“Sheep pay ... sometimes better than crop and often better than cattle. With good management, sheep need not be labour intensive. In fact, there are many valid reasons to keep sheep in a mixed farm business.”

Many of our members ask the question about labour efficiency within the sheep enterprise particularly in relation to some of the expensive sheep handling equipment that is now available on the market. Does it really save on time and money? Well, the quick answer is that good management and budgeting are a key part of keeping sheep and this can often include key pieces of equipment that work towards creating more efficiency.

Agribusiness Consultant Ken Solly from Solly Business Services in Naracoorte maintains that income from cropping may be higher in average to good years but sheep incomes are usually more consistent across the board.

Sheep tend to be a very labour intensive animal in relation to cattle with physically hard work and repetitive handling among the things that farmers consider a deterrent to keeping sheep. However, by examining your sheep business, you can often find opportunities for improvement and operating more efficiently.

Stocking rates are considered the key and over or under stocking your farm is probably the biggest risk that needs to be managed. If a season is poor or late coming, you need to have management strategies in place, such as buying feed in or using stored feed on the property.

When it comes to technology and/or sheep handling equipment, it is important that you assess what it is you need and why you need it, in other words how it will help you. Of course, you must be prepared to spend time learning how to use it properly and if it is paddock equipment, what works best for managing the sheep.

According to Ken Solly each investment in the sheep enterprise needs to be made on an internal rate of return basis. This is where you compare the dollar gains and savings that can be made against the cost and life expectancy of the investment. A 20% IRR is deemed necessary for an investment to be worthwhile and there are plenty of these opportunities within the sheep enterprise.

As for time management, if your equipment is maintained, you will not spend as much time having to check the sheep, for example, keep troughs and tanks in top working order and yards and laneways well fenced. Remember, well designed yards can be operated by one person and a dog.

“Plan as many jobs as possible when sheep are in the yards for time-critical operations. This minimises droving and yarding for a start.”

There are many ways to make the job of running sheep much more producer-friendly and when in a mixed farming enterprise, they spread risk so persistence can be worthwhile.

The attached PDF “Sheep - the simple guide making more money with less work” provides you with all the information you need to make smart choices when it comes to running sheep on your property.