executive officer or a director of a company that owns the animal

If you are concerned about the welfare of any animal, report it to the RSPCA on 1300 139 947 or DPIPWE on 03 6165 3263 or email [AnimalWelfare.Enquiries@dpiipwe.tas.gov.au](mailto:AnimalWelfare.Enquiries@dpiipwe.tas.gov.au)

## CATTLE NUTRITION<sup>3</sup>

Cattle, are ruminants. The microbial composition of the rumen fluid adapts as the type of feed changes – so it is especially important for any change in feed to be introduced gradually.

A sudden change of feed (from dry feed to lush, from pasture to grain etc) can make a cow very sick very quickly and can even cause death.

To supplementary feed cattle, good quality hay should be fed at the rate of around 4 to 5 kg per cow per day. You will need to feed out around twice the weight of silage per cow per day compared with hay.

If you need to feed concentrates, pellets are a better option than grain for the hobby farmer, because of the risk of acidosis (grain poisoning).

If you need to include grain in the diet, always introduce it gradually and always mix it with hay.

The ability to assess the body condition of livestock is an essential skill for anyone with cattle. The basics are easy and DPIPWE has produced a guide<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/cattlefeed.pdf](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/cattlefeed.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/CATTLEbody score.mlc.pdf](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/CATTLEbody score.mlc.pdf)

## SHEEP NUTRITION<sup>5</sup>

Inadequate feed and worm disease are the two most common sheep problems on hobby farms. It is important that everyone who has sheep has a basic understanding of a sheep's feed needs. Sheep are ruminants like cattle.

Supplementary feed needs to be introduced gradually into the diet – too much too quickly can make a sheep very sick and even kill it with “grain poisoning”.

Pellets, oats or whole lupins are less of a risk for grain poisoning than barley, triticale or wheat, but must still be phased into the diet gradually.

It is important to feed only sheep pellets to sheep. Cattle pellets often contain extra copper, which can be toxic for sheep. Feeding pig or poultry pellets to any ruminant animal is illegal (as they contain some meat or meat product).

If the backbone is prominent in a sheep it is in poor condition.

If a sheep has wool then you need to actually feel along the sheep's backbone and if the backbone is protruding, the sheep is in poor condition and needs better feeding.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/Sheepfeed.mlc.pdf](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/Sheepfeed.mlc.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/SHEEPbody score.mlc.pdf](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/SHEEPbody score.mlc.pdf)

## HORSE NUTRITION<sup>7</sup>

Horses nutritional needs vary greatly depending on the type of horse, its age and its weight. Even more depends on the work it does. This guide is very general and should be used as your starting point only. Horses are NOT ruminants.

It is rare for a smallholding to have sufficient pasture of sufficient quality for that to be the horse's only source of feed.

Mature horses need 1.5% to 2.5% of their bodyweight in dry matter per day. Growing horses need up to 3%. This should be a combination of roughage and concentrate, depending upon the amount of work the horse gets.

You can either mix your own concentrate or buy it already mixed. Oats fed whole are considered the best and safest grain for horses.

Other grains can be fed crushed as long as you know their limitations. All grain types can kill your horse if they gorge on it. Grain must be introduced over 10 days to get their digestive system used to it.

Learn how to do a body condition score to assess if you are feeding your horse enough<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/horsefeed.mlc.pdf](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/horsefeed.mlc.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/HORSES.mlc.pdf](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/HORSES.mlc.pdf)