

Livestock Guardian Dog Case Study

Dubai Land & Cattle and Junfin Farms, Maverick County



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Beyer & Birgit Junfin, Maverick County

Ranch Scenario -

This ranch is in Maverick County Texas and has two locations. The ranch in Eagle Pass is Dubai Land & Cattle and the ranch in Quemado is Junfin Farms, both are along the Rio Grande River. The headquarters is Junfin Farms and is approximately 900 acres near Quemado TX and contained a herd of 300 sheep and 180 cattle. Pastures are open and irrigated with good fencing and vary in size from 50 to over 100 acres. The Dubai Land & Cattle ranch is approximately 2400 acres surrounded by the town of Eagle Pass and is part of an old pecan orchard. The location had a herd of 280 sheep, 120 meat goats, 80 cattle and 487 yearlings. It is separated by a highly travelled main road and a highway system on another side. Some new fencing and brush work are in progress at this location. The ranch had excellent cellular signal which allowed the use of traditional Oyster 3 GPS trackers that used a cellular signal to transmit data every 4 hours.

Overall Management Plan -

The ranch's long-term plan was to grow their Dorper sheep herd to over 1800 head and sell lambs to buyers in Mexico. Sheep were to be fed by product of a parasitic fly program on irrigated pasture in Quemado. A new ranch was purchased in Eagle Pass that was more of a typical sheep and goat ranch with a large amount of brush. This ranch was used to run sheep and goats on. Management stopped increasing the herd at 1500 ewes in 2020 due to the predation of lambs. Owners wanted non-lethal predator control methods to be used if possible.

General Observations -

The ranch received four dogs as part of the project, 1 male and 3 females. The dogs were either pure Akbash or Akbash x Great Pyrenees. Dogs were fed with a self-feeder that was not inside a feeding station in Quemado. This led to sheep eating all the dog food. Ranch personnel also used UTVs to move and chase down the dogs at this location which led to the dogs being very difficult to catch for health checks and GPS tracker maintenance. Dogs at the Quemado location were patrolling outside the pasture boundaries from time to time. AgriLife employees observed ranch personnel using UTVs to try and catch the dogs which caused the dogs to leave their charges. When observed by AgriLife personnel all dogs preferred to be with their charges if given the opportunity to do so. One dog was found chasing young lambs and the other dog was found eating dead lambs on several occasions by ranch personnel. The dog chasing lambs was moved to a pasture with cattle and sheep. This stopped the dog from chasing livestock. The dog that was found eating dead lambs was tethered on several occasions for a week at a time.



Dogs in Eagle Pass were hand fed daily by a specific ranch worker. After the worker was fired, the dogs were no longer being fed and cared for which led to poor nutritional status and the female dog being bred by a town dog. Dogs were always found with livestock and were not roaming at the Eagle Pass location.

Overall management of the dogs was not a high priority for the owners and communication was difficult at times because they were often traveling for business. Onsite communication of the owners and ranch personnel was not sufficient enough for proper care of the dogs. Dogs were checked by AgriLife employees every 4 to 8 weeks throughout the project. The owners were notified several times of issues that were encountered during each visit by AgriLife personnel. The issues were not rectified and in May of 2023 all dogs were removed due to improper management.

LGD Bonding Protocol:

All puppies were purchased from breeders across Texas for this project at 8 weeks of age. This ranch received two dogs that were supposed to be bonded by a ranch worker at the ranch location in Eagle Pass. They were placed in a pen without livestock from 8 weeks of age until the dogs were 6 months old. The dogs were never in direct contact with livestock but could see and hear the animals in a pen that surrounded the dog pen. The dogs were released with livestock at 6 months of age after the ranch worker that was caring for them was fired when an AgriLife employee found unsanitary conditions in the puppies pen a second time. The dogs were well socialized during the bonding period.

The other two dogs the ranch received were bonded by AgriLife personnel. The dogs were bonded in a pen without hot wire and received socialization, leash training, tether training and truck rides each week. Livestock were rotated in the pens every three weeks. The dogs were placed with the cooperating producer at 10 months of age and tracked until 18 months of age.

LGD Movement -

Movement of the dogs was followed by GPS trackers and data was reviewed on a weekly basis and analyzed monthly throughout the project. Dogs in Eagle Pass were not found to be patrolling outside of their pastures very often. Dogs in the Quemado location were patrolling outside of their pastures, at times weekly.



Predation -

Coyotes, town dogs, bobcats, lions occasionally and black headed buzzards were all seen on the ranches. Dead livestock were not properly disposed of by ranch personnel at the Quemado location. Dead animals were placed in an irrigation drainage ditch that bordered several pastures which brought scavengers into the area and may have been the cause of lamb losses before and during the project.

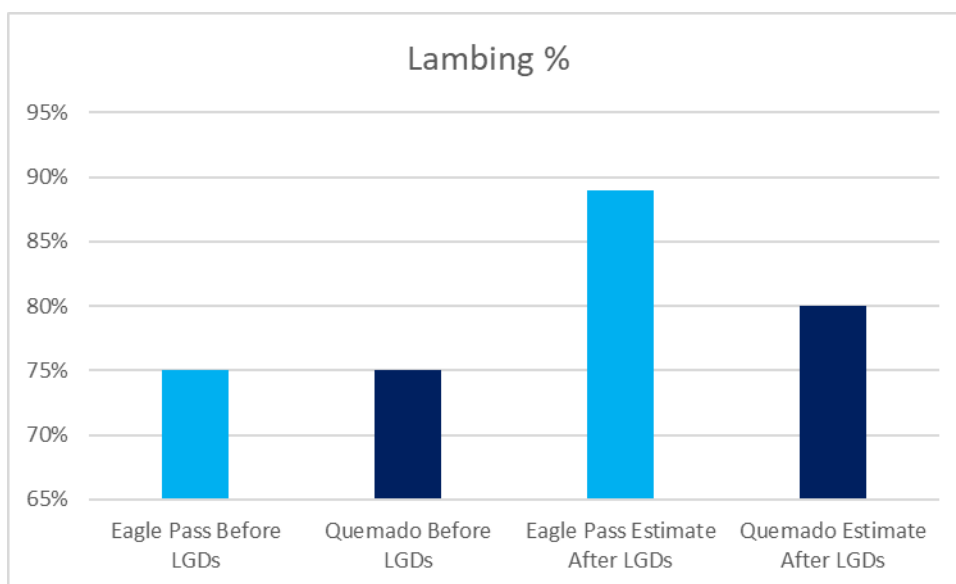
Lamb Crop Information and Herd Size -

Before LGDs – October 2022

The ranch had a 75% lamb crop before using LGDs and the herd size was 300 head at the headquarters and 280 head at the location in town.

After LGDs— June 2023

The actual lambing percentage after using LGDs was unknown. However ranch staff reported ewes had a healthy lamb crop on both ranch locations prior to termination of the project.



Q&A – Jeff Lewey

What were the most positive benefits of the program?

Having peace of mind that the livestock were being protected by the dogs. Working with AgriLife personnel and the LGD Program in San Angelo. This program is extremely important to sheep and goat producers. The program is highly talked about by producers for the success it has generated.

What was the greatest challenge with the program?

Working with owners that did not understand the sheep industry and the need to maintain proper care of the dogs.

What are your future ranch plans related to LGDs?

The ranch is moving away from sheep and will be purchasing more cattle due to easier overall management.

What would you have done differently?

Training should have been done with ranch owners and personnel on the proper care and use of LGDs. Ranch owners should have provided more support for employees. Owners should have been on site overseeing the project.