

# Reduce the risk using livestock

By David Mason-Jones

As the summer fire season is here, some local government authorities are mandating the ploughing of firebreaks within the boundary of all farms. I was recently told of a case in South Australia where the farmers in a particular region were required to plough up an area 10 metres wide inside the boundary fence of their properties.

The trouble is that the pasture growing in this 10 metres has a value and, when the size of the farm is relatively small, 10 metres of ploughed up and unproductive land can be a dramatic economic impost on the farmer. While the aim of controlling wild fire is important, there may be other ways of doing this that are just as effective and may be more economically and environmentally sound.

'Using grazing animals and a planned approach to grazing is one way of doing this,' says David McLean, a consultant and educator in holistic management with Resource Consulting Service. 'The plan needs to define where the animals will graze, when they will graze, for how long they will graze in alone location and in what density they will be used to impact the pasture.'

'Using grazing animals in this way will help reduce the fuel load in a way that fits in with the farm's commercial plan and also creates positive environmental outcomes,' he says.

One of the keys to using sheep and cattle like this is planning. It is no use to start with a plan of rotational grazing and then suddenly,

pull all the grazing animals back from their planned sequence and start grazing them around the house and any other assets you want to protect.

'Months before the fire season arrives, you need to plan where you want to graze your animals to reduce the fire risk,' says David. 'The use of a grazing planning schedule is useful for this.'

**Fire season:** The first factor to be considered is the time of year when the fire risk is highest. The grazing plan must make sure that the boundary firebreaks are eaten down in the weeks before the onset of the greatest fire risk.

**Direction of threat:** While it is true that a fire can come from any direction, there may be features of the terrain and climate that mean that it is more likely to come from a particular direction. There may be heavy bush or national parks on one side of your property or prevailing winds from that direction. Concentrate your grazing activity - as well as your other fire reduction measures - on the line of the fire's likely approach.

It would be sensible to ensure that, not only is a 10 metre strip grazed on this approach but all the paddocks on this side of the farm are well grazed before the fire season starts.

**Assets to be protected:** Identify the most important assets on your farm that you need to be protected from fire. These may include your house and sheds, and other features like a vineyard or orchard.

Make sure that your grazing plan is organised so that the fuel load in these areas is



While it is true that fire can come from any direction, when using grazing to reduce the fuel load it helps to identify the most likely direction the fire will come from.



High impact grazing with tight mobs reduces the fuel load and enables the country to recover faster than if it were ploughed for firebreaks. It is more sustainable.



This shows how controlled grazing can reduce fuel load. There is virtually no fuel in the grazed area but this form of grazing sets the scene for a rapid recovery when rain comes.