

WOOL PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA



Sheep are found in most states and territories of Australia, across more than 85 million hectares. However, most wool production occurs in the sheep-wheat belt of Australia's eastern states.

There are two distinct types of wool production carried out in Australia, determined by the climate and environment — they are known as high-rainfall and low-rainfall systems.

Fast facts

- Wool production is carried out across more than 85 million hectares of Australia.
- There are two types of production systems — low-rainfall and high-rainfall.
- Woolgrowers in both systems manage their properties carefully to look after both the sheep and the environment.

Woolgrowers manage their sheep according to the amount of rainfall they receive and the types of pasture they can grow.

High-rainfall wool production

Woolgrowers in high-rainfall areas (Tasmania, south-west Victoria, south-west Western Australia, eastern New South Wales and parts of South Australia) grow **improved pastures**, which can feed high numbers of sheep year-round.

Wool-producing properties in high-rainfall areas tend to be smaller than those in low-rainfall areas, because they can grow more pasture. The pasture is more plentiful and nutritious than in low-rainfall areas, so they can run more sheep in a smaller area.

Low-rainfall wool production

Woolgrowers in low-rainfall areas (north-western Victoria, many areas of Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and western New South Wales) tend to have large

properties covered in **native pastures** and shrubs.

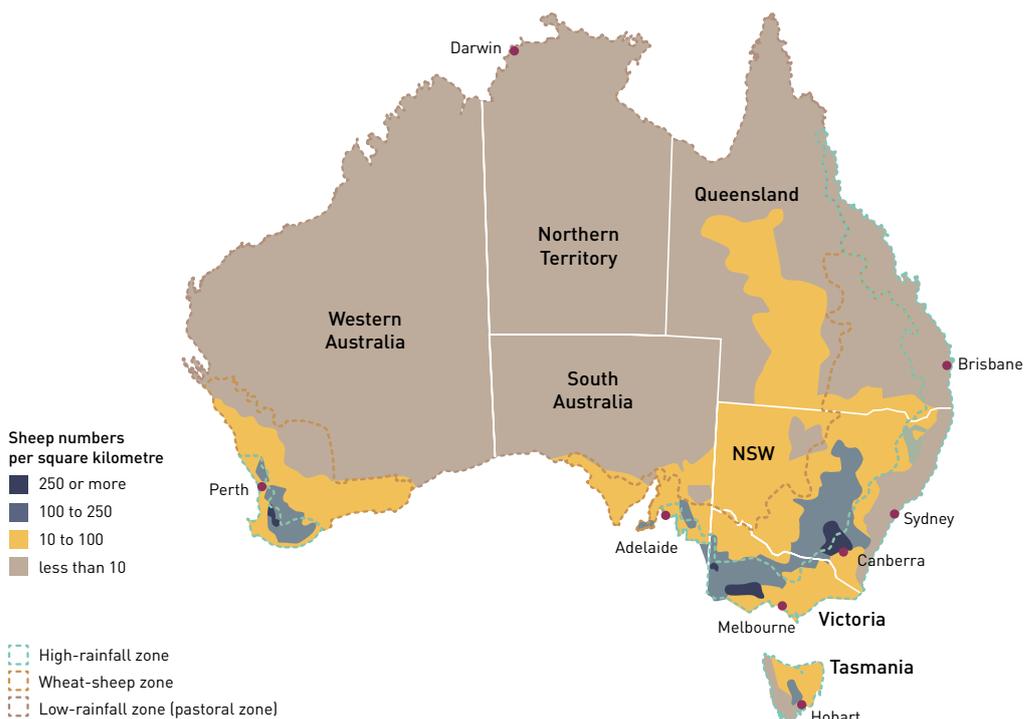
The pastures and shrubs in these areas can survive on much less rainfall than improved pastures, but are of lower nutritional value and cannot support as many sheep on the same area of land compared with the pastures in high-rainfall systems.

Did you know?

- Paddock sizes in low-rainfall areas range from 2,000 to 20,000 hectares, which is equivalent to more than 10,000 football fields.



High-rainfall system: Wool producers in high-rainfall systems can usually run more sheep throughout the year.



Wool-producing areas in Australia

Source: <http://apps.daff.gov.au/agsurf/regions.html>

Stocking rate

The number of sheep grazing on a given area at any one time is called the stocking rate.

High-rainfall areas can carry higher stocking rates than low-rainfall areas — more sheep can be kept on the same amount of land.

Paddocks in high-rainfall areas tend to be much smaller than those in low-rainfall areas. Producers in high-rainfall areas also tend to move sheep between paddocks more regularly.

Depending on the season and the amount of pasture available, woolgrowers adjust the number of sheep in each paddock and across their properties.

In a season with plenty of rain, producers can buy more sheep, or keep more of their lambs to increase the size of their flock to make use of all the pasture.

Sometimes producers make **hay** or **silage** with the extra pasture and store it as feed to be used during dry seasons or droughts, when there is not enough pasture to feed the sheep.

Grazing management

Woolgrowers plan and manage their stock carefully to keep sheep healthy and to look after their land.

In high-rainfall systems, producers have many paddocks and move their sheep between the paddocks as the pasture is eaten. This is called rotational grazing.

How long the sheep stay in a paddock depends on the time of year and how fast the pasture is growing.

In low-rainfall systems the paddocks are much bigger and producers can leave the sheep in the one paddock for much longer.

Glossary

Hay — surplus pasture that has been cut, dried, baled and stored to feed livestock when there is not enough pasture available.

Improved pastures — nutritious pasture species such as clover, lucerne and phalaris. Often these species are introduced species (species that have come from other countries).

Native pastures — pastures that originated in Australia. Often they are hardy and can grow with little rain, but are not as nutritious as some introduced species.

Silage — pasture or crops that have been cut and stored wet, in large plastic-wrapped bales or in underground pits to feed when there is not enough pasture available.

Mixed farming systems

Most wool producers run mixed farming systems — this means they might run sheep, crops and cattle all on the same property.

Managing all these different enterprises takes a lot of planning and a wide range of different skills.

Producers will often rotate their paddocks between pastures and crops to provide feed for the sheep and provide paddocks with a break from cropping.

Sheep can also graze crop stubble after harvest and help control any weeds between crops.

As well as crops, pastures and livestock, mixed farms often have areas that are set aside for native wildlife, trees and other native vegetation.

Having more than one enterprise means producers have more than one source of income. Mixed farming is a way to manage business risk.



Balanced system: Mixed farming means juggling the needs of multiple enterprises.



Low-rainfall system: Wool producers in low-rainfall systems often run their sheep on native shrubs and pastures.

More information

For more information about wool production go to:

- Beyond the Bale: beyondthebale.wool.com
- Download the free Lifetime Ewe Management smartphone application
- learnaboutwool.com
- makingmorefromsheep.com.au
- wool.com/nutrition
- woolmarklearningcentre.com

