2025 results

A FOCUS ON WEIGHTY WEANERS

Examining post weaning growth rates through nutrition, parasite prevention and trace element supplementation

Herd $olutions

mla
MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA

Producer Demonstration Site

Focus on Weighty Weaners Milestone 2 Report- Year 1 Data

What this project is about

This project is about lifting post-weaning growth rates in beef weaners in East Gippsland by tightening up nutrition, minerals and worm and fluke control on real commercial farms. We are working with local producers to show what best-practice weaner management looks like in a pasture-based system and to put hard numbers around the benefits.

Why we did the project

Many producers report that, even in good seasons with plenty of grass, their weaners are not hitting target growth rates or sale weights as quickly as they should. This is limiting options for selling steers, holding cattle over winter and getting heifers to critical mating weight on time, and it also works against industry goals to reduce emissions by turning stock off younger. In the region there are known mineral deficiencies, ongoing worm and fluke issues, and growing concern about drench resistance, but most beef producers are not routinely testing pastures, animals or drenches. At the same time, more producers now have scales and can track growth, which makes it an ideal time to benchmark current performance and test improved management on-farm.

What we measured in 2025

In 2025 we monitored weaner performance on seven beef properties across East Gippsland, chosen to represent a mix of locations, grazing systems and weaner mobs of at least 50 head. We weighed weaners over a 4–6 month period after weaning to establish current growth rates and see how they compared with a minimum target of 0.5 kg/head/day. At the same time we collected information on current drench programs, checked for liver fluke, and carried out testing to assess drench resistance in cattle worms on each participating farm. We also investigated mineral status and took feed tests to understand the energy, protein and fibre (NDF) levels of the pastures and supplements that were actually on offer to the weaners. This first year gives us a clear picture of “business as usual” and where the main bottlenecks to growth are on each farm.

What we plan to measure in 2026 and 2027

In 2026 and 2027 we will move from benchmarking to demonstrating improved weaner management on a subset of six herds, again with mobs of at least 50 weaners that are being grown on for at least five months after weaning. Producers will apply one or more changes to their current program, which may include: more consistent micro-mineral supplementation based on blood or liver results, best-practice worm control using regular worm egg counts and DrenchChecks with larval culture, targeted fluke treatments backed up by fluke testing, and supplementation based on feed tests rather than just “grazing as normal”. On these demonstration mobs we will continue to weigh weaners every six weeks, record grazing moves and feed offered, measure pasture availability and quality, and track how changes in management flow through to growth rates and sale options. The same process will run for two years on each farm so producers can fine-tune their system, and we can capture how improved management, once bedded in, performs across different seasons.

Farm 1 Results

Farm 1 calves were born in May and were weaned in mid-January. Mean starting weight was 307kg. The calves started off well, with weight gains between March and April averaging 0.65kg/head/day, and an average weight of 340kg at the April weighing (see figure 1).

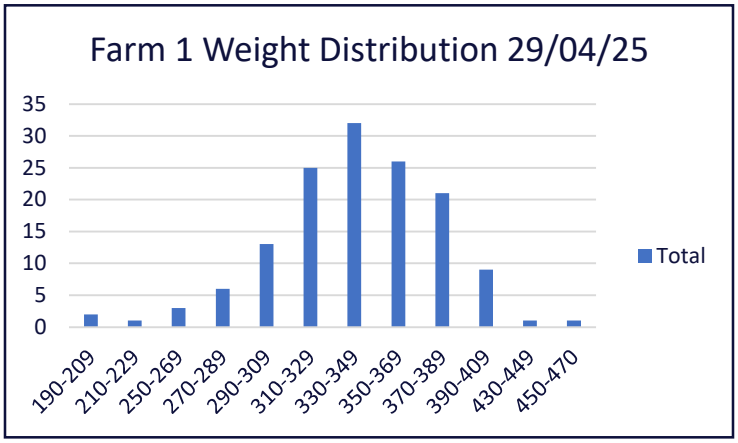


Figure 1: Farm 1 weight distribution April 2025

Unfortunately, this weight gain was short lived, with mean body weight 332kg in June with an average daily gain of -0.24kg/head/day. A confounding factor in this data was that the stock used in the project were also used for a team penning event, where cattle were held off feed, shifted to another property and sorted by horses for the sporting event.

This trend of weight loss continued into July where mean weight fell to 300kg, with the average daily gain of -0.75kg/head/day. Weight gain and loss was consistent across the mob- there was no “tail” that performed particularly poorly, and the decline in weight was uniform (refer to figure 2).

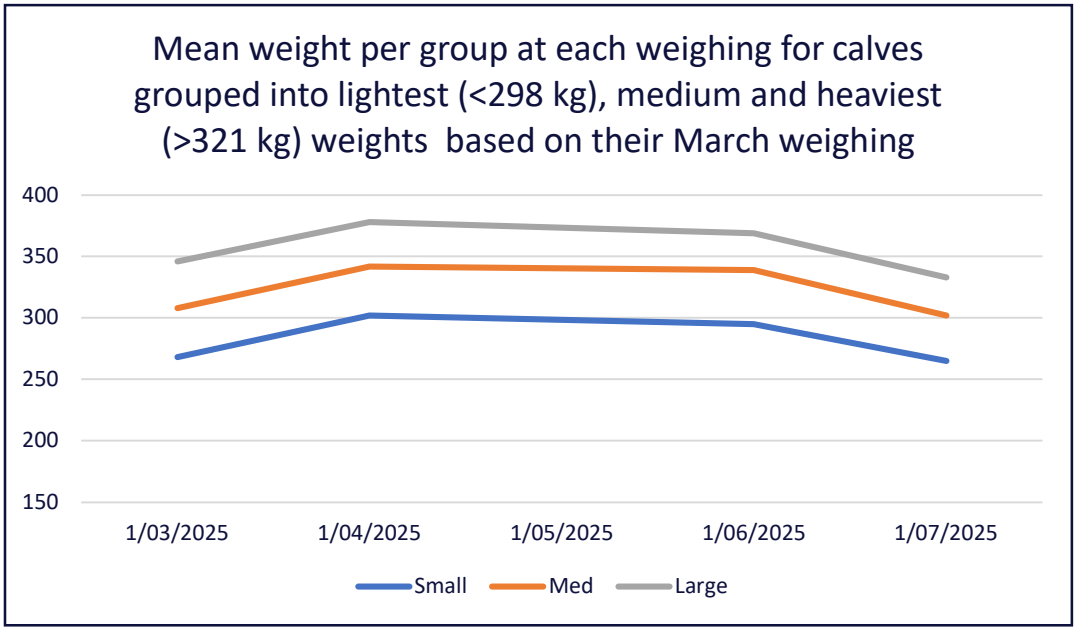


Figure 2: Weight changes for farm 1 across small, medium and large heifers within the mob

To summarize, overall daily gain was somewhat neutral (0.05kg/hd/day) for the data collection period. 88 out of the 138 heifers gained -100 grams to 100 grams over the 4-month period (see figure 3).

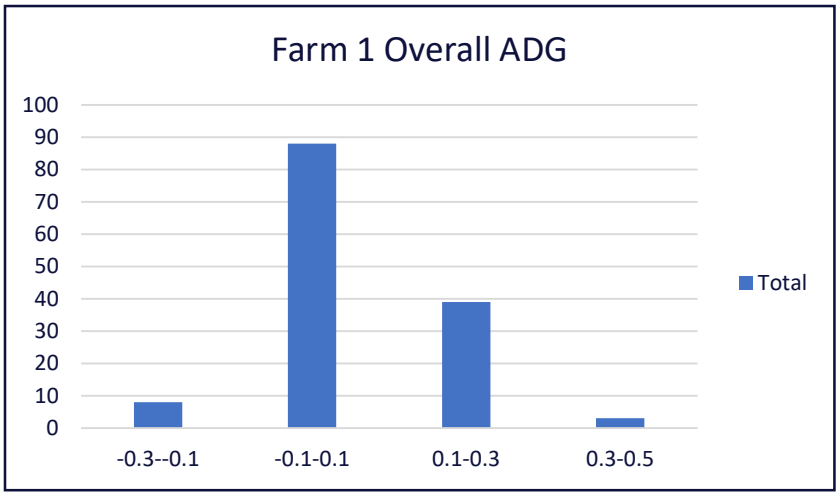


Figure 3: Farm 1 overall daily gain

Whilst the team penning event certainly was not ideal for trial conditions, there were lab result findings that also explain the poor weight gains for these heifers. In May, a faecal antigen ELISA detected a positive pool for liver fluke, meaning some heifers were infected with liver fluke. A WEC was also performed which returned a result of 83 eggs per gram, indicating drenching was probably not required at the time. However, when blood pepsinogen levels were analysed in July, results indicated subclinical ostertagia may have been present, as all 4 samples returned a high reading (figure 4).

Test:	SAMPLE ID	PEPSINOGEN
Low normal:		(0.0)
Hi normal:		(5.0)
Units:		U/L
	1.3855	12.1 H
	2.3885	63.5 H
	3.4020	18.7 H
	4.4032	5.6 H

Figure 4: Blood pepsinogen results July 2025 Farm 1

Following this result, the producer drenched the trial heifers with Flukazole C and Dectomax V. A repeat fluke test conducted after the weights had been collected was negative, indicating fluke drench resistance is extremely unlikely.

Trace elements did not appear to be a problem on this farm- blood selenium and B12 were normal (which reflected a successful supplementation program as this farm has a known selenium deficiency), and plant tissue results indicated copper availability was adequate.

Feed analysis showed that metabolizable energy and protein levels were too low to support optimal growth in the heifers, particularly in those samples with a high fibre (NDF) content. This excessive fibre significantly reduced voluntary feed intake, which limited the amount of available nutrients and hindered growth rates (see Table 1).

Table 1: Farm 1 feed test values and calculated feed intakes

Voluntary feed intake was calculated as 120/NDF*BW.

Farm 2 Results

Farm 2 calves were born in August and were weaned in late February. The mean starting weight for the project on this farm was 182kg. Weight gains were initially very good, with average daily gain between April and May of 1.2kg/head. Weight gains tapered in the period that followed, with average daily gain between May and July only 300 grams per day. The calves then displayed some compensatory growth, averaging a growth of 1.27kg/head/day between July and October.

Growth was consistent across the mob, with median and mean values for each weight identical. The smallest and largest calves also performed similar to average calves, indicating variance in weight across the trial was likely due to age differences.

Date	Feed type	ME	Protein	NDF	Weaner weight	ME Req for 0.5kg/day	ME Req for 1kg/day	Max intake (KgDM)	Max ME intake	Actual ADG
5/05/25	Pasture	9.5	18.4	56.3	340	66.3	85.8	7.2	69	0.65
2/06/25	Pasture	9.78	17.8	48.6	330	64.6	83.6	8.1	80	-0.24
21/07/25	Barley Silage	10.2	8.8	59.7	300	59.5	77	6.0	62	-0.75

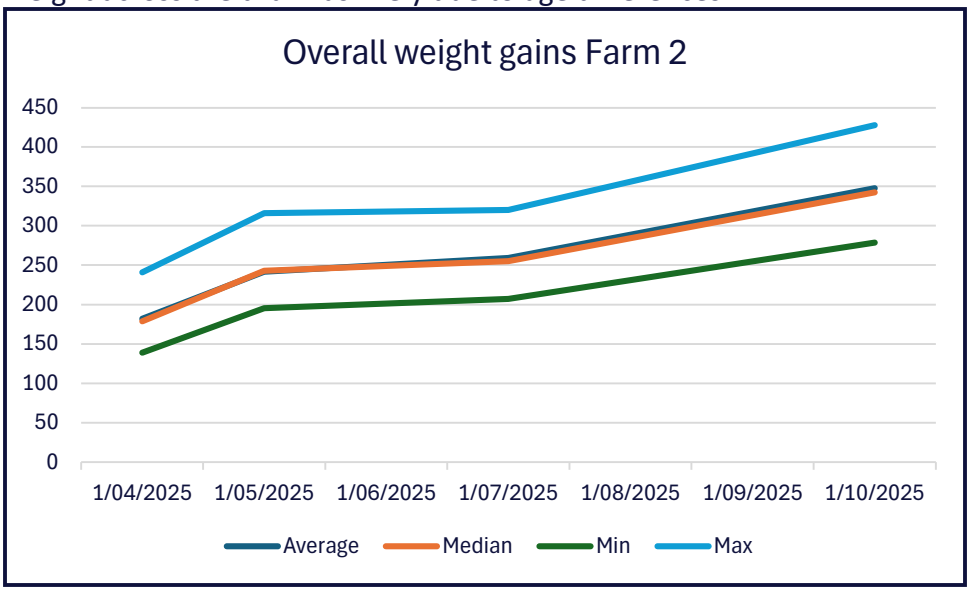


Figure 5: Farm 2 overall daily gain

Overall daily gain was 930 grams/head/day for the entirety of the trial period (April to October). There also appears to be good, consistent gains within all animals in this mob (See figure 6), with a minimal “tail end”.

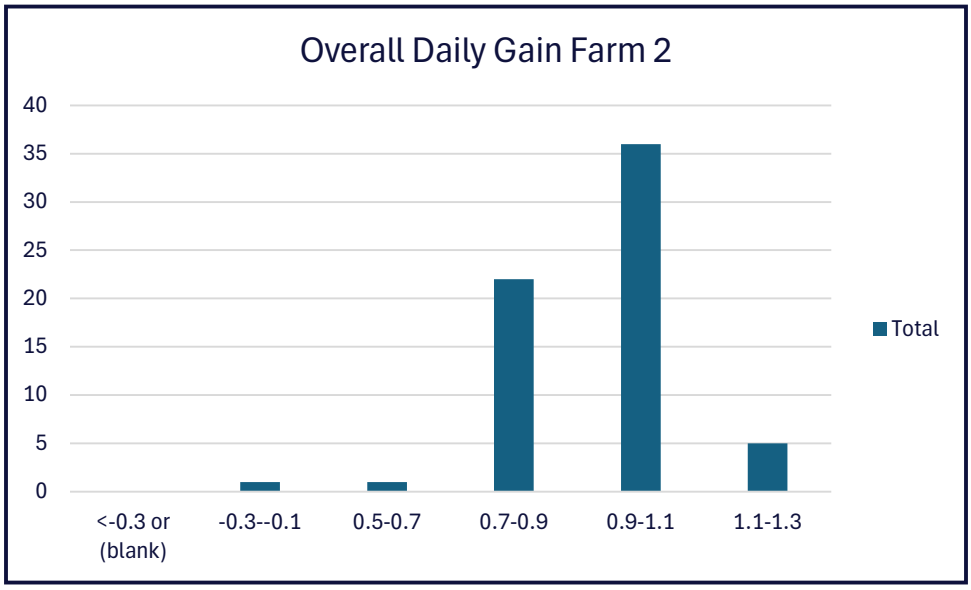


Figure 6: Overall average daily gain farm 2

Worm egg count and liver fluke antigen ELISA tests were negative for intestinal worms and liver fluke respectively. Pasture tissue tests indicated copper availability was adequate, and blood samples for selenium and B12 were normal, reflecting an effective supplement program (this farm already had one in place).

Date	Feed Type	ME	Protein	NDF	Weaner Weight	ME req for 0.5kg/hd/day	ME req for 1kg/hd/day	Max intake (KGDM)	Max ME intake	ADG
27/05/25	Pasture	11.57	29.1	35	200	42.5	55	6.9	79	1.07
13/10/25	Pasture	11.34	31.1	34.6	342	66.64	86.24	11.9	135	1.27

Table 2: Farm 2 Feed test results and intake calculations

Pasture quality on this farm was adequate for weaner calf nutritional needs (see table 2). Unfortunately this producer did not get a feed sample collected during the period the calves did not perform particularly well, due to staffing and time related issues. For the same reason, blood pepsinogen levels were unable to be assessed.

Farm 3 Results

Farm 3 calves were born in July and were weaned in March. Average starting weight for farm 3 was 299kg (Figure 7). Initial average daily gain was low, with gains between April and May averaging 250 grams per day. Average daily gain between May and August improved slightly to 420 grams per day. Average daily gain in the final trial period between April and October increased to 940 grams per day, giving an overall daily gain of 580 grams per head per day (Figure 8).

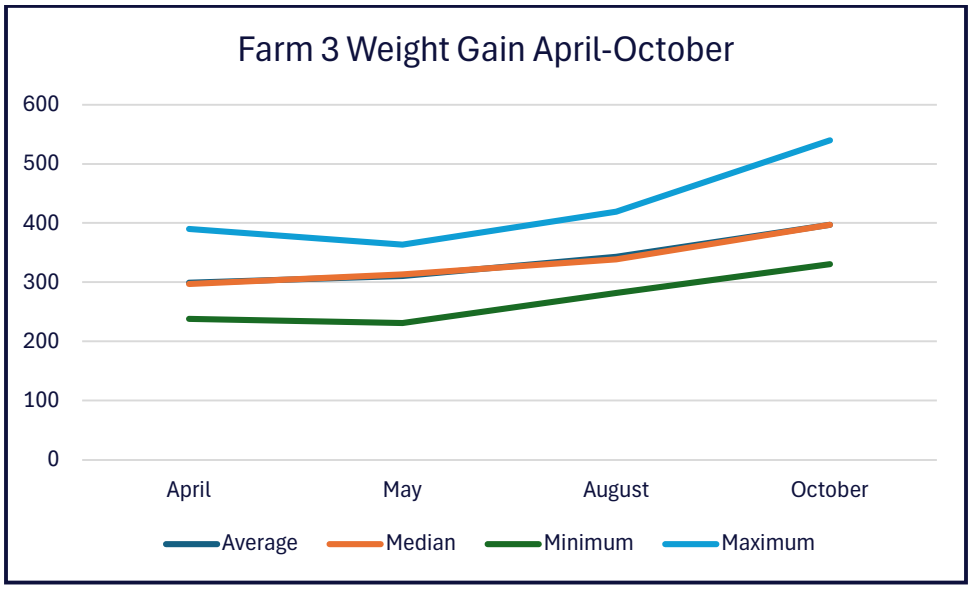


Figure 7: Farm 3 Weight Gain from April to October.

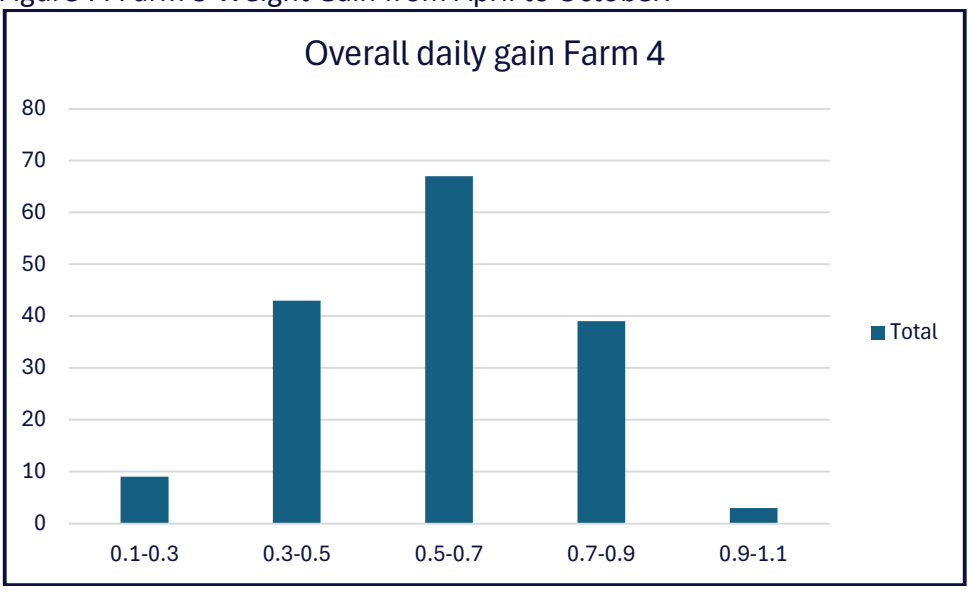
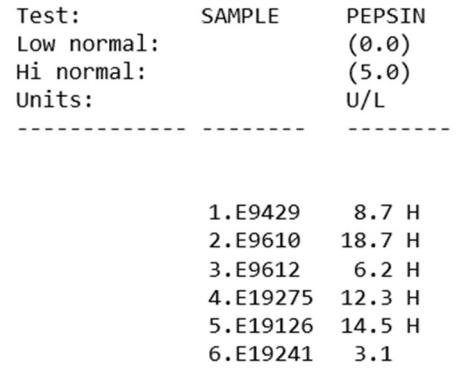


Figure 8: Overall daily gain for Farm 3 from April to October

Liver fluke antigen ELISA testing for this farm was negative, and worm egg count result was 83 eggs per gram in both April and May. Vitamin B12 and selenium levels were normal, as this farm already supplementing these trace elements. Copper availability on pasture tissue testing was also normal. Pepsinogen levels were mildly elevated in June, indicating that subclinical

ostertagia was potentially an issue, however it is worth emphasizing that elevations were mild and may not have been due to ostertagia (Figure 9).



Test:	SAMPLE	PEPSIN
Low normal:		(0.0)
Hi normal:		(5.0)
Units:		U/L
1.E9429		8.7 H
2.E9610		18.7 H
3.E9612		6.2 H
4.E19275		12.3 H
5.E19126		14.5 H
6.E19241		3.1

Figure 9: Farm 3 Pepsinogen results June 2025

Feed quality was inadequate to enable weaner calves to gain 1kg/head/day in May (Table 3). This was primarily due to high NDF limiting intake of nutrients. Pasture quality did however improve in October, and weight gains reflected this.

Date	Feed type	ME	Prot	NDF	Weaner weight	ME Req for 0.5kg/day	ME Req for 1kg/day	Max intake	Max ME intake	Actual ADG
26/05/25	Pasture	9.74	17.4	51.5	296	58.82	76.12	6.9	67	0.25
3/10/25	Pasture	11.3	15.4	32.1	397	75.99	98.34	14.8	168	0.94

Table 3: Farm 3 feed test results and calculated intake values

Farm 4 Results

Farm 4 calves were born in March and were weaned in January, and average starting weight in January was 354kg. 80 calves from this farm were enrolled in the trial. The calves recorded an average daily gain of 700 grams between February and March. Average daily gain then plateaued over the next 8 week period, with an average daily gain of 300 grams recorded between March and May (Figure 10). Unfortunately, this producer was unable to weigh their stock a fourth time, as their Gallagher system broke down and is still being repaired. Overall daily gain for this farm over the trial period averaged 0.38kg/head/day (Figure 11).

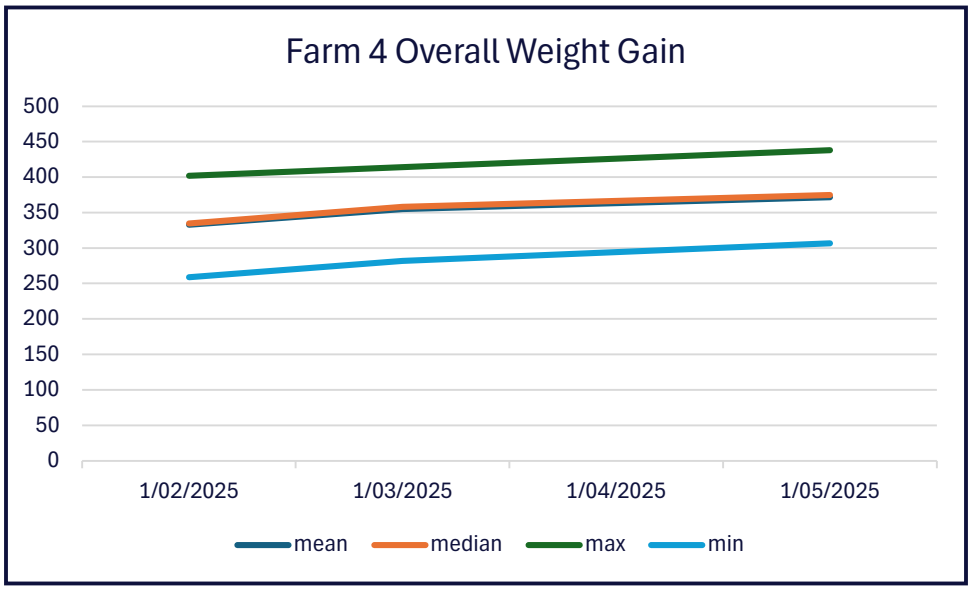


Figure 10: Changes in average, median, minimum and maximum weights Feb- May Farm 4

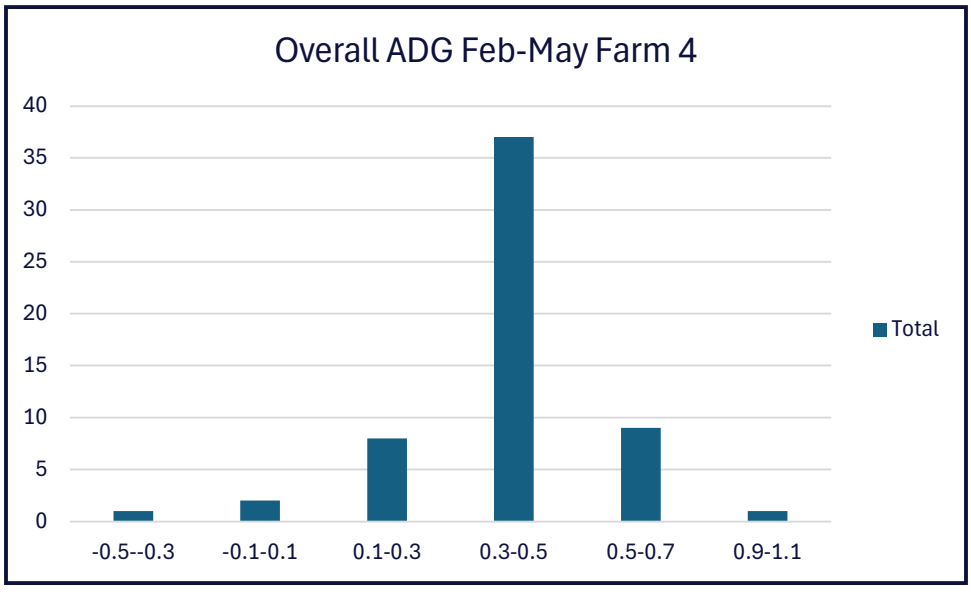


Figure 11: ADG across trial period Farm 4

Date	Sample Type	ME	Protein	NDF	Weaner Weight	ME Req for 0.5kg/day	ME Req for 1kg/day	Max intake (KgDM)	Max ME intake	Actual ADG (Kg/hd/day)
31/03/25	Pasture	10	15.2	61.1	358	69.36	89.76	7.0	70	0.7
18/05/25	Pasture	10.5	16.3	54.5	371	71.57	92.62	8.2	86	0.3

Table 4: Farm 4 Pasture Feed test results and predicted intakes based on NDF

Pasture quality in March appears to have reflected weaner growth rates, however in May feed quality was slightly higher, but growth rates were lower. This farm conducts long rotation regenerative cell grazing, so feed on offer would have likely been adequate to permit maximum voluntary feed intake.

Worm egg count result was 117 eggs per gram, which was a marginal result. However, blood pepsinogen levels in July were unremarkable, meaning worms were unlikely to be contributing to poor weight gains (see figure 12). Glutathione Peroxidase (GSH-Px) levels were however low in four of seven samples, confirming selenium deficiency on this property.

Test:	SAMPLE	GSH PX	VIT.B12	PEPSIN
Low normal:		(40)	(200)	(0.0)
Hi normal:		(300)	(500)	(5.0)
Units:		U/gHb	pmol/L	U/L
	1.V11	32 L	415	3.3
	2.V44	50	351	3.8
	3.V31	34 L	328	3.7
	4.V42	43	331	5.3 H
	5.V1	33 L	404	
	6.V36	38 L	365	
	7.V18	58	327	

Figure 12: Farm 4 blood test results for trace elements and pepsinogen July 2025

This farm did not have a trace element supplementation program in place. Pasture tissue testing confirmed the pasture was low in selenium. Copper availability however appeared to be acceptable.

Farm 5 Results

Farm 5 calves were born in August and were weaned early in February due to adverse seasonal conditions. Average weight at the beginning of the trial period was 197kg. Initial growth rates were very poor, with growth between March and May of 300 grams/head/day. However, these calves then performed exceptionally well, averaging 1.1kg/head/day between May and June, as well as June and July (Figure 13). Overall average daily gain over the trial period was 0.7kg/head/day (Figure 14).

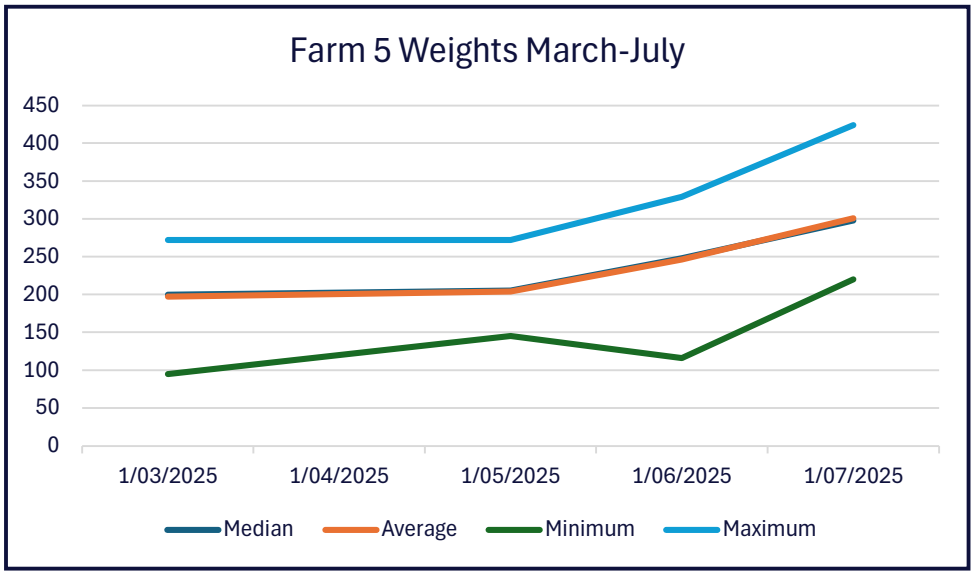


Figure 13: Average, median, minimum and maximum weights across the trial period for farm 5

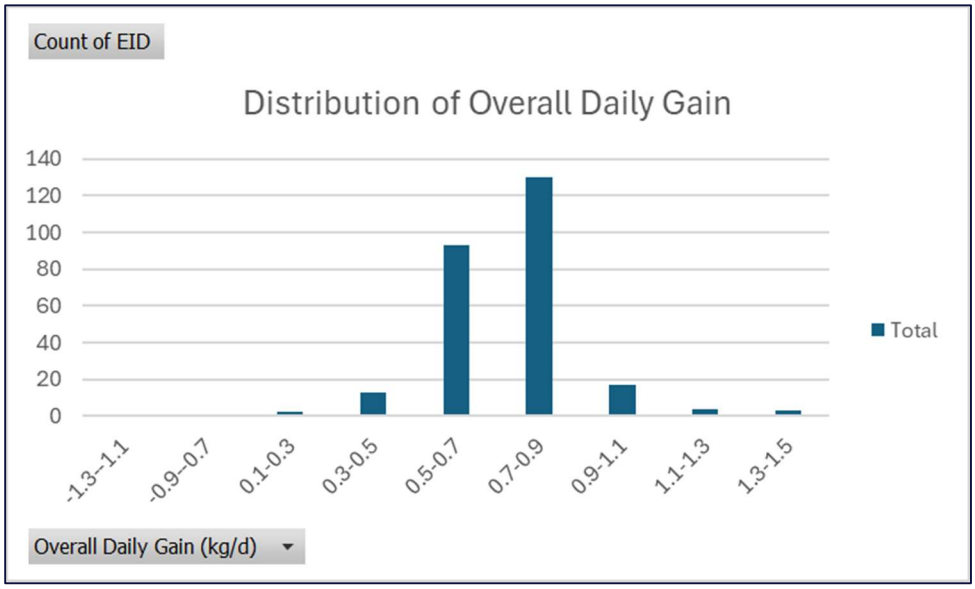


Figure 14: Overall daily gain farm 5

These calves experienced a severe worm burden at the time of reduced weight gains, with WEC recorded at 1183 eggs per gram in May. These calves were subsequently treated with Trifecta, an oral triple active combination drench. Post drench WEC was 50, indicating drench resistance was not present. Liver Fluke antigen ELISA testing was negative.

This farm had a robust trace element program in place, which was supported by previous testing. At the time the blood testing was scheduled, calves were growing exceptionally well, so it was decided that blood testing for trace elements and pepsinogens could be forgone.

Date	Feed type	ME	Prot	NDF	Weaner weight	ME Req for 0.5kg/day	ME Req for 1kg/day	Maximum intake	Max ME intake	Actual ADG
12/05/25	Wheat Forage Pivot Red wheat	10.9	19.7	46	204	43.18	55.88	5.3	58	0.3
16/06/25	Pasture	12	25.2	33.2	248	50.66	65.56	9.0	108	1.1
11/08/25	Rye Forage	12.1	17.2	33.3	300	59.5	77	10.8	130	1.1

Table 5: Feed test results farm 5

Feed test results on this farm were excellent and low NDF promoted high voluntary feed intakes and therefore high metabolizable energy and protein levels, which were well reflected with good weight gains (refer to table 5).

Farm 6 Results

Farm 6 calves were born in April and were weaned in January. Calf weight averaged 300kg at the first weigh, and average daily gain was 0.85kg/head/day from February to April. Average daily gain from April to May was 0.7kg/head/day, which then slowed to 0.3kg/head/day in the final period of May to June (Figures 15 & 16). Overall daily gain for this batch of calves over the trial period finished at 0.67kg/head/day.

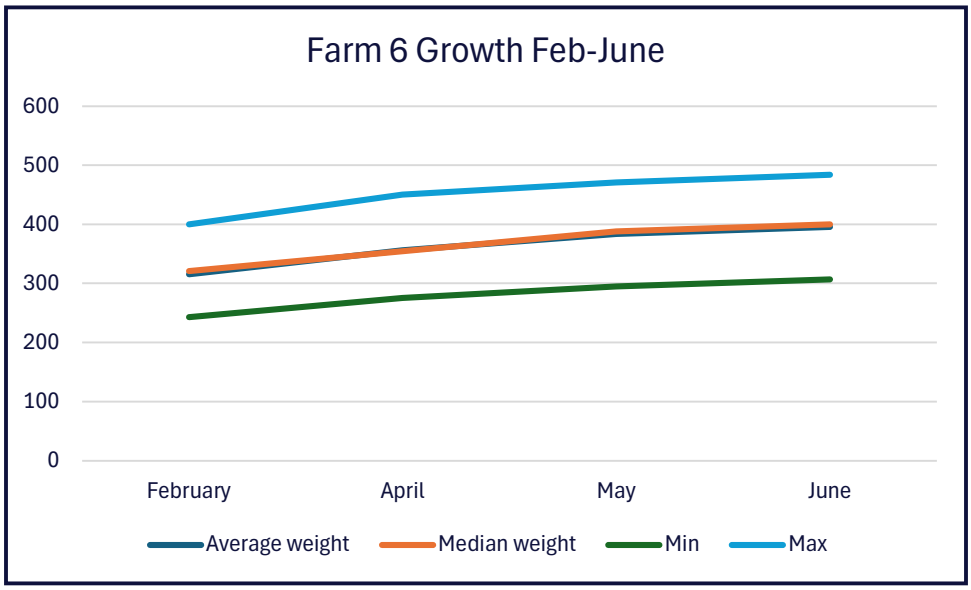


Figure 15: Farm 6 Overall Growth Feb- June

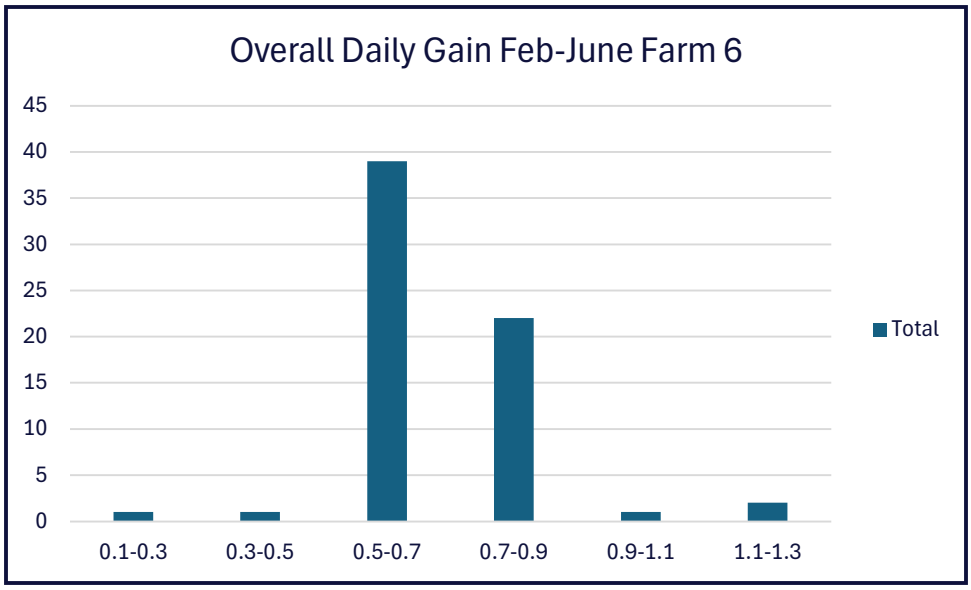


Figure 16: Farm 6 overall daily gain Feb-June

Pasture quality was not adequate to provide sufficient energy for 1kg/head/day growth on this farm, which was consistent with growth rates observed (see table 4). However, there were other factors that contributed to reduced weight gains observed between May and June.

Date	Feed type	ME	Prot	NDF	Weaner weight	ME Req for 0.5kg/day	ME Req for 1kg/day	Maximum intake	Max ME intake	Actual ADG
8/04/2025	Pasture	10.91	17.1	30.3	356	69.02	89.32	14.1	154	0.85
18/05/2025	Pasture	9.32	14.7	56.7	388	74.46	96.36	8.2	77	0.7
24/06/2025	Pasture	10.25	19.2	44.4	400	76.5	99	10.8	111	0.3

Table 6: Farm 6 feed test results and voluntary feed intake calculations

All the calves blood tested in June were found to be deficient in selenium (GSH-Px), however blood B12 levels were within normal range. Whilst a worm egg count was low-normal in May at 117 eggs per gram, subclinical ostertagia was also suspected, as blood pepsinogens in 3/3 calves were all elevated (see figure 17).

Test:	SAMPLE	GSH PX	VIT.B12	PEPSIN
Low normal:		(40)	(200)	(0.0)
Hi normal:		(300)	(500)	(5.0)
Units:		U/gHb	pmol/L	U/L
	1.R50	13 L	276	
	2.R18	26 L	360	
	3.R49	11 L	373	
	4.R16	24 L	435	17.9 H
	5.R19	16 L	312	27.5 H
	6.R31	18 L	306	11.7 H

Figure 17: Farm 6 blood test results June 2025

Liver fluke testing was negative, and pasture tissue testing indicated copper availability was acceptable for growing calves.

Farm 7

Farm 7 is a trading enterprise which purchased weaner calves in March. Average calf weight at the beginning of the trial period in April was 315kg. Daily gain between April and June averaged 440 grams/day initially. Between June and July, the calves lost an average of 150 grams/day. Daily gain then increased to 570 grams per day between July and September (Figure 18). Overall daily gain for the April- September period was 400 grams per day (Figure 19).

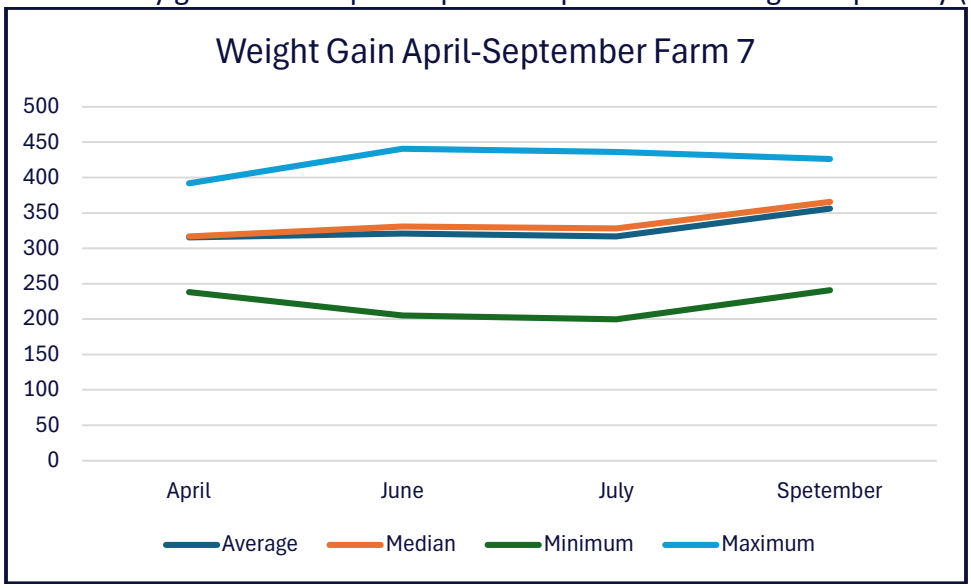


Figure 18: Farm 7 Weight gain from April-September

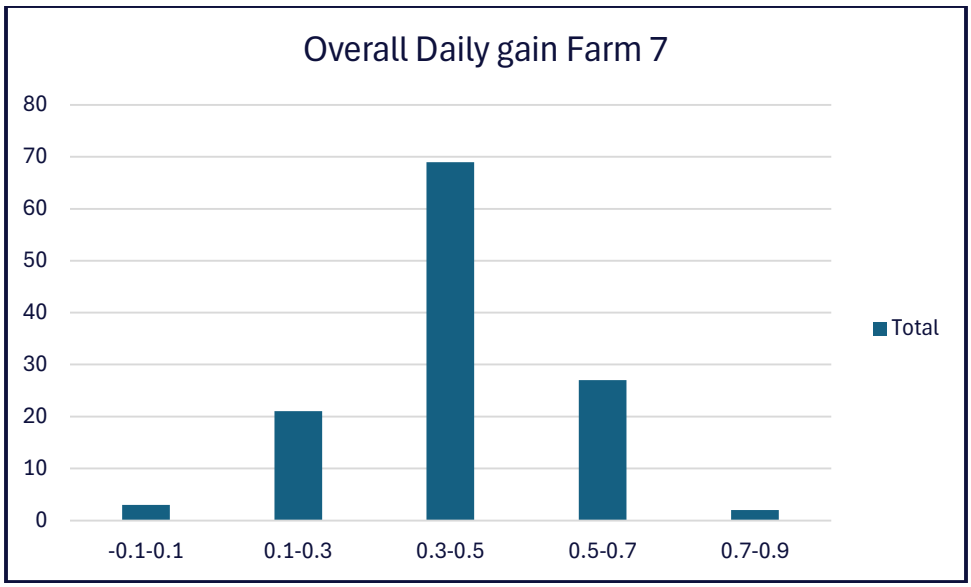


Figure 19- Farm 7 Overall Daily Gain

Liver fluke antigen ELISA testing on this farm was negative. Worm egg count was 100 in July, which was considered a marginal result. Blood pepsinogen levels were moderately elevated in 2/4 samples collected later in July, indicating subclinical ostertagia may have been present. 2/6 calves were also selenium deficient, indicating that whilst a supplementation program using

short acting products was potentially treating some calves, others were falling into marginal zones of adequate trace element delivery (see figure 20).

Test:	SAMPLE	GSH PX	VIT.B12	PEPSIN
Low normal:		(40)	(200)	(0.0)
Hi normal:		(300)	(500)	(5.0)
Units:		U/gHb	pmol/L	U/L
	1.170	54	290	7.6 H
	2.145	38 L	333	27.6 H
	3.125	47	320	22.8 H
	4.43	40	320	6.5 H
	5.84	47	369	
	6.30	25 L	326	

Figure 20: Farm 7 blood testing results for pepsinogen and trace elements.

Feed test results indicated feed quality was inadequate for 0.5kg/hd/day in June and July. Feed quality did however improve in September. These calves still did not gain 1kg/hd/day despite feed quality sufficient to do so, meaning potentially worm burden and marginal trace element status may have further impeded growth rates (Table 7).

Copper levels in pasture tissue tests appeared adequate.

Date	Feed type	ME	Prot	NDF	Weaner weight	ME Req for 0.5kg/day	ME Req for 1kg/day	Max intake	Max ME intake	Actual ADG
9/06/25	Pasture	8.99	12.7	62.8	331	64.77	83.82	6.3	57	0.48
14/07/25	Pasture	8.66	11.8	62.1	328	64.26	83.16	6.3	55	-0.15
9/09/25	Pasture	10.88	16.8	42.8	357	69.19	89.54	10.0	109	0.55

Table 7: Farm 7 Feed test results and calculated intakes

Summary

2025 data produced interesting and varied results in animal performance and potential problems. Each farm's findings are summarized below:

	Overall Average Daily Gain	Feed quality	Internal parasites	Trace Elements
Farm 1	0.05kg/hd/day	Inadequate	Subclinical ostertagia and liver fluke detected	Adequate
Farm 2	0.93kg/hd/day	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate
Farm 3	0.58kg/hd/day	Inadequate over winter	Possible subclinical ostertagia	Adequate
Farm 4	0.38kg/hd/day	Inadequate	Adequate	Inadequate
Farm 5	0.70kg/hd/day	Adequate	Inadequate	Adequate
Farm 6	0.67kg/hd/day	Inadequate	Possible subclinical ostertagia detected	Inadequate
Farm 7	0.4kg/hd/day	Inadequate	Possible subclinical ostertagia detected	Inadequate

At the time of writing, the data is still being collected for 2026. Final data collection will take place in August, and data will be analysed for statistical significance by December 2026.