

## **STORMS DO ARRIVE!**

The challenges that you encounter on a commercial farm are many and varied. There is the need for a balanced response to situations between heart and head. This is not always an easy process, especially when animal welfare is involved.

None the less there are times when the decision is not between heart and head, but between responsibility and couldn't care less.

It is a sad fact some farm operators are nothing more than hired shepherds that leave their posts when they are most needed.

There are situations that arise when such decisions need to be made. Take for instance the following:

We used to shear our sheep in the month of September... it was spring time and the weather was usually warm, with plenty of feed... conditions mostly good. Yet it could turn nasty... weather conditions were known to change where it could snow and become bitterly cold.

I remember a time when this happened... we finished shearing, the weather was fantastic, mostly bright sunny days, the sheep were enjoying the sun on their backs, grass was growing, and everything was as good as it gets.

Two weeks on and everything changed. The weather turned completely... conditions became almost unbearable... rain, hail then snow arrived driven by an icy cold wind. Temperatures plummeted.

It was dark when this happened, and we were sitting around the fire place enjoying the warmth listening to the rain on the roof.

We never expected the conditions to turn as bad as they did. We did expect a little rain and a small drop in temperature, but nothing like we were experiencing at that moment.

We looked at one another knowing that the sheep were now in danger. They had very little wool to keep warm under such terrible conditions and if left many would perish.

What were we to do? Trying to round up flocks of sheep in the dark under such terrible conditions and take them to shelter would be almost impossible. It would also mean freezing "to death" in the attempt. Yet we knew if we just ignored the situation and went to bed, many sheep would die for sure.

Decision was made to try and bring them into shelter. Keep in mind this was when I was a child and we had no motor bikes, only horses. We had to catch the horses [who were so cool calm and collected – NOT] and negotiate our way through these conditions.

Whilst dad was saddling the horses, I went and let the dogs go. They were curled up in their kennels with their tails over their noses, keeping warm as possible. They were not all that keen to race out into the blizzard type weather. None the less they obeyed as good dogs do, even wagging their tails, showing enthusiasm for the work ahead.

Jumping on our horses, calling the dogs, we headed out into the night in the hope we could save the sheep. This was far from a pleasant experience, yet if we didn't do it there was no one else who would or perhaps could. I doubt if horse, dog or sheep would have obeyed the voice and directions of a stranger... in fact I know they would not have.

I can tell you, if we didn't have good horses and sheep dog's we would have lost the battle. These experienced "servants" knew the drill, they went around the sheep, in the dark, and started to shift them towards the shelter. We had to be there to oversee the project, but the dogs and horses did all the vital work.

It was an interesting experience, the horses behaved, the dogs behaved, and the sheep gave little trouble. It was almost as if all knew how dangerous the situation was for the sheep.

I can almost guarantee if we tried the same exercise in good conditions very little would have gone smoothly. The horses would have played up, the dogs would have got distracted and gone off chasing Kangaroos and the sheep would have scattered into the night.

A few hours of work and we had the shivering sheep under shelter. Horses, dogs and men returned home tired, cold and needing our own "shelter".

Arising in the morning we were greeted with fields of snow... there is no doubt if we had ignored the situation, stayed indoors in front of the cozy fire, we would have witnessed dead and dying sheep everywhere.

You see previous experience had taught my dad that if he chose to ignore the situation, dead and dying sheep were a forgone conclusion. He knew if we were to save these sheep we had to act, we had to bring them into shelter.

We could have just gone and opened all the gates that led into the shelter and left the sheep to find their own way, but this would have failed. We could have then said, we opened the "doors" but they failed to see, stupid sheep, their fault.

This may have passed the mustard if we knew no different, but we knew that doing that wouldn't work. My dad was an experienced shepherd, who had learnt off his dad and he knew he had to take control and do what he needed to do.

None the less he couldn't do it all himself... he needed help from willing participants... not only willing, but glad to follow instruction in such trying conditions.

This was no time for horses to play up, for dogs to ignore instruction and for us children to rebel and complain about the conditions... a team effort was required... even the sheep had to behave.

Sadly, I know of some who would not have made the effort, preferring to stay inside by the fire. Even some experienced shepherds choose the comfort of the fire, less experienced know no better... either way the sheep perish.

I can tell you... a shepherd without dedication, experience and a willingness to learn from others will witness far too many dead and dying sheep. There is no doubt some sheep will perish... no matter who the shepherd is... but the fewer the better.

If one is not prepared for a storm and doesn't know how to react when it hits... there will be losses... unnecessary losses.

Not sure about you... but I see storm clouds on the horizon... may Yeshua be my shelter.