mla Your levies at work // September 2014

Feedback

On the front foot

A note from the MD...

Last month I announced plans to restructure MLA, to align industry's marketing and R&D service provider with the needs of levy payers, to underpin a profitable industry into the future.

The new structure provides a reinvigorated focus on on-farm R&D and livestock productivity, and addresses the recommendations in the 2013 on-farm R&D systems review. Central to this is the development of a new annual consultation model, to provide more producers with the opportunity to have a say in how their R&D levy is spent to have positive on-farm impacts.

Marketing levies will continue to be invested to grow demand in our global markets, while there will be further scrutiny on the distribution of levy investments across our emerging and mature markets. There will be an increased focus on market access activities, and analysis and broad communication of market insights to assist the value chain to better understand profit drivers.

These changes are all expected to be in operation in October. We will also undertake a 10% reduction in MLA's operating costs, to improve efficiency and balance the forecast reduction in levy transactions.

The Board has also committed to address recent criticisms around the Board selection process and member voting entitlements for AGMs. An assessment of the costs and application of automatically allocated voting entitlements is under way, in order to enable industry to make an informed decision. We are also working with industry to put a resolution forward at this year's AGM to change the composition of the Board selection committee.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss these changes or to provide your feedback **managingdirector@mla.com.au**

Richard Norton
MLA Managing Director

Contents

Cover: Dr Jay Kocharunchitt, researcher with the University of Tasmania. Image by Dr Anthony Baker.

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Grass seeds

Winning the war on seeds

Grass seeds may be small, but they can be a big problem for the sheep industry, affecting animal wellbeing, on-farm profitability and productivity of the entire supply chain.

Seeds from barley, brome, spear, silver and wire grasses pose the biggest problem for sheep. They can work their way into the eyes, wool and, even, the flesh of stock during spring and summer.

The result? Infection, reduced weight gain and increased animal health costs. The problem continues post farm gate, as seed contamination is a costly problem for processors and can threaten market access. Seedy carcases are downgraded and producers can incur maximum financial penalties of $1/kg or more.

In 2012, an MLA survey of Australian sheep and lamb processors identified grass seed contamination as one of the major issues, so the National Grass Seed Action Plan (NGSAP) was developed by the sheep supply chain including MLA, the Sheepmeat Council of Australia and processors to address the problem, starting on-farm.

Agricultural adviser, Geoff Duddy, who recently completed a one year role as the National Grass Seed Coordinator, said producers needed to be aware of seeds and make prevention their priority.

"Grass seed contamination is not acceptable from a production and welfare perspective, and producers must take responsibility to minimise their risk," Geoff said.

"It has been an industry issue for decades, and the wider sheepmeat industry is keen to work with producers to reduce the incidence of grass seeds. The NGSAP aims to 'win the war against seeds' so the industry remains profitable and competitive."

Geoff said productivity and profitability implications from grass seeds were wide-spread. They included:

- **Lost on-farm productivity:** Reduced weight gains (even 25 seeds in a lamb can halve daily liveweight gain); reduced flexibility of selling time; increased mortality in weaner sheep and spring-born lambs in severe situations (from mis-mothering).
- **Lost on-farm profitability:** Extra costs for supplementary feeding or managing infection and disease; penalties from processors for downgraded carcases ($10–$30/carcase depending on seed infestation).
- **Reduced wool value:** Vegetative matter causes discounting, additional costs during processing and reductions in saleable wool volume.
- **Reduced skin value:** Seeds can puncture and scar skins, affecting the quality of tanned products.
- **Reduced processor profitability:** Seed removal reduces chain speed and throughput, increases labour and processing costs and reduces meat yield. Alternative markets need to be found for downgraded product, and contamination can risk market share or even a plant's export licence.

Grass seed management is a priority for the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, according to its Chief Executive Officer, Kat Ferme.

"We ask producers to take greater responsibility on their farm, so the entire Australian supply chain can continue to produce high quality product," she said.

"It's a situation that starts on-farm, but has ramifications throughout the supply chain, so grass seed management really is a win-win for the industry."

Kat said the NGSAP aimed to equip producers and their agents and agronomists with the knowledge and skills to identify, manage and ultimately prevent problems.

"A national series of workshops, as part of the NGSAP, supports producers to develop their own grass seed management action plan to determine the cost of seeds to their business and identify management strategies which suit their production system," she said.

Up to 60%
of carcases can require trimming during high-risk periods

$10–$30
financial penalty/carcase

As few as 25 seeds in a lamb can reduce daily liveweight gain by up to
50%

"Another priority is to increase the amount of feedback from abattoir to producer on animal health conditions, including grass seed contamination. Providing this information through feedback reports alerts producers to issues where they can minimise production loss on-farm and reduce contamination at processing. The program is a positive step towards helping producers to increase the dollars in their pocket."

See our feature on grass seed contamination on pages 14-17.

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Resources to help producers manage grass seeds are available at **www.mla.com.au/grassseeds**

Furthering the partnership

(From left) MLA Regional Manager Indonesia Dr John Ackerman at the networking event prior to the signing of the Partnership in Brisbane with Himawan Hariyoga, Deputy Chairman of the Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board and Co-Chair of the Red Meat and Cattle Partnership, Mahendra Siregar, Chairman of the Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board and MLA Managing Director Richard Norton.

The Indonesia-Australia Partnership on Food Security in the Red Meat and Cattle Sector was signed by governments from both countries in Brisbane last month.

Announced in July 2013 by the Australian Prime Minister and Indonesian President, the Partnership is a new initiative aimed at bringing together key industry and government stakeholders from Indonesia and Australia to improve the productivity, sustainability and competitiveness of the red meat and cattle sector.

'The Boxed Beef and Live Cattle Industry Indonesia Strategy', developed by MLA and supported by industry, was provided to the Australian Government in June 2013 and was the basis for the development of the Partnership.

MLA's Regional Manager for Indonesia, Dr John Ackerman, said it was important for the Industry Strategy to focus on establishing an 'Indonesian-Australian Industry/Government Red Meat and Cattle Forum' as an ideal way to re-build relationships, reduce uncertainties, enhance open dialogue and provide a setting to investigate mutual opportunities.

The consequent formation of the Partnership includes government and industry representatives from both countries who will communicate regularly with the MLA Indonesia Taskforce through John, acting as an official observer.

"This partnership brings together knowledge and expertise from both countries, to further develop a stronger relationship that provides opportunities to transfer skills, and work together, to build the industries in both countries," John said.

"The intention was to have a more effective partnership which enables greater coordination amongst Australian stakeholders, and supports growth and productivity advancements within Indonesia in order to harness the available opportunities for both countries, now and into the future.

The Australian Government has committed $60 million in funding to the Partnership over 10 years with a focus on commercial outcomes for both countries.

Indonesia is one of Australia's major trading partners for meat and livestock, worth more than A$500 million in 2013.

www.mla.com.au/Indonesiapartnership

Guidance on CSG

A guidance note has been compiled to provide general information to producers on coal seam gas (CSG) operations on livestock properties.

At the request of peak councils, MLA funded the compilation of the information for producers on some of the issues they need to consider and specific advice they need to seek, before operations start on their properties. It expands on the general information contained in earlier research which was co-funded by MLA.

CSG is a non-renewable natural resource found beneath the ground, which is becoming increasingly attractive for exploration and extraction.

The expansion of the CSG industry is driving greater interaction between the mining sector and producers.

As producers owning rural properties are approached by CSG operators for use of their land for these purposes, it is important that producers are informed about the impacts these operations may have on their current and future business operations and seek advice on how to manage any risks.

The note and earlier research can be downloaded at: **www.mla.com.au/industryissuesresearch**

MLA AGM

Turn to the back page to find out all the key dates in the lead up to MLA's annual general meeting.

A paperless future

The processing of paper-based National Vendor Declarations (NVDs) costs industry more than $13 million a year.

Around 46% of that cost is attributed to the re-processing of NVD forms at saleyards, feedlots and abattoirs. The current paper-based model also limits industry's ability to respond quickly to emerging and changing market requirements.

Initiated by Safemeat, and the Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) Advisory Committee, MLA has been developing a proof-of-concept for a fully integrated paperless NVD form called StockDEC. It involves working with commercial software designers to develop innovative ways for producers to access the NVD electronically – including in areas without internet coverage. The mediums being investigated include phone and tablet apps. Field testing will occur over the coming months.

StockDEC will improve the efficiency by which declarations are delivered to supply chain participants through automated, real-time access; improve the accuracy of livestock declarations through enhanced integrity checks (eg integration with the National Livestock Identification System) and be extendable to encompass other livestock declarations (eg Meat Standards Australia, Pasturefed Cattle Assurance System, Animal Health Statements and Commodity Vendor Declarations).

$13 million/year
cost of processing paper NVDs

www.mla.com.au/vendordeclarations

MLA Challenge

It starts with attitude...

Farm business consultant Sam Newsome (pictured) from Agripath was as busy as the competitors during the MLA Challenge.

Sam's responsibilities included benchmarking the Challengers' businesses, visiting and working with the Challengers on-farm and helping judge each stage.

Feedback asked Sam what he considered the 10 crucial factors in achieving improved business performance in livestock enterprises, based on his observations from the Challenge.

1. Attitude

As an untried initiative, the MLA Challenge attracted Challengers who shared a "pioneering spirit" – an openness to change and a thirst for knowledge.

Winners John and Annie Ramsay of Tasmania showed a strength of character to avoid the doom and gloom that sometimes engulfs agriculture and developed a real "can do" approach of "we've just got to find a way".

2. Measurement and research

Being a producer who has also worked in industries like dairy and cotton, I enjoyed seeing the Challengers embrace benchmarking to understand the profit drivers and using this analysis to test their decision making.

Similarly, using MLA tools such as the Feed Demand Calculator, and practical strategies such as pregnancy scanning and body condition scoring using MLA publication guidelines, made decision making much easier.

Runner's up Andrew and Megan Miller developed this side of their skill set extremely well.

3. Goal setting

Having written goals and, better still, communicating them to the world via their blogs, provided the road map for the course of the MLA Challenge.

Matt and Angela Pearce of NSW have developed an excellent business plan that will guide them forward.

4. Focus – keep it simple

Many of the Challengers were able to simplify their business by reducing enterprises and tightening calving and lambing. This had flow-on effects for off-farm work, labour efficiencies, holidays and reduced clashes between enterprises.

Victorians Bill and Georgie Wilson's strategy of tightening their calving pattern will allow them to not only match feed supply and demand, but will make things easier on Georgie when Bill is away contracting.

5. Roles

Getting good people involved in the business, both in the on-farm team and the wider service providers, was a common theme. Also getting the right people doing the right jobs was important.

Marcus and Shannon Sounness were able to define their individual roles with Marcus focusing on production and Shannon's strengths in organising, logistics, occupational health and safety, and communication are now well utilised.

6. Communication

Getting the strategies out of the heads of the Challengers and into a format that could be understood by the rest of the team and the service providers was a key to the speed at which change was implemented.

Lachlan and Anna Hughes implemented a suggested format for communicating between the team members over three properties and a wholesale meat business.

7. Structure

Understanding the goals of the business owners and testing whether this was going to be enhanced by the current business structure was an important part of the Challenge. Understanding the current model of capitalisation (debt and equity) for their business was a key aspect of the MLA Challenge for several of the Challengers.

8. Deadlines

There is nothing like a deadline. As the saying goes "a job takes as long as you've got to do it". Not letting "perfect" get in the way of "better" allowed the Challengers to get things done. The fact the Challengers only had access to the framework of the MLA Challenge for one year played a big part in their rapid success.

9. External support

Having sounding boards through their producer mentors, Agripath and the Challenge judges, the Challengers overcame the professional isolation that comes with agriculture. Being able to confide in a third party and access their experiences enabled the Challengers to avoid mistakes and gain ideas they would not otherwise have considered – this was invaluable.

10. Review

With quarterly judging there was an automatic feedback loop that gave the Challengers the ability to take on board both positive and constructive feedback to change tack. It's good practice to seek advice and regularly assess and monitor your business performance and compare results with your goals and business plan.

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www.mla.com.au/challenge

Building capability

Change for good

Adopting innovations and outcomes from research can help Australian producers meet challenges such as climate variability and increasing costs of production. However, change is often not simple and there are often barriers which can limit an enterprise's potential. Here, *Feedback* looks at the process of change and the ways MLA invests levies to encourage producers to make practice change to enhance their profitability.

MLA R&D Communication and Extension Manager Dr Jane Weatherley said adoption, in the form of on-farm uptake of R&D innovations, tools and strategies, offered producers a pathway to overcome production, seasonal and market challenges to become more productive and profitable.

Benchmarking and record keeping were important to give producers the confidence to assess future opportunities and direct management decisions to increase farm performance.

"Boundaries to adopting best practice are what shape and constrain the changes that producers are willing or able to make," Jane said.

"Some boundaries cannot be overcome, so it is difficult to achieve 100% industry adoption of innovations.

"MLA aims to ensure R&D is relevant and practical for as many producers as possible by supporting them to implement change."

She said adoption was not a simple 'yes or no' decision but a continuous process, and producers often had rational reasons for non-adoption or partial adoption.

According to Jane, the top 25% of producers have several traits in common.

"Producers who see the productivity and profitability results of implementing change always have a really good understanding of their business strategy – they can readily weigh up the costs versus benefits to change, they know their profit drivers and know their boundaries."

She said other traits of producers who participated in MLA best practice programs included a desire for continual improvement coupled with a willingness to change, infrastructure and farm planning in response to trusted information sources.

To support producers and industry extension providers to understand and manage boundaries to change, MLA invests in tools, strategies and guidance to roll out sustainable adoption of best practice techniques.

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Is it working?

MLA measures the impact of R&D adoption through cost-benefit analyses and producer surveys to ensure investment into best practice programs delivers the intended benefits to levy payers.

More Beef from Pastures

- MLA's investment of $2.4 million over three years (2010–13) has delivered activities to over 10,000 producers.
- 50% of southern producers implemented practice change, predominately in better pasture and grazing management.
- The net present value to industry (of that change) is estimated at $21.5 million.
  Source: MLA More Beef from Pastures program evaluation

EverGraze

- More than 14,000 producers and advisers have been involved, achieving practice change on more than 4,300 enterprises, or 200,000ha.
- Estimated to deliver net present value of $129 million over 20 years.
  Source: www.evergraze.com.au

Persuasion skills training

- 88% of regional extension staff implemented new skills, such as better consultation with producers.
  Source: From the 2013 report Enhancing extension skills to drive adoption in the northern beef industry

Taking control

Want to start making a change for the better? MLA has extension and training opportunities to suit different production systems and management goals:

- **More Beef from Pastures:** for beef producers who want a sustainable increase in kg/ha of beef through optimal management of their feedbase.
- **Making More from Sheep:** for lamb and wool producers who want a best practice package of information and management tools to build a profitable and sustainable sheep enterprise.
- **Going into Goats:** for producers who want to understand the essential processes for a successful goat production system.
- **BeefUp forums:** for northern beef producers who want to make more money from their businesses.
- **Pasture Updates:** for producers in southern Australia who want to find out about local pasture issues and the latest pasture R&D being funded by MLA.
- **EDGE programs:** for producers who want to gain knowledge and develop skills in business, breeding cattle, ruminant nutrition and grazing land management.
- **Producer Demonstration Sites:** for producer groups who want a practical, hands-on environment to share experiences and participate in the commercial application of research outputs.

www.mla.com.au/Research-and-development/Extension-and-training

How flexible are your boundaries?

MLA funded a pilot project run by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture between June 2013 and February 2014 to explore the adoption process and subsequently recommend ways of increasing producer adoption of best practice and engagement with MLA programs.

Both flexible and firm boundaries to change were observed in the research, with flexible boundaries allowing significant change and firm boundaries acting to prevent or limit change. Examples of three producers exhibiting representative boundaries to change are provided below.

	Farmer of solitude	Low cost farmer	Sky is the limit farmer
Boundaries to change	Firm boundaries.	Mostly firm physical boundaries with flexible management boundary.	Flexible boundaries.
Approach to change based on past changes	Very little change, focused on maintenance, "We're just carrying on I suppose, as we used to".	Solved management problems and increased efficiency, focused on maintaining very low costs.	Eliminated elements of operation that were not profitable (including enterprises), focused on continual improvements to performance.
Information sources	Occasionally talks to other producers over the fence.	Past involvement in formal benchmarking, attends courses and extension events, likes to use network of contacts to see innovations in practice before implementing change.	Continued involvement in formal benchmarking and very active participant in courses including the MLA best practice program in the past. Now relies heavily on trusted network of experts for targeted information.
Extent of record keeping	Minimal, little influence on processes.	Extensive and values understanding the underlying processes to save money, "The great thing about measurement is that you don't have to waste money if you don't have to".	Extensive and uses it to guide progressive change, "You've got it all in black and white in front of you, what's making the money and what's not, so it's pretty easy to put a line through".
Potential future changes	Unlikely to make many changes, opposed to debt and not confident about ability to increase profits.	Essential for future changes to "mesh" with existing enterprises and single labour unit, most likely to be fine-tuning management.	System is streamlined and highly profitable, but open to further growth and change that records suggest will improve farm performance.

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In profile Building capability

Nadine Marshall // *Social Scientist, CSIRO Land and Water Flagship, Townsville*

There are always plenty of scientists featured in *Feedback*. But what about a 'social scientist'? What do they do and why are they important to the future of Australian agriculture? CSIRO Social Scientist Nadine Marshall explained her job is to provide the "human element" to help policy makers, industry leaders and communities make better decisions. Her current work in the northern beef industry focuses on the concept of social resilience in the face of change and how people cope with and adapt to change.

What have you discovered? For our project to develop a social resilience handbook for Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups, we surveyed 200 northern beef producers every three years. We looked at how they perceive risk of change, their adaptation skills, their connection to the land and any financial and emotional buffers to weather change. We found 15% of northern producers were in a really good position to adapt to change.

So that means 85% of the industry isn't managing change well? The rest were highly vulnerable to the impact of change because they don't have strategic skills meaning their business is not positioned to cope with change.

What changes are producers facing? Environmental changes (drought), market changes (falling prices) and even cultural change (public perception). They have faced change in the past, but the situation they face today is an unprecedented accumulation of many factors.

What impacts change? Regional, national and global factors influence how people behave in their business. There are cultural drivers such as beliefs, environment and animal welfare. Connection to the land is another factor. The more dependent a person is on the natural environment, the more sensitive they are to change. Producers tend to be very dependent on the land so are very sensitive to climate variability, drought, new regulations etc.

What drives producers to adapt to change? Drivers of behaviour include how attached someone is to their enterprise, what their family situation is, what their networks are, their approach to business and their environmental awareness – do they recognise that change is happening on their land? Vulnerability to change can be moderated by building adaptive capacity. Producers shouldn't reduce their dependency on the land because that is what makes them really good food producers. Instead, we want them to recognise they are sensitive to change and to protect themselves by investing in their own adaptive capacity.

What characterises people who are good at change? The 15% of northern beef producers who manage change well are:

- → interested in change and see it as positive
- → possess strategic skills
- → have financial and emotional buffers
- → good support networks
- → are interested in how science and technology can help them
- → recognise change is a continual process
- → understand change is the new normal

What is the first step towards embracing change? Recognise there is a challenge that requires a change of practice. Assess the risks associated with not changing, and the risks with taking on change. Develop strategic skills to manage long-term, not just seasonal change.

Why is this human aspect important? A policy may be economically strong but still have a negative social impact. Agricultural decision makers have historically focused on agronomic, economic and environmental consequences and haven't always designed strategies that consider people. Fortunately, decision makers now recognise they have to invest in people if the industry is to be profitable and sustainable.

Personal adaptation

Nadine's team is developing a handbook for NRM groups, to help enhance social resilience on the rangelands. The handbook (to be published in 2015) has four steps to help producers prepare for change by investing in their own adaptive capacity.

Step 1: Develop an interest in change – Change is inevitable so it needs to be a priority topic for the livestock industry, especially producers.

How? Use resources such as BusinessEDGE to prepare for change.

Step 2: Develop strategies to manage change – The future is uncertain and there are lots of possible scenarios, so producers need skills to work through their options.

How? Recognise potential risks and develop strategies to manage this risk. Consider attending an industry course or simply have the conversation with your business partners about how you will cope with potential change and if you have the financial/emotional buffers, skills, networks and resources to cope.

Step 3: Develop planning skills in a shared environment – Challenges tend to be regional or industry-wide, so look at your fellow producers as collaborators, not competitors. Change requires new ideas, but they can be difficult to test, so work within the industry to see what does and doesn't work and share these experiences.

How? Northern producers are often geographically isolated so networking can be hard. It is important for extension officers, and even the local community to create forums where producers can talk about shared challenges.

Step 4: Don't forget the human element – Facing unprecedented change can cause a lot of emotional stress. It is important to recognise issues such as depression and ensure support is available.

How? Build social and community networks for support and recognise it is okay to say 'I need help'.

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Game changer

Producers, processors and livestock exporters can have their say on the future direction of Australia's red meat and livestock industry, with a fresh approach to setting the industry agenda.

Angus Hobson
Chief Executive Officer
Red Meat Advisory Council

The Red Meat Advisory Council (RMAC) – the peak body representing red meat producers, processors and livestock exporters – has kick-started a five-year plan for the industry.

This Meat Industry Strategic Plan, or MISP, will provide an over arching plan for the beef, sheepmeat and goatmeat production, processing and live export sectors.

It will frame nearly $1 billion in collective industry and industry-government funding, and will be integrated with other national and rural R&D priorities and strategies.

The plan will be used to help the industry's policy bodies (Peak Industry Councils) and levy-funded service providers (MLA, LiveCorp, Australian Meat Processor Corporation and Animal Health Australia) to define, and deliver on, the highest priority challenges and opportunities for the red meat and livestock industry as a whole.

The 2015–2020 plan, which is the fourth of its kind, will be developed on an overtly collaborative and inclusive platform.

Following an independent review of the MISP in 2013, MISP4 will provide a more defined direction for the industry, and will be supported by a formal implementation plan.

Importantly, MISP4 will be designed to allow any and all industry stakeholders to view the industry's progress against its objectives.

While MISP4 will likely focus on fewer issues than previous plans, it will deliberately attempt to hone in on the 'game changers' – the strategies, tools, innovations, technologies and other investments with the greatest potential to overcome challenges in the areas of efficiency, profitability, consumer and community support, and market access and diversification.

A key ingredient for MISP4 is the collaborative, inclusive consultation process which will draw on input from the whole supply chain.

An initial two-step consultation process began with a forum for key industry stakeholders (industry leaders, representative bodies, agri-business, community interest groups, government, co-investors, etc) in early September to identify 'big picture' issues. This will be followed by 13 regional consultation workshops in September and October where producers, processors and livestock exporters can help inform and identify the limiting factors and future opportunities facing their sectors.

RMAC urges stakeholders across the country to participate in the consultation. The MISP for 2015–20 will be released in July 2015.

Role: Provide advice to the Minister on cross-sector or whole-of-industry matters; develop and monitor the MISP; custodianship of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between government and industry; and provide a forum for Peak Industry Councils to discuss and advance policy issues.

Funding: RMAC manages a suite of investment reserves ('the RMAC Fund') to generate income for its own operations, to support its members in delivering their MoU obligations, and to maintain a pool of contingency funding in the event of major industry emergencies.

Leadership: The RMAC Board comprises an Independent Chair (Ross Keane) and six directors representing the production, processing and live export sectors of Australia's beef, sheepmeat and goatmeat industries. The Board is supported by the organisation's Chief Executive Officer (Angus Hobson) and Secretary (Justin Toohey), and by the RMAC Executive Group (comprising executive officers from the industry's sector-based Peak Industry Councils).

Members: Cattle Council of Australia, Sheepmeat Council of Australia, Australian Lot Feeders' Association, Goat Industry Council of Australia, Australian Livestock Exporters' Council and Australian Meat Industry Council.

www.rmac.com.au

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Details of the consultation meetings on page 38 or at **www.rmac.com.au**

Market compliance

LDL update

Livestock Data Link (LDL) aims to enhance the exchange and usage of carcase performance information by businesses within the beef and lamb industries.

A web-based application, it links slaughter data from the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) database with analytical tools and benchmarking reports. LDL enables supply chain participants to analyse carcase performance in terms of compliance to market specifications, with performance outcomes linked to a 'Solutions to Feedback' library on how to address non-compliant issues on farm.

MLA is continuing to enhance the functionality of LDL with three new elements: the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) Index; regional benchmarks to allow producers to compare their compliance to market specifications such as weight, fat and MSA with other producers in their region; and sheep health and disease feedback.

The latter component involved the establishment of an operational proof-of-concept pilot that demonstrated the feasibility of providing animal health and disease feedback to producers in a consistent and user-friendly manner, to encourage improved adoption and practice change.

Research was undertaken to identify the most effective method for the integration of this data into LDL.

Animal health and disease feedback will inform producers if any sheep from their mob were inspected and detected with animal diseases during processing.

An animal health 'Solutions to Feedback' library has been developed for the following conditions: sheep measles, cheesy gland, grass seeds, hydatids and liver fluke.

www.nlis.mla.com.au

Optimising the value of MSA

Producers aren't the only ones to benefit from recent changes to Meat Standards Australia (MSA). While producers can now closely track the potential eating quality of a whole carcase using the MSA Index (featured in the June edition), MSA Optimisation is currently being rolled out to beef processors across the country. As processors become 'optimised', producers may notice changes to payment grids if processors had previously based prices on boning groups.

Fifteen processors have already implemented the new carcase sorting system and all MSA beef processors will be operating under the optimisation model by December.

MSA Manager Richard Lower said MSA optimisation replaced the standard national boning groups with a more flexible and efficient system, customised to meet the needs of individual processors.

"MSA optimisation effectively means an individual, optimised system is developed for each processor, based on the cuts being harvested in their business and the eating quality potential for each of those cuts," Richard said.

Since MSA's inception, a standardised national carcase sorting system – MSA boning groups – has been used to collate carcases of similar eating qualities.

The groups are determined by calculating the eating quality of 136 cut-by-cook (cut x cook) combinations in a carcase. These act as the 'hurdles' a carcase must clear to be awarded one of the standard 18 boning groups.

The upshot is that carcases can be moved down a boning group by failing to jump just one of the 136 hurdles, regardless of whether the processor ever intended to pack and sell that cut x cook combination as MSA.

"Under MSA optimisation, processors are able to determine the way their carcases are sorted by setting the cut x cook combinations, or hurdles, that suit their customers and their specific markets, therefore driving the value of their brands," Richard said.

The system also offered potential to segregate cuts more efficiently with different eating quality grades, reducing the variability of quality within brands as well as ageing or storage times.

The program does not require producers to change their livestock management; however, there will be changes to payment grids if processors had previously based prices on boning groups. Producers will notice more detailed feedback sheets from 'optimised' processors, which may incorporate the new MSA Index (see story in the June 2014 issue of *Feedback*).

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The MSA Index is available to all MSA producers through **www.mymsa.com.au**

MSA driving processor refinements

Nolan Meats Director Terry Nolan believes MSA optimisation is a truly 'cuts based' system. Image courtesy of Beef Central.

Nolan Meats was the first processor to implement MSA optimisation and company Director Terry Nolan praised the success of the system.

Nolan Meats, located at Gympie, Queensland, adopted MSA optimisation in October 2013 after trialling it. Terry had advocated for adoption of an optimisation-style system for some years.

"I don't see any negatives to optimisation – it's a great system," Terry said.

"Boning groups are not a good indicator of what's important to the consumer.

"Boning groups grade everything to the lowest quality in each group, which meant we had to drop out higher-value cuts important to our market in favour of lower ranking cuts that weren't as important.

"Now we can tailor our boning runs to do what best fits the profile of our cattle and our customer and, at times, we even get more of the better value cuts. It truly is a 'cuts based' system".

According to Terry, another benefit of optimisation is improved plant efficiency.

"We used to draft carcases post-grading into 18 boning groups but we've streamlined it to just six boning runs, optimised to suit our brands and customer requirements," he said.

"We have larger groups of carcases in our boning runs, so there's less downtime and changeover required."

Terry said much of the work to implement optimisation involved changes to software and data analysis.

"Optimisation is about linking the grade data of the cuts available with the market you're supplying to get the best available outcome," he said.

"We do a lot of our own in-house IT work so we could, in collaboration with MSA, quickly analyse data and optimise cut outcomes relative to our markets. That message is communicated to producers with the MSA Index, which allows them to benchmark their cattle on a national basis.

"There may be some objections to software changes or other administrative issues at the plant level but, really, any forward-thinking processor should embrace the optimisation model – it's a further refinement of how we trade."

Nolan meats: Old system – **18** boning groups

New system – **6** boning groups

Terry Nolan
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Building capability

MLA sponsors one participant annually in the Australian Rural Leadership Program to help build leadership capability in the red meat industry.

Applications are now open for ARLP Course 22 which begins in May 2015. For information on how to apply go to **www.rural-leaders.com.au**

Learning about leadership

North Queensland cattle producer Lyn French is passionate about the education of Australia's rural and remote youth and works as a volunteer for organisations supporting rural education.

ARLP participant Lyn French pictured in India with cow pats ready to be sold and turned into biogas.

For the past 18 years, Lyn has helped place Volunteers for Isolated Students Education tutors, and she has served six years on the Federal Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association.

More recently, Lyn has also focused on educating herself. New doors have opened to her as an MLA-sponsored Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) participant in 2013.

Lyn and her husband, Robert, live and work on 'Gilberton Station' in North Queensland's remote goldfields country. They raised three children on the 36,000ha property, which has been in Robert's family for seven generations. The property is also home to 2,000 Brahman-cross breeders for an enterprise based on turning off steers at 18 months.

For the past 100 years, Gilberton Station's management has been based on a simple philosophy: stock lightly, use fire wisely and keep an eye on your land.

In 2005, with lick invoices mounting, the Frenchs tightened up their operation by introducing controlled mating and pregnancy testing, turning off empties and only feeding lick to pregnant and lactating cows.

Lyn also has a passion for developing new industries within her community and is exploring opportunities to market the meat and hides of feral animals.

Here she shares what she gained from ARLP:

What are your best memories from the ARLP course?
Travelling the length and breadth of Australia – as well as India – and meeting and learning from talented, amazing people.

I now have a network of rural people who think strategically and innovatively and I'll never be afraid to call on them for advice.

The course gave me the opportunity to develop this wonderful network, but it also enhanced my own skills and gave me confidence to deal with the changes affecting our industry.

Have any of the learnings changed how you do things?
The course has given me the skills and confidence to take on leadership roles within the beef industry. Cattle producers in Australia need to band together and be on the front foot to keep up with changes and what consumers want. We need to stop the declining value of our beef and start dictating what we want and what we need to stay profitable.

What makes a good rural leader?
If you have the desire and willpower, you can be an effective leader. Good leaders are made, not born – they develop through life skills, lifelong study and experience. And you don't need a title to be a leader!

List your ARLP take home points:

- → Leadership is a skill that can be learnt.
- → You need to practise being courageous, being honest to be your best self, receiving feedback and having the concept of duty to your community.
- → Leadership is a journey that needs a blend of people who work as one.
- → You must learn to change and change to learn.

Lyn French
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Looking to 'make a difference'

Jack Walker is MLA's sponsored participant in the latest round of the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP), which kicked off in May.

Jack and his wife, Mim, operate a cattle enterprise at Theodore, in Central Queensland, producing pasturefed cattle for the European Union market and also Red Brangus seedstock for producers across northern Australia.

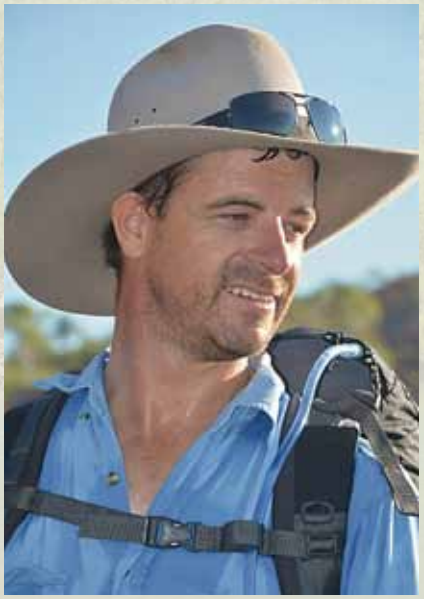
Jack spent 10 years working in the corporate pastoral beef sector before taking the opportunity in late 2012 to work with Mim's family running 'Fairholme'.

He applied to join the ARLP program to build on his leadership skills and network with like-minded rural leaders of the future.

"I've been on a number of committees in the past, including the Australian Lot Feeders' Association CSG (coal seam gas) Sub-committee and the Surat Basin Future Steering Committee," Jack said.

"Since moving to Theodore, we have put a lot of effort into our own business and haven't gone outside it too much, but now I'm looking for ways to make a difference to our industry and our community."

Jack said he was looking forward to the networking opportunities afforded by the course.



Jack Walker, MLA's sponsored participant in the Australian Rural Leadership Program, pictured during "a great two weeks in the Kimberley". The trip was the first session for participants in the ARLP's Course 21.

"It is great to be involved in groups and committees, but I want to be sure I involve myself with people and organisations that make a difference and achieve something for the future of our industry," he said.

Jack Walker
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Research at work

The latest on-farm strategies emerging from MLA's investment in research, development and extension.

In this issue

Is your bottom line looking seedy?

The good news for sheep producers is that there are grass seed management options to suit all production systems.

Agricultural adviser, Geoff Duddy, who has recently completed a one year role as the National Grass Seeds Coordinator, said sheep producers who successfully managed seeds relied on a combination of short, medium and long-term strategies. →

Grass seeds

"Although grass seeds only threaten livestock a few months of the year (late spring through summer is the risk period) controlling them needs to be a year-round focus," Geoff said.

"Grass seed management should be part of good pasture management, regardless of the time of year."

He said it was important to assess the best combination of agronomic, grazing or management strategies for the season and individual production goals.

If seed has set and there are no seed-free paddocks, short-term options include:

- **Feedlotting** – relocating stock out of seedy paddocks avoids grass seed contamination.
- **Early turn-off** – but only if sheep are seed-free. (Don't make seeds someone else's problem.)
- **Strategic grazing** – this enables priority stock, such as lambs, to graze low-risk paddocks.

A couple of months before seed sets, effective strategies include:

- **Spray topping** – If paddocks with problem annual grasses are identified early in the season, graze heavily over spring and remove stock two to three weeks before grass maturity (for uniform grass seed heads). Apply a non-selective herbicide between head emergence and milky doughy stage (depending on the chemical used) to prevent seed set.
- **Spray grazing** – Spray broadleaf weeds at 6–8 weeks with a low rate/sub-lethal dose of a selective herbicide. Plants wilt, increasing sugar levels and palatability. After 7–10 days, graze the paddock at 4–5 times the normal stocking rate. Avoid grazing pasture below 3cm to prevent damage to desirable plants. This technique is most effective in the two weeks after spraying.
- **Premature shearing** – Shear before seed set to reduce grass seed contamination of wool. This is also a good long-term option for producers who don't wish to use chemicals (or have resistance issues) or if all paddocks have a seed risk.

Figure 1 Grass seed management calendar

Management option	Timing
Genetics	Year-round
Modifying lambing times	To suit enterprise
Crop rotation	To suit enterprise
Targeted marketing	Prior to seed set
Winter cleaning	Autumn/winter
Spray grazing	Autumn/winter
Fodder crops	Sown between winter and early spring
Strategic grazing	Spring
Feedlotting	Spring
Selling lambs earlier	Spring
Premature shearing	Spring
Spray topping	Spring
Pasture improvement	Spring
Harrowing and slashing	Spring
Mowing or chemically cleaning pathways to watering points	Spring/summer
Avoid mustering/moving stock during seed pick-up times	Spring/summer

- **Winter cleaning with herbicide** – To manage pastures badly infested with silver grass, and to a lesser extent barley and brome grass, spray before they set.
- **Mechanical control** – Harrowing or slashing long pastures reduces the likelihood of grass seeds entering eyes of sheep and works well in conjunction with early shearing.

Producers can also implement longer-term options, such as:

- **Fodder crops and improved pastures** – Replace problem grasses with more productive and nutritious feed. Grazing management and soil fertility are important to maintain a competitive improved pasture that will keep weed invasion to a minimum. Options include oats or combination of oats and vetch, barley and vetch, pulses (peas, beans, vetch), etc.
- **Genetics** – Selective breeding enables lambs to reach target weights early, so they can be sold before the main grass seed period.

"Even if you can keep one-two paddocks seed free this may be sufficient to substantially reduce the impact of grass seeds on your operation," Geoff said.

He added that producers should be aware that efforts to provide 'clean' pastures can be undone by not paying attention to uncontrolled grass seed.

"Seed pick-up risk can be reduced by keeping all laneways, holding areas, tree lines and sheep camps free of grass seeds and avoiding mustering or handling stock during high-risk times," he said.

To watch the MLA Winning against seeds video and tutorials go to **www.mla.com.au/grassseeds**

Your agronomist can provide information about appropriate herbicides to use in spray topping and winter cleaning.

MLA 40 page booklet: *Winning against seeds*: **www.mla.com.au/winningseeds**

MLA Tips & Tools: *Winning against seeds*: **www.mla.com.au/seedstipsandtools**

Tip: A trial lamb kill can test the effectiveness of grass seed management. This involves processing small lines (20–30 head) of representative lambs to determine the likelihood of seed infestation. Producers can use this feedback about grass seed incidence to make better on-farm grass seed management decisions. Talk to your processor to see if they can help you.

Grass seeds

Snapshot

Graham and Leigh Clothier, Lucindale, SA.

Property: 1,440ha

Enterprise: Wool, prime lambs for domestic and export, also sell direct to local butcher

Livestock: 40% Merino ewes, 60% balance is White Suffolk/ Merino-cross ewes. Turn-off 4,500-5,000 lambs annually

Pasture: 40% sown to dryland lucerne, the rest is annual pasture and some perennial pastures

Soil: Farming sands, blue gum country, sandy loam

Rainfall: 525mm

Tactics to tackle seeds

South Australian lamb producer Graham Clothier avoids processor penalties and lost productivity with a conscientious grass seed management program.

Without intervention, seeds from barley, brome and silver grasses would be a problem at the Lucindale property Graham runs with his brother, Leigh.

"Barley seeds can get into eyes of sheep, while brome and silver grass seeds penetrate their skin and carcase. This impacts the health of our stock and can lead to penalties if seeds go through to processing," Graham said.

"Our main enterprise is prime lambs, so discounts from grass seeds would affect our business."

With 20% of lambs destined for export, he is conscious of market access implications of grass seed contamination.

The Clothiers' grass seed strategy is multi-focused, involving pasture management, controlled grazing, early shearing and genetics.

The Clothiers use the following strategies to minimise grass seed risk:

Good genetics: The Clothiers turn off lambs before the main grass seed risk (December), and this is where breeding counts. They use traits such as eye muscle depth and growth as purchasing criteria for new genetics which, combined with good feed, allow stock to reach turn-off weights (47-50kg liveweight) 2-3 weeks earlier, reducing the threat of seed contamination.

Pasture management: The Clothiers began improving their non-wetting soils 20 years ago by spreading and delving clay. They introduced a cropping program to mix the clay in, and today grow canola, barley and lucerne. Dryland lucerne is used to consistently finish lambs despite variable seasons. To meet their goal weight for every White Suffolk/Merino lamb produced, the Clothiers finish young stock on lucerne and perennial pastures. Feeder pens provide a 'relief valve' if they do not receive any summer rain.

Strategic grazing: The Clothiers try to keep the most productive pastures seed-free, to finish lambs. They rotationally graze lucerne, moving mobs of 400-500 lambs through 12-15ha paddocks. Grazing time is seasonally adjusted to prevent over-grazing. Lambs are weaned into perennial clover and ryegrass paddocks, and are not put onto annual pastures until after seed drop. After shearing, large mobs (700-800) of ewes graze the annual pastures to encourage seed knockdown, reducing seed risk for lambs.

Chemical and mechanical: Spray topping helps control problem grasses. Graham grazes annuals heavily then removes stock before plant maturity so grasses run to head. He uses herbicide (Gramoxone in lucerne, Round-Up on annuals) in mid-late October to prevent seed setting. Slashing annual grasses also reduces the likelihood of seeds entering the eyes of sheep. Making silage in early October reduces seed risk and provides an autumn ration.

Graham's grass seed management calendar

Mid-September: weaning

Early October: cutting silage

Mid-October: shearing

Mid to late October: spray topping

Mid-November: slashing paddocks

Early shearing: Shearing is in mid-October so wool is short going into the main seed drop in December and is less likely to catch grass seeds.

Graham said managing seeds made sense at a farm and industry level because of the potential impact to productivity, profitability and supply chain relationships.

"It's hard to quantify the cost of managing seeds, but we are very conscious of the impact of not controlling them. Not only would we face penalties of up to $1.50/kg, but it could delay our lambs reaching target weights," he said.

"Managing grass seeds is a win-win across the industry, so it's important producers play their part to deliver the right product."

Graham's tips

- Use lucerne to finish lambs earlier and for pasture options.
- Shearing before seed drop moves vulnerable stock out of the risk window.
- Invest in genetics to turn lambs off sooner.
- Use every tool available, eg chemical, mechanical, silage hay, large mobs for seed knockdown, feed crops and establishing soft-seeded annuals such as ryegrass as the dominant grass species.

Graham Clothier
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Seeds don't help the export sell

As Business Development Manager for Wellard Meat Traders, which added an abattoir to its portfolio of livestock export ships, farms and machinery dealerships in 2012, Blair Brice knows all too well the drawbacks of grass seeds in the supply chain.

Beaufort River Meats (BRM) at Kojonup in Western Australia processes 2,500 sheep and goats a day, sourced from the surrounding Great Southern region – one of Western Australia's main sheep-producing areas.

Chilled or frozen sheep and lambs are sold to a range of markets around the world. The main focus is chilled whole or six-way carcases to the Middle East, with more than 4,000 lambs freighted to this market each week.

"The Middle East is a very visual market," Blair said.

"Whole carcases are displayed in wet markets or butcher shops, with minimal value-adding. Customers – mainly housewives – tend to buy large volumes of meat several times a week to feed their extended family."

He said the Middle Eastern market associated carcase attributes such as size and presentation with quality.

"Our buyers want an 18kg carcase in a complete state. Meat brokers and butchers start asking questions if they see unnecessary trimming," Blair said.

"They class it as an imperfect product, which their customers will be reluctant to buy."

Consequently, any carcases that have to be trimmed to remove embedded grass seeds don't make the grade, and are redirected to the lower-value boneless product market.

"The Middle East is also very competitive, with Australian processors vying against Eastern European and South American nations for market share," Blair said.

"An added challenge is the timing of grass seed risk (mainly late spring to early summer), which coincides with an influx on lambs into the market, so buyers can afford to be selective.

"When grass seed infestation occurs we have no choice but to discount our buy price or avoid that line altogether. Given the choice we will take the second option every time because grass seeds kill our productivity and/or our revenue."

Blair said BRM's niche focus – a premium quality product from the best available lambs – means it doesn't have the economies of scale to risk market share by supplying sub-quality product.

The level of grass seed contamination affects how a carcase is treated. If a small volume of grass seeds work their way through the skin into muscle, abattoir staff have to remove seeds using tweezers – which Blair compared to pulling out splinters.

A high volume of seeds requires entire cuts to be removed, preventing the carcase from being air-freighted to export markets which seek presentable, entire carcases.

It takes several minutes to remove seeds from one carcase – a significant percentage of the 15 minutes from slaughter to chiller.

Removing grass seeds with minimal carcase damage requires expertise, so skilled staff are redirected from other areas of the plant. Extra staff, or overtime hours, may be needed during the grass seed peak – another business cost and an added burden to an industry already facing labour shortages.

Downgraded carcases also pose a challenge to the plant's logistical managers as they balance supply and demand.

Because it produces carcases, BRM cannot vary discounts based on the value of each cut. Instead, a $1.70/kg discount – about 35% of carcase value – is applied to damaged carcases to cover the cost of removing seeds. It can be a double whammy for producers, as skins containing vegetative matter carry a similar percentage discount.

Blair said Wellard's livestock buyers encouraged producers to reduce grass seed contamination through pasture improvement and optimising stocking rates to produce a high-quality product that meets the market's demands.

Blair Brice // E: b.brice@wellard.com.au

Climate variability

Producers feeling the pinch

In the pursuit of higher production levels, producers can be left in a vulnerable position during tight seasons.

That's one reason why managing climate variability is an important consideration for producers, according to climate specialist Graeme Anderson from Victoria's Department of Environment and Primary Industries.

Graeme was one of the presenters at a recent round of adviser workshops presented by MLA's Farm300 and Rural Industries Skill Training's (RIST) Project 2020.

"There are three main reasons we need to become more agile at managing variability between boom and bust seasons," Graeme said. They are:

→ **Maximum production**
Every generation of producers manages to boost production levels, due to the application of better genetics, better production systems and so on. As farms carry higher production levels there's less buffer in systems to deal with usual dry spells.

→ **Rising temperatures**
The Bureau of Meteorology has comprehensive data sets from across Australia showing each decade since the 1950s has been warmer than the last. If you repeat the rainfall variability of the last 100 years, but with a warmer background temperature, the result is an increase in the incidence of dry or tight seasons.

→ **Unreliable rainfall**
Sources of rain-making moisture, in Australia's case, is determined by natural cycles (wetter or drier) in the Pacific and Indian oceans. Rainfall will continue to fluctuate from year to year, but these fluctuations could become even stronger as these oceans continue to become warmer – wet years potentially wetter, and dry years drier.

"When you put those three factors together, and throw in good old-fashioned variability, it's no surprise we're going to run into tight conditions more often," Graeme said.

"We'll also run into plenty of great seasons as well, so the challenge is still about making the most from the good ones and reducing the risks from the bad."

According to Graeme, leading producers use a range of tools to boost their enterprise 'agility'.

"At any point in time we know our soil moisture to depth (rainfall in the bank), we have seven-day rainfall forecasts, plus three-month seasonal outlooks," he said.

"Together with feed availability and demand tools, producers can map out what's in front of them as we go through each season.

"The more agile producers tend to set key decision trigger points for action and, as each season unfolds, exert discipline to act as needed. Many producers tell us not taking or delaying decisions can prove costly to the business, livestock, land asset and your state of mind.

"The new 'More Lambs More Often' package developed by the team at RIST is a great example of a package to support producers to boost production as well as have agility to ramp up or down quickly as the season requires."

Graeme Anderson
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More information and tools:

- → Sustainable grazing – a producer resource **www.mla.com.au/sustainable-grazing-a-producer-resource**
- → More Beef from Pastures – drought preparedness checklist: **www.mla.com.au/mbfp/droughtpreparedness**
- → Rainfall to pasture growth outlook tool: **www.mla.com.au/rpgot**
- → Looking after drought pastures: **www.mla.com.au/droughtpastures**
- → MLA Challengers Andrew and Megan Miller discuss destocking in a dry time – blog and video: **www.mla.com.au/sellingsteers**
- → Feeding and management of livestock during a drought: **www.daff.qld.gov.au/environment/drought/managing-drought/drought-strategies**
- → Future Beef drought information for northern Australia: **www.futurebeef.com.au/topics/drought**
- → MLA drought management information: **www.mla.com.au/droughtmanagement**

Two failed wet seasons have forced some tough decisions on Western Queensland beef producers David and Donna Rankine. However, long term the strategies will hopefully result in pastures which quickly bounce back, improved land condition and a productive maternal base.

Ideally, David and Donna run about 1,000 Brahman-cross breeders on 'Bunuro' at Torrens Creek in Western Queensland, producing steers for feedlotters and backgrounders.

"We normally run 1,000 breeders plus replacement heifers and so on, so about 1,600–1,700 head all up. We're back to 800 or 900 breeders now, but still carrying about 1,600–1,700 head," said David, who has been following weather variability closely as an MLA-supported Climate Champion.

The couple bought the largely undeveloped property in 2001, working there on weekends until taking on the full-time management in 2005.

The 30,000ha property consists of "fairly marginal country", according to David, and includes about 16,000ha of land populated by heart-leaf poison bush.

The native shrub is not a declared pest plant, but contains high levels of the toxin fluoroacetate, which is the active ingredient in 1080 and will kill cattle. Heart-leaf is at its most dangerous after winter rainfall.

The Rankines have undertaken extensive internal fencing, creating 14 heart-leaf free paddocks of about

Decision making in dry times

Snapshot

David and Donna Rankine, Torrens Creek, Qld.

Property: 30,000ha

Enterprise: Beef cattle

Livestock: 800–900 Brahman-cross breeders

Pasture: Spinifex with about 10% kangaroo, spear grass and bluegrass

Soil: Sandy loam

Rainfall: 500mm

800ha each and 8–10 heart-leaf paddocks of about 1,600ha each.

Pasture preservation

They run a planned rotational grazing system to preserve their fragile spinifex pastures which, over the past 10 years, has seen them lift carrying capacity from one beast/16–20ha to one beast/10–12ha.

"In a good season, our clean country is adequate to carry the cattle," David said.

"If it's a poor season we can use the heart-leaf country, but we monitor the cattle closely and if we get winter rain we have six weeks before the toxins increase in the heart-leaf, then we're forced to lock the cattle out.

"The past two failed wet seasons mean we've been able to run our cattle in the heart-leaf country, which has allowed us to maintain our numbers, although at less productive levels."

The herd is less productive for a couple of reasons. For a start, pregnancy rates are down, despite the cattle "looking quite well", and the Rankines have also been forced to sell some of their breeders to meet financial commitments.

"This is predominantly breeding country so we usually send our weaners away on agistment to fatten," David said.

"That agistment is not available, so we've had to carry those extra cattle ourselves.

"In order to do that we sold off about 300 cows, both to free up space and because we needed the cash flow and didn't have our normal steers to sell.

"We don't like selling pregnant cows but in this case we had to because we needed cash and they were the ones in saleable condition.

> "Luckily we have individual herd recording so we could target cows that, although they were in calf at the time, had been less productive in the past."

Containing expenses

With cash flow tight the Rankines have also been watching their lick consumption.

"We're in marginal country so we feed lick all the time – phosphorus during the wet season and urea in the dry," David said.

"We aim for 10g/head/day of phosphorus and 60–90g/head/day of urea.

"We've maintained the same lick regime during the drought but economics is a big factor at the moment – we know we should be feeding more.

"We're monitoring the cattle in the heart-leaf country and we know they've gone off the phosphorus lick, but we haven't started feeding urea yet.

"They would do better if they had it but, economically, we just have to watch them closely and hope we can hold out a little longer."

When *Feedback* spoke to David in early August he predicted he had enough grass to feed his cattle until January.

And he was also pleased to report the environmental goals he and Donna have set for the property, in terms of protecting fragile native vegetation on their good country, were still being met due to the availability of the heart-leaf country.

However he admitted he would be in a quandary if the longed-for rain came too soon.

"Hanging over our head is the fact that an inch or so of rain during winter will cause the heart-leaf to become more toxic and we'd have to lock our cattle back into the clean paddocks, which would degrade them," he said.

"Making the right decisions is certainly a challenge. This was undeveloped country when we bought it in 2001, so we're pioneering a bit and it's a struggle at the moment."

David Rankine
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Read about David and Donna's involvement with the Climate Champions program on page 28 of the July 2013 edition of *Feedback*.

Read how David operates his business to manage climate variability at: **www.climatekelpie.com.au/farmers-managing-risk/climate-champion-program/david-rankine**

Pastures

Tender loving care

While the number of producers establishing leucaena is increasing, the area planted to it is still small, considering its adaptability to tropical and cooler climates.

Resources

- *Leucaena: A guide to establishment and management* **www.mla.com.au/leucaenaguide**
- Leucaena fact sheets: **www.daff.qld.gov.au**
- The Leaucaena Network coordinates extensive workshops and field days. Membership $170: **www.leaucaena.net**

Manager of the MLA-supported Leucaena Network, Michael Burgis, said the potential for cattle producers to value add by planting leucaena was immense.

"With a return of more than 30% in profitability (compared with traditional pastures), it's a quantum leap," he said.

"And with live weight gains more than double those of cattle grazing grass only, the reasons to plant leucaena stare you in the face."

Michael said The Leucaena Network provided new and existing growers with comprehensive information to maximise production potential.

"Leucaena can spread, so the network introduced a voluntary code of practice to advocate the importance of planting inside fence lines, away from roadsides and watercourses, and controlling incursions. It's one of those plants that need to be loved," he said.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Senior Agronomist Stuart Buck said leucaena growers could expect to cover the cost of establishment within five years.

"Establishment cost can be from $250–$400/ha, depending how it's done and conditions," he said.

Stuart said maximising leucaena production involved planning, good sowing techniques and good management once the plant was established.

Here, Michael and Stuart share their tips on getting the most from leucaena:

Preparation

- **Site selection:** Choose well-drained, deep, fertile soil and frost-free areas. Paddocks with a cropping history are easier to prepare. Paddocks need to be clear to allow machinery access.
- **Infrastructure:** Paddocks need to be well fenced with access to water points and yards for cattle management.
- **Cultivation:** A well-prepared seed bed is vital. Producers can plough from fence to fence and fully cultivate or, alternatively, cultivate strips with grass areas in between.

Plant establishment

- **Nutrition:** Soil tests are needed before sowing to determine phosphorus, sulphur, zinc and potassium levels – fertiliser application to supplement any lacking nutrients can result in up to three times the biomass.
- **Sowing:** Planting is recommended between September and March. It could take up to six workings to cultivate and it is imperative to have 60–90cm of soil moisture before sowing to minimise the risk of a hot, dry spell.
- **Control:** Manage pests and weeds to maximise establishment. Other important elements include early weed and insect control.

Production

- **First grazing:** With good moisture at planting and good seasonal conditions, light grazing can occur within 12 months of sowing. Once the trees are about 1.5 metres high, a light graze can be beneficial. If cattle take off available leaf and fine stems, the plant will bush out for more production into the long term. The paddock should then be spelled until there's adequate forage to graze again.
- **Second grazing:** A higher stocking rate and longer grazing duration can take place second time round and then full production will be reached around two years after sowing.
- **Maintenance:** Stocking rate management or mechanical intervention may be needed at certain times of the year to reduce plant height. If leucaena grows beyond your ability to keep it under control, it will set seed, which should be avoided. If seedlings emerge outside the planting area, they should be controlled – particularly in roadways or watercourses – to prevent a weed problem.

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Michael Burgis
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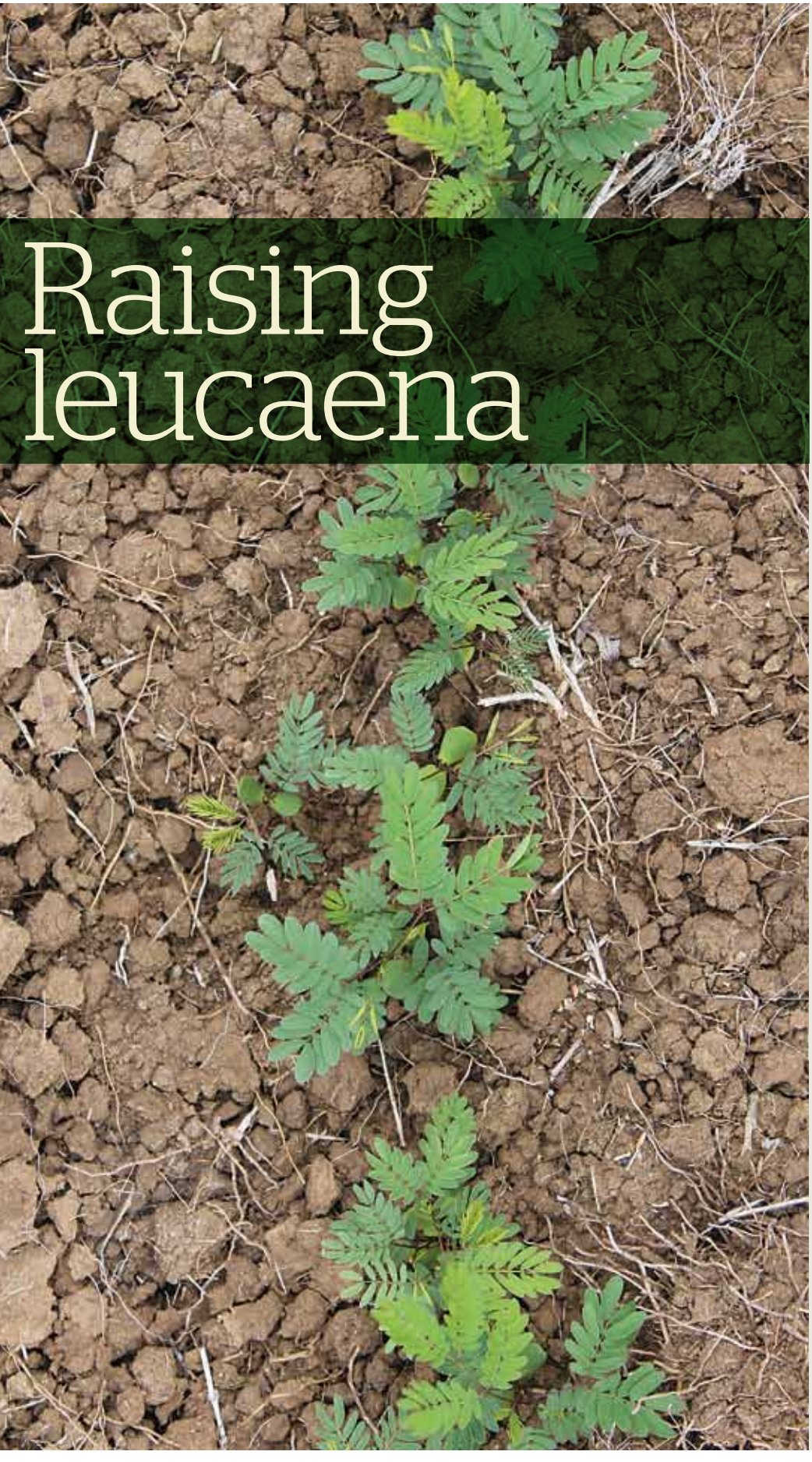
What is leucaena?

Leucaena is a high-quality, long-lived leguminous forage tree. First introduced by CSIRO in the 1950s for extensive grazing systems in tropical Australia, it is also being used today by producers in cooler climates.

The plant produces palatable, nutritious, high-protein leaf for cattle giving liveweight gains of 250–300kg/head/year, or 125–150kg/ha at a stocking rate of 1 head/2ha. This is twice that of grass-only pastures.



Raising leucaena

When all the components needed to plant a leucaena crop aligned, Hugh and Katie Rea embarked on a trial to find out if it was a worthwhile investment. Two years down the track, everything is going to plan and significant cattle weight benefits have encouraged them to commit to sowing more leucaena every second year.

Hugh and Katie live at 'Rubina', 30km north of Dingo in Central Queensland, with their three young children.

Running Droughtmaster cattle over four properties, they fatten bullocks to turn off as three-year-olds for the Japan ox market.

Having planted 97ha of leucaena at 'Meekatharra' in February 2012 and a further 251ha at Rubina this year, they use it to underpin a production goal of 300kg gains in the cattle at a younger age.

"We put number three weaners (at 290-300kgs) on the leucaena in late July last year. When we weighed them at the start of May this year at 16-18 months old, they averaged 463kg," Hugh said.

"We are going to achieve more than 600kg easily in two years."

The 251ha of leucaena has cost more than $70,000 to establish.

"That accounts for ploughing, planting, spraying, fertilising, labour and our own machinery, valued at contract rates," Hugh said.

"I didn't include the cost of locking the paddock up for nine months."

"It is hard to estimate the return on investment. However, roughly if we can get 140 head to bullock stage at two years of age instead of three years, and taking into account light stocking for the first two years, the paddock should pay for itself in four years" Hugh said.

→

Pastures

Snapshot

Hugh and Katie Rea, Dingo, Qld.

Property: 10,320ha across four properties: 'Rubina', 'Meekatharra', 'Quamby', 'Sunny Hills'; plus a family partnership property at Bowen, North Qld, of 24,280ha

Enterprise: Beef cattle

Livestock: 2,800 head

Pasture: Brigalow, buffel grass, Indian couch, Rhodes grass

Soil: Heavy clay to lighter loams and ridges

Rainfall: 685mm

Hugh Rea has committed to a program by sowing more leucaena every second year.

→

Before planting leucaena, Hugh burnt the selected paddock to remove buffel grass, as it poses a problem when trying to achieve a fine seed bed.

"After we burn, we go through with a hydraulic release plough to break up the ground and allow the offset discs to go in, then we power harrow to get that fine seed bed," he said.

"We planted double rows 900mm apart on 12-metre centres, but I think we'll bring them a little closer for future plantings, because I can see us running out of leucaena before grass."

Hugh sprayed a six-metre strip with herbicide prior to planting and then, with a full profile of moisture, planted seed in five-centimetre intervals.

"We also took soil samples and applied fertiliser at planting to correct any soil deficiencies. A 2.5-metre strip is sprayed with a residual herbicide to stop the grass coming back into the strips and taking moisture," he said.

A bait for predator insects was also applied.

The Reas' steers graze leucaena year-round.

"In the early part of the wet season, when the grass is more palatable, the leucaena really comes away," Hugh said.

"As the weather cools down and the grass dries off, the growth slows and you can see the cattle getting on top of it. I aim to have the leucaena just about stripped before the wet season to prevent it from turning into trees.

"Then I'm going to try to hedge some of it early with a mulcher instead of a cutting blade, to smash the stem tops off, so instead of growing straight back up from the cut they sucker from below the smashed area.

"In future, my plan is to do some early, low trimming and next time lift it 10–15cm to encourage it to shrub. I don't see the advantage of letting leucaena grow to a four-metre tree and then having to turn it back into a hedge."

Lessons learned

- → Graze to keep leucaena down and, if that fails, trim.
- → It's a big investment, so it's important to do everything right from the start.
- → A fine seed bed is important to set up.
- → Moisture is needed before planting.
- → Good weed and pest management is vital.

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Animal health

Vitamin supplements: the new reproductive frontier for sheep?

Just as pregnant women understand the importance of folic acid and iron during child bearing, MLA-funded research could soon reveal the crucial vitamins for optimum reproductive health in ewes.

Animal and human health researchers are teaming up to improve lamb survival by supplementing pregnant ewes with vitamins, including 'super' levels of vitamin E and D and sulphur amino acids, to boost immune function.

Project Leader Dr Andrew Thompson from Murdoch University said the project aimed to tackle one of the biggest challenges facing the sheep industry: lamb survival.

"We aim to determine if maternal supplementation with vitamin E and selenium, vitamin D or sulphur amino acids during late pregnancy can boost immunity in both ewes and lambs," Andrew said.

"Immune function is known to be a heritable trait and limited research in the 1980s indicated that high immune competency in ewes was associated with improved lamb survival.

"There is clear evidence that vitamin E deficiency is linked to impairment of immune function, however previous studies haven't established the optimum supplementation levels.

"In this project Merino ewes grazing on dry pastures will be given 10 to 20 times the level of vitamin E you might give them to avoid more common health issues, such as White Muscle Disease.

"We'll also be looking at the interaction of vitamin E and selenium."

Learning from humans

Murdoch University Human Neonatal Researcher Dr Andrew Currie will also bring his expertise to the project, investigating the theory that a high level of vitamin D in pregnant ewes can boost immune competency to reduce uterine infection, in turn reducing stillbirths and postnatal death from infection.

"Vitamin D has emerged as an important vitamin of the immune system, with the ability to boost antibacterial defences while dampening excessive inflammation," Andrew said.

"Human trials using maternal vitamin D supplementation to improve newborn immunity are underway. However, being able to tightly control the supplementation of the ewes in this sheep study, and examine the vitamin status, microbiology and immunity of their lambs in detail, is going to add significantly to our knowledge of how best to use vitamin D during pregnancy."

The researchers are also examining the immune responses for sheep with different levels of productivity, such as high growth and high fleece weights.

"Sheep breeders will often say 'if they grow fast, they die fast' and the scientific evidence backs them up: high growth compromises immune function across a range of species," Andrew Thompson said.

"We also know that lamb survival can be compromised by selecting for high wool production, and this too could be related to negative impacts on immune function.

"Based on earlier research, we're investigating whether supplementation with sulphur amino acids can boost immunity and reduce lamb and weaner mortality.

"If successful, we would expect those more vulnerable, high performance animals to show the greatest response to the interventions."

Measuring and monitoring

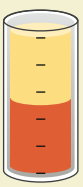
The project is being undertaken at the University of Western Australia's research farm at Pingelly, using 400 artificially inseminated Merino ewes. The project has also been supported by Merinotech WA and Moojepin Multi-Purpose Merino stud who provided semen from selected sires.

The ewes were managed to lamb in late April, when vitamin E deficiencies were more likely for ewes grazing dry pastures.

→

Project dashboard: Enhancing immune competency to improve lamb and weaner survival

Financial contributions to the project:
$398,792



MLA levies: **50%**

Government: **50%**

Length of project:
20 months

Start date: 18/12/2013
Finish date: 31/08/2015

Completed: 8 months

The project is part of MLA's objective to: Increase sheep reproductive efficiency.

Lambing involved a large team of researchers, technical staff and students working around the clock for 7-10 days to gather the project's vital data, including blood samples and swabs from the ewes and lambs before they have had their first drink.

The final sampling will be performed when the lambs are nine-months-old.

Pasture and feed sampling will also be conducted throughout the project.

"It's too early to draw any conclusions. The supplementary feeding treatments do not appear to have influenced lamb birth weights but measures of innate immune indicators (or the ability to fight off early infections) suggests much lower neutrophil numbers (white blood cells essential to the immune system) in the lambs which subsequently died," Andrew Thompson said

"If we get good results we could go to a commercial farm situation and replicate the study on a bigger scale.

"Vitamin E and D supplementation would be quite practical for producers because it's an injection at six weeks and then one week pre-lambing.

"The sulphur is logistically a bit more difficult, because it needs to be fed every 1-2 days during the last six weeks of pregnancy and three weeks into lactation. However, it could potentially be delivered by lick feeders."

All livestock research projects are performed with the full approval of Murdoch University's Animal Ethics Committee.

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Genetics

Measure, monitor and meet the market

Fiona Conroy and Cam Nicholson are working to ensure they are in no danger of falling behind the advance of genetic progress.

Snapshot

Fiona Conroy and Cam Nicholson, Geelong, Vic.

Property: 290ha

Enterprise: Self-replacing, performance-recorded Angus herd producing steers for the long-fed market

Livestock: 200-300 breeders (depending on seasonal conditions)

Pasture: Phalaris, ryegrass, sub-clover, fescue

Soil: Clay loam

Rainfall: 550mm

Genetic gain

Want to learn more about the power of genetics in your beef business?

Module four 'cattle genetics' from the *More Beef from Pastures* manual: **www.mla.com.au/mbfp**

Breedplan: **http://breedplan.une.edu.au**

Animal Breeding and Genetics Unit at the University of New England: **http://agbu.une.edu.au**

Agricultural Business Research Institute: **http://abri.une.edu.au**

For northern producers go to: **www.futurebeef.com.au/topics/breeding-and-genetics**

Watch a webcast of Dr Rob Banks (geneticist and Director of AGBU) speaking on 'Using genetics to increase farm profit' at MLA's Hamilton Meat Profit Day at **www.mla.com.au/hamiltonMPD**

The couple use a swag of tools to enhance their herd's performance, including BREEDPLAN, artificial insemination and performance recording, to produce steers for the long-fed market.

"I think the compulsion to measure animal performance started with my dad more than 20 years ago, and we've built on it from there," Fiona said.

"If you can measure something, you can see if it's getting better."

Fiona and Cam encouraged producers to invest time in developing a strong, mutually beneficial relationship with their seedstock supplier.

"It's extremely important. A cow's genetic impact is on one calf a year, whereas a sire makes his mark on 50 or 60, influencing not only what traits change but the rate at which you improve your herd," Fiona said.

Fiona and Cam run a self-replacing, commercially registered Angus herd (ACR), are foundation members of Team Te Mania (which consists of more than 40 herds based on Te Mania Angus genetics) and participate in its progeny test program.

Their females are moderately framed, highly fertile and good doers.

"A key driver of profitability is fertility, so we place strong emphasis on reproduction traits," Fiona said.

"We're also part-time producers, so we need a herd that's capable of calving with minimal assistance."

Fiona and Cam have a simple wish list when sourcing new genetics, with a focus on reproduction, mature cow size and the long-fed $Index.

"In particular, we want below-breed-average birth weights, above breed average calving ease values, low days to calving and positive intramuscular fat," Fiona said.

"We also focus on good growth traits, below average mature cow weight and I always look at the long-fed index.

"We run high stocking rates of around 23 DSE/ha so, overall, moderate sized mature cows with some fat cover work better for us but it is horses-for-courses. What you run depends on your environment and how you farm."

Despite their off-farm work demands and family commitments, the couple manage all their herd-recording requirements. Because of their years of measuring, they can track significant changes in their herd that have improved their profitability.

Intramuscular fat Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) in their steers, which usually go to the Rangers Valley Feedlot in northern NSW at 14–16 months of age, weighing an average 450kg, has gone from being negative in 1993 to more than two in 2011 (the breed average was 0.8).

"They are also above breed average for eye muscle area and rib and rump fat," Fiona said.

"The feedback from Rangers Valley is our steers are in the top 5% for profitability for the feedlot."

The couple's cows have below average days to calving EBVs and the heifers are calving earlier each year, even if it's just by a day or so.

Anything that fails to get pregnant, has trouble calving or fails to raise a calf satisfactorily is turned off.

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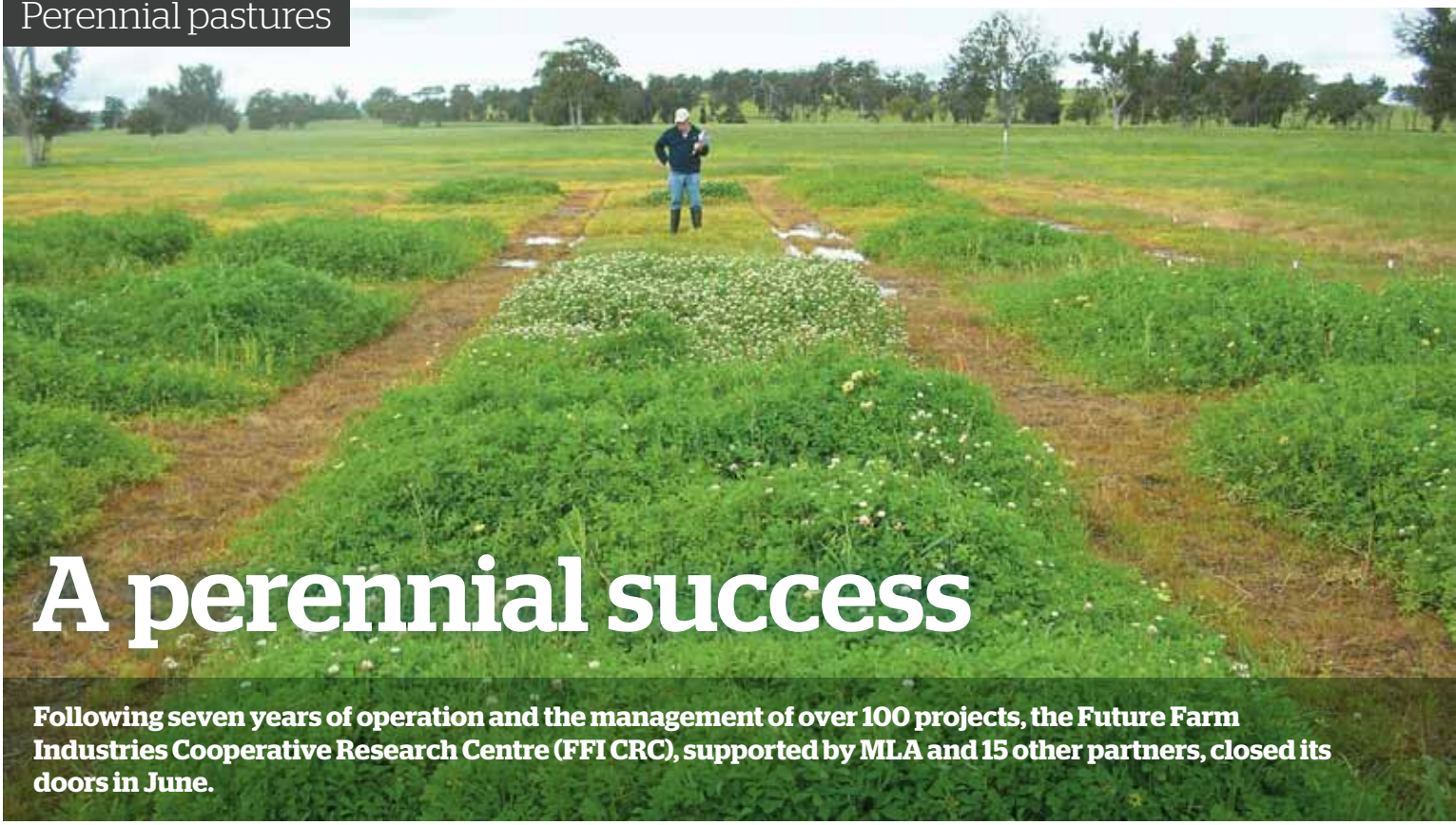
Perennial pastures



A perennial success

Following seven years of operation and the management of over 100 projects, the Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre (FFI CRC), supported by MLA and 15 other partners, closed its doors in June.

The annual legume messina grows well on saline waterlogged soils, such as this trial site at Darkan, Western Australia.

Peter Zurzolo, Chief Executive Officer of FFI CRC, said research showed the adoption of perennials by Australian producers made sense economically, agriculturally and environmentally.

"The CRC set out with the objective of dual benefits: to improve productivity and profitability through the use of perennial plants while increasing natural resource management outcomes," Peter said.

Research predicts the future net benefit for Australian agriculture through the use of perennials could reach $1.6 billion by 2030.

What's next?

The CRC's projects have either been completed or transferred to other agencies to continue its important research.

MLA will continue to be involved in the support of the EverGraze website and tools, and commercialisation and adoption of varieties of panic grasses (two varieties), cocksfoot (one to two varieties), summer active continental fescue (one to two varieties) and tedera.

Watch the proceedings of the recent Future Farm Live event, held to conclude the seven years of research, at: **www.youtube.com/user/FutureFarmCRC**

www.futurefarmonline.com.au
www.evergraze.com.au

Here are some FFI CRC initiatives:

Living haystacks

Tedera is expected to be commercially available within three or four years. MLA is funding a project to determine the benefits of tedera for sheep production systems.

Tedera originates from the Canary Islands and is called a 'living haystack' because of its ability to provide green feed in summer.

The best traits were selected from 65 lines, according to the tedera research project leader Dr Daniel Real of the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia.

"It virtually hibernates but retains its leaves. It will allow producers in Mediterranean climates of Australia and Europe to use tedera instead of hand-feeding sheep and cattle. It's much simpler," Daniel said.

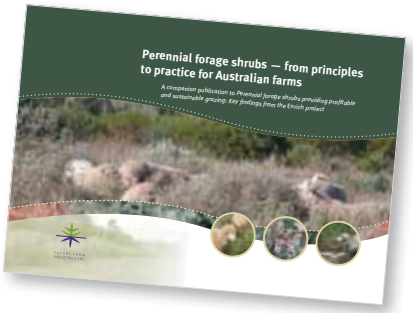
Modelling has shown tedera could increase farm profit by up to 20%, and further research is underway.

Sheep vote with their mouths

Australia's top 10 native perennial forage shrubs, which sheep have helped to select during trials, are detailed in the new Enrich forage shrubs booklet released in April 2014.

The 74-page resource is the culmination of more than seven years' work by the CRC's Enrich project team, which was supported by MLA.

Enrich project leader Dr Jason Emms (SARDI) said the booklet, *Perennial Forage Shrubs - from principles to practice for Australian farms*, will be valuable for sheep and cattle producers in southern Australia's low rainfall zone.



The booklets can be downloaded from **www.futurefarmonline.com.au**

A salty favourite

Anameka is a line of old man saltbush developed following 10 years of research and refinement. It is based on reducing risk through use of perennial forage shrubs on grazing land. It is due to hit the market in 2015.

Old man saltbush research has been a positive outcome for the FFI CRC, with 100,000 seedlings offered to producers in a research release earlier in 2014.

The Anameka line of saltbush will be available for producers following the signing of a licence agreement between the CRC and Chatfield's Nursery in Tammin, Western Australia.

Read the *Feedback* feature on the salt bush work in the September 2013 edition at **www.mla.com.au/feedback**

The tropical spread

More than 60,000ha in Western Australia and 400,000ha in NSW are now sown to tropical grass pasture species.

The FFI CRC began a tropical grasses project six years ago, which aimed to increase the adoption of a system based on tropical grasses in northern NSW and the northern agricultural region of WA, and to select and release new tropical grass varieties for southern Australia.

New cultivars of panic grass (*Megathyrsus maximus*) have been developed and the CRC has finalised a commercialisation agreement with Heritage Seeds to take three lines to market in the next 12-18 months. These varieties boast increased production and are adapted to a wider range of environments.

Extension materials produced during the project include guides to establishing and managing tropical grasses (available from **www.futurefarmonline.com.au**) and a second edition of a tropical grasses book is in production.

EverGraze Packages

The EverGraze approach is encapsulated in the principle: *Right Plant, Right Place, Right Purpose, Right Management.*

Research from EverGraze and other related projects, as well as local case studies and demonstrations, has been combined to create the EverGraze Regional Packages, which provide information for different regions across southern Australia. These web-based packages provide evidence-based options to address the issues and opportunities for improving farm profit, risk and natural resource management.

www.evergraze.com.au

ADOPT

CSIRO's Adoption and Diffusion Outcome Prediction Tool (ADOPT) helps identify the factors that influence the adoption of agricultural innovations.

The tool features a structured approach to predict the likely level of adoption and diffusion of specific innovations. MLA is using ADOPT as part of its process to evaluate the benefits of new projects to producers.

ADOPT is available from CSIRO - **www.csiro.au/Organisation-Structure/Flagships/Sustainable-Agriculture-Flagship/ADOPT**

The view on improving reproductive efficiency

The chance to investigate and then potentially address reproductive issues and unexplained losses that had dogged Jim and Sarah Viner's cattle operation was too good to miss when the CashCow research project came along.

Snapshot

Jim and Sarah Viner, Gympie, Qld.

Property: 'Tressavale' – 728ha; 'Kerinyaga' – 202.5ha

Enterprise: Beef cattle breeding

Livestock: 450–500 Brahman-Charolais cross cows

Pasture: Rhodes grass, creeping blue grass, Setraia, tropical legumes

Soil: Scrub-type soils

Rainfall: 'Tressavale' – 1,200mm; 'Kerinyaga' – 1,500mm

Left: Sarah, Samuel and Jim Viner enjoy the view of their southern Queensland property near Gympie. The Viners have applied CashCow findings to improve their enterprise profitability.

Through taking part in the CashCow program the Viners discovered Pestivirus was the main reason for calf losses in their herd between pregnancy testing and branding.

For Jim Viner, the decision about whether to take part in MLA's research project on reproduction performance and profitability in northern Australia was a no brainer.

"There were a lot of things we'd come to accept such as calf losses and poor fertility in some of our cows," Jim said.

"We have trouble with wild dogs and paralysis ticks so we put losing up to 15% of our calves, between pregnancy testing and branding, down to a bit of everything.

"It was just too overwhelming to address it on our own. We tried to manage around it but didn't really know what we were managing for.

"CashCow opened our eyes and enabled us to focus on a few things."

The Viners, who run up to 500 Brahman-Charolais cross cows on two properties just east and west of Gympie, joined the project in its trial year and participated for four years.

In condition

One of the key learnings for Jim was the importance of cow body condition score and the ripple effect it has on the entire operation.

"In hindsight we've learnt a lot and changed our management as a result," he said.

"I now have a much better eye for body condition score. Before CashCow, I thought our cattle were okay but in fact they were doing it a bit tough. To address that issue we've dropped our numbers back and the timing of our weaning has become far more flexible.

"As soon as our cows are down to body condition score two to two-and-a-half we wean the calves and supplementary feed them if we have to.

"We find if we wean when cows are at two to two-and-a-half they pick up to three to three-and-a-half very quickly without having to spend lots of dollars."

The Viners keep about 80% of their heifers for replacements and the steer portion is sold off their mothers at weaner sales to the restocker market.

"In good years some of them go into the vealer trade but generally we're looking at 220–250kg steers turned off at 10 months of age," Jim said.

Jim has also given away the idea of calving his heifers at two years of age.

"It was just too hard," he said.

"We grow a lot of grass here but it's often low in protein and, with the stress of being pregnant, we found our heifers' growth was being compromised. They weren't reaching their potential mature cow size. The smaller ones were only 220kg carcase weight.

"About 50% of our income is from cull cows so by leaving them an extra year we are achieving a 300kg carcase. We're better off economically and we're not pushing the cows."

Mothers with maturity

The Viners also found that calving heifers as two-year-olds had a detrimental effect on their ability to get back in calf.

"Our heifers are our newest genetics and the females we want to keep."

As part of the CashCow program, the Viner's herd was tested for Pestivirus and Jim found this accounted for a considerable number of their losses between pregnancy testing and branding.

"We set up a plan to eradicate it from our herd and our losses at branding have reduced from 15 to 5% and we attribute most of that 5% to wild dogs," he said.

"To address that we're part of a neighbourhood baiting program, which seems to be helping, and we also carry out periodic trapping and shooting."

Jim said CashCow gave him the advice and tools to see the wood for the trees and he was keen to see a follow up program in the northern cattle industry.

"I would definitely support another program and I think it would be very interesting to see the benefits of some of those changes over time," he said.

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Read the full CashCow findings at **www.mla.com.au/cashcowreport**

Meat safety

Playing it safe

Research fellow in antimicrobial interventions Dr Jay Kocharunchitt and PhD candidate Bianca Porteus testing new antimicrobial technologies at the University of Tasmania. Image by Dr Anthony Baker.

MLA's meat safety research projects aim to protect Australia's existing beef and lamb markets and gain access to new ones.

MLA Market Access Science and Technology Manager Ian Jenson said meat safety research and development (R&D) was necessary to ensure the safety of consumers and answer the questions of trade regulators.

"When we talk about food safety it very quickly leads to discussion about trade," Ian said.

"The research we do tries to help the industry to improve its performance, and also to meet existing – and what we predict will be future – requirements, so we can negotiate in the trade arena."

Ian said important Australian markets like Japan and Korea were particularly sensitive to food safety issues, however "all markets express their food safety needs".

"In China, Vietnam and much of the Middle East we're seeing governments stepping in and putting their own meat safety requirements in place," he said.

"Our food safety record stacks up pretty well against most of the world, but we know that any kind of slip-up can cause markets to close or requirements to increase."

Here are snapshots of a selection of MLA-funded meat safety R&D projects:

Bacterial breakthroughs

Researcher: University of Tasmania
Project timeframe: April 2013 – March 2016

This project is seeking better ways to control pathogenic bacteria that can be found on carcases.

"No matter how careful processors are, getting some contamination on the carcase is inevitable," Ian said.

"The microbiological requirements, particularly in countries like the US, have become very stringent. There are existing anti-microbial technologies, but they're not always very effective and they can be difficult and expensive to run.

"This research is about finding more appropriate and effective alternatives."

Chilling out

Researcher: University of Tasmania
Project timeframe: April 2013 – March 2016

This research aims to predict and improve the shelf-life of vacuum packed, chilled meat, particularly lamb.

"Shelf-life is one of the most costly technical barriers to trade in the Middle East," Ian said.

"This work is about putting data together to share with Middle East importers and governments to negotiate more appropriate standards. It's also about understanding whether we can improve the shelf-life of lamb even further."

The Australian story of *E.coli*

Researcher: CSIRO
Project timeframe: September 2012 – April 2014

Developed in response to strict US market requirements, this project sought an understanding of the prevalence and concentration of pathogenic bacteria (*E. coli*).

"The US has declared seven types of the *E. coli* bacterium to be 'adulterant', which basically means all Australian manufacturing beef bound for the US has to be tested for these bacteria," Ian said.

"MLA research only found four of those seven types in Australian cattle, so we think we're now in a position to negotiate less stringent commercial testing procedures."

Keeping it clean

Researcher: South Australian Research and Development Institute
Project timeframe: January 2013 – March 2015

This project involves collecting and analysing data from processors to improve meat hygiene practices across the industry.

"We're trying to understand why some processors are better than others at controlling bacteria," Ian said.

"We're analysing their own test results, then visiting the slaughter floors to see different practices in action."

Ian Jenson, MLA
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Maintaining our reputation

Australia's beef and lamb industries can be proud of their reputation for producing clean and safe red meat, but this safety status needs to be maintained and communicated if the industry is to retain market share.

That's the message from MLA's Business Manager for Global Marketing, Stephen Edwards, who sees first hand how international customers view Australian beef, sheep and goat meat.

Stephen helps coordinate MLA's marketing campaigns in the US, Korea, Japan, Middle East, Europe, India and South-East Asia, where food safety is paramount – even in regions that have never experienced food safety scares.

"MLA research revealed that, while different countries place different values on red meat attributes, 'freshness' and 'guaranteed safe to eat' tended to rank as the most important," Stephen said.

Maintaining Australia's good reputation and a marketing edge required a consistent, long-term approach, Stephen said.

"It's about being proactive, not reactive. The market is very fickle," he said.

"Food safety issues in one protein can drive consumers towards alternatives, but issues with food from one country can result in customers avoiding that product altogether, regardless of country of origin."

A food safety scare can lock products out of the market and even tarnish unrelated products. It's not a situation Australian producers and exporters can afford to be in, with exports taking more than 60% of industry's production.

"Our island status and world-best production and processing practices mean Australia enjoys a strong reputation for clean, safe red meat, but our competitors are catching up," Stephen said.

"The US is making a comeback after the 2003 BSE scare. US beef now has a negligible BSE risk, the same as Australian beef."

While systems such as the National Livestock Identification System and Livestock Production Assurance underpin Australia's safety credentials, other countries are making inroads with traceability and environmental integrity. Uruguay, for instance, has implemented a radio frequency identification tracking system.

MLA's food safety marketing strategy covers three areas:

- reinforcing Australia's safety record
- trade and consumer education
- collaborating with other major beef producing nations to ensure beef is viewed by consumers as a safe and sustainable product

Previously, Australian beef and lamb has been marketed differently in each region but the roll-out of MLA's new global campaign from 2014 will see Australian product progressively branded as 'True Aussie'. The food safety message is reinforced by two of the three True Aussie pillars – ideal place and trusted partners (see the feature in June 2014 *Feedback*).

Drawing on the 'Coca Cola' model (a global logo paired with regionally specific slogans) 'True Aussie' has a consistent message supported by locally relevant taglines.

Stephen said the aim was for customers to recognise Australian red meat around the world, whether they were buying high-value cuts for food service in China, trimmings in the US or bulk commodity products in the Middle East.

"Niche and commodity markets alike are sensitive to food safety, so we want customers to connect the country of origin label on red meat to Australia's production and processing standards, regardless of where they are eating our product," he said.

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Korea

MLA launched the *Hoju Chungjung Woo* (Aussie Beef: Clean and Safe) 'safety mark' in Korea in 2002.

And now as the new 'True Aussie' labelling is being rolled out in Korea, MLA is working to ensure the trust in Australian red meat, established through *Hoju Chungjung Woo*, is maintained in Korea.

The introduction of the *Hoju Chungjung Woo* safety mark couldn't have come at a better time, with the US BSE outbreak in 2003 putting food safety at the forefront for Korean consumers – particularly Korean housewives, who are the main food buyers.

US and Canadian beef was banned and Korean beef imports dropped 45%, but demand for Australian beef grew. By 2004, Australia's share of the chilled important beef market had jumped from 28 to 95%.

After the US re-entered the market, *Hoju Chungjung Woo* helped Australia maintain a 78% share of the imported market by 2013, despite a 5.4% tariff difference between Australian and US beef.

The 'clean and safe' message still resonates today, with 80% of imported retail beef on Korean supermarket shelves branded with *Hoju Chungjung Woo* stickers. Point-of-sale information and food sampling are also used to educate Korean customers about Australia's beef safety record.

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Giving the competition some flavour

Six of Australia's best butchers went head-to-head with butchers from the United Kingdom and New Zealand in this year's Tri-Nations Butchery challenge held at England's prestigious Yorkshire Show. And the winner was... New Zealand.

Now in its fourth year, the challenge encourages innovation in the independent retail sector to grow demand for beef and lamb through value-adding and offering convenient options for time-poor consumers. It also garnered media attention locally and overseas creating a positive image for Australian beef and lamb.

The Australian team attracted global ingredient manufacturing company Flavour Makers as a principle sponsor. The 'Flavour Makers Naturals' produced an impressive 45 beef and lamb value-added products in a two hour time frame. Education on the products is now available to the wider butcher industry through Beefing Up Your Profits and Racking Up Your Profits workshops run by MLA.

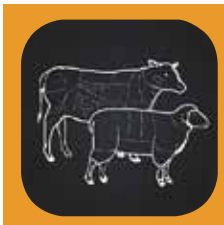
Hosted by the UK industry, the event included an industry or supply chain education tour. The Challenge and tour attracted representatives from the UK, Australian and New Zealand meat industry as well as Retail Meat New Zealand and MLA.

Australia will be the host country of the challenge in 2015.

Watch a video about the event at: **www.australianbutchersguild.com.au**

The 2014 Australian team, named the Flavour Makers Naturals, comprised Adam Stratton (Tender Value Meats – Hornsby, NSW), Gary Hine (The Naked Butcher – Mundaring, Western Australia), Matthew Papandrea (Joe Papandrea Quality Meats – Bossley Park, NSW), team captain Michael James (Carina North Meats – Carina, Queensland), Trevor Hill, (Bruce's Meat – Torrens Park, South Australia) and Tom Bouchier (Peter G Bouchier – Butchers of Distinction, Malvern, Victoria).

Straight to the cut



MLA has launched a new smartphone app to help consumers improve their knowledge of meat cuts and cooking methods to give them more confidence when it comes to cooking beef, veal, lamb and goat.

The 'Meat Cuts' app educates users on how to best match meat cuts with cooking methods with just a few taps on their mobile.

MLA's Regional Marketing Manager – Australia, Lachlan Bowtell, said matching the right cut with the appropriate cooking method was vital for a great cooking outcome.

"Consumers want to be sure they're going to get an enjoyable meal, so developing an app that helps consumers increase their understanding of cuts and their most appropriate cooking method is a step to filling the knowledge gap, and increasing the number of beef, lamb, veal and goat dishes in meal repertoires," he said.

"We know from research that many consumers find the variety of beef and lamb cuts available confusing. Chuck might be called chuck steak, but works best as a slow cook option and should not be grilled as a steak. No chuck at the supermarket? Try some blade or gravy beef. That's the type of information 'Meat Cuts' can provide.".

The app features 41 beef cuts, 25 lamb cuts, 21 veal and 20 goat cuts, explaining where on the animal each cut originates, the most suitable cooking methods and why.

The app also features 107 recipes, one recipe for each cut, along with alternative cut suggestions for each recipe should the selected cut not be available at retail.

17,410 downloads

of the 'Meat Cuts' app in the first three weeks of its launch

The Meat Cuts app has featured on the Apples iTunes App store home page as one of their suggested 'Best New Apps'.

Lachlan said MLA research found that after price and nutritional value, difficulty in preparation and a lack of cooking confidence were the main concerns for consumers when purchasing beef or lamb.

"Providing consumers with a resource like the 'Meat Cuts' app to boost their confidence in cooking with different cuts helps break down the purchasing barriers and increases their knowledge about different cooking options," he said.

"Each red meat meal success they have will spur their confidence to perhaps try something new down the track - but ultimately it's the information they can find in the app on matching cuts and cooking methods that is essential to helping them achieve that success."

'Meat Cuts' is the third consumer-focused smartphone app released by MLA, joining the 'LambRoast' and the highly acclaimed 'SteakMate' app which has had more than 44,000 downloads since its launch in November 2013.

The apps are available through **Google Play** and the **Apple iTunes App Store.**

Recipe

Spanish beef and pearl barley paella

Serves: 4
Preparation time: 20 minutes
Cooking time: 55 minutes

Ingredients

600g beef blade steak, trimmed of fat, 2cm diced
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon smoked paprika
4 silverbeet stems, finely diced
1 red capsicum, finely diced
1 green capsicum, finely diced
1/2 cup pearl barley
1 head garlic, sliced in half horizontally
6 sprigs thyme
1 pinch saffron, soaked in 1 tablespoon of hot water
500ml salt reduced beef stock
1 bunch silverbeet leaves, shredded

Method

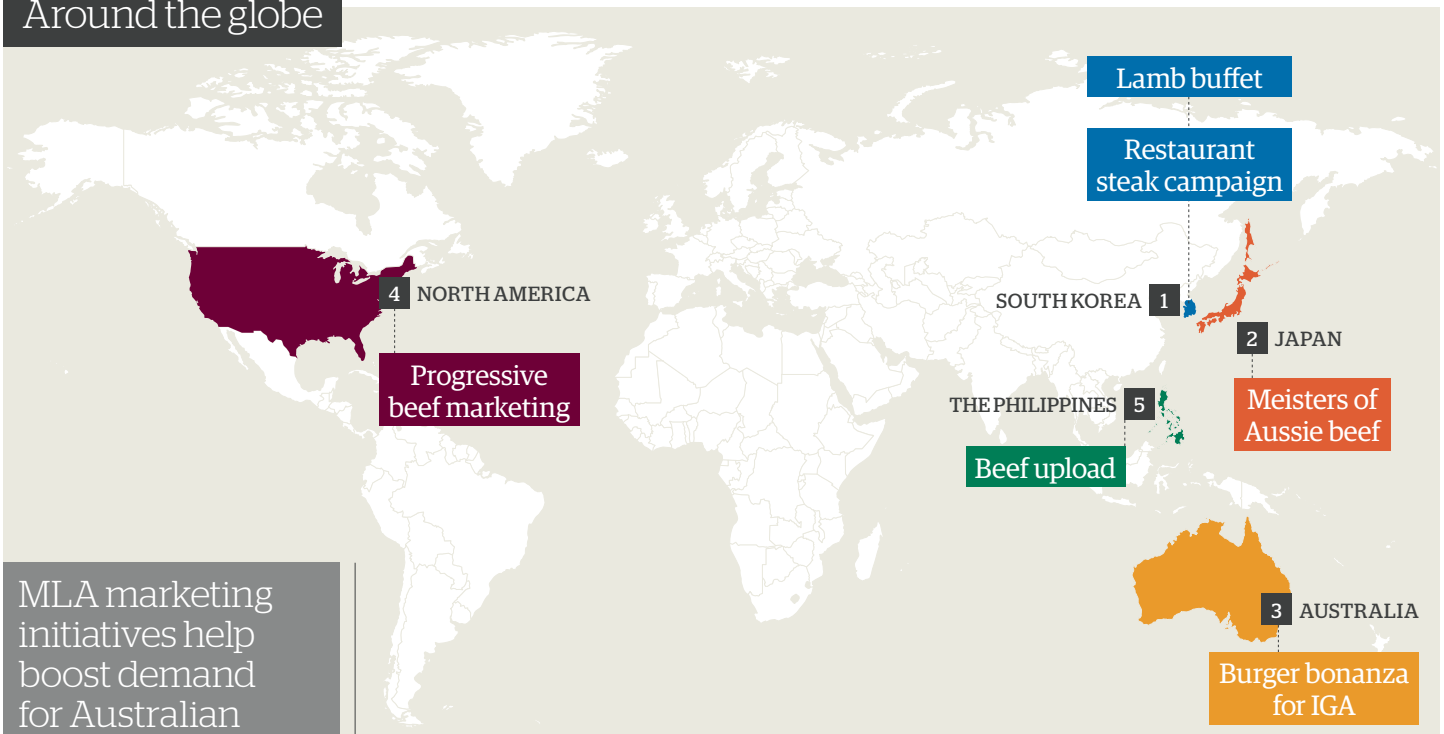
1. Drizzle oil over beef in a bowl and toss to coat. Place a 30cm paella pan, frying pan or cast iron casserole dish over high heat and brown beef. Add paprika and stir to coat the beef.
2. Add diced silverbeet stems and capsicum, pearl barley, garlic, thyme, saffron and stock and bring to the boil, reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 45 minutes or until beef and pearl barley are tender. If liquid reduces too much add a little water to keep the beef moist.
3. Add shredded silverbeet leaves in the last two minutes of cooking, or steam separately and serve paella on top of silverbeet.

Switch to make:
Italian beef risotto – omit smoked paprika and capsicum, add one can of diced tomatoes, diced carrot and celery and finish with basil instead of thyme.

Tips

1. Rump steak can be used instead of blade.
2. Try kale, spinach or baby spinach instead of silverbeet.
3. Try celery or onion instead of silverbeet stems.
4. This recipe can be made in a slow cooker. Transfer everything except silverbeet leaves to the slow cooker after step 1. Cook for eight hours on low. Add silverbeet leaves for the last few minutes of cooking.

Around the globe



MLA marketing initiatives help boost demand for Australian beef and lamb both at home and in our global marketplace.

1 SOUTH KOREA

Lamb buffet booms

A hotel chain in Korea, famous for its buffet restaurant called 'The Garden Kitchen', ran a month-long lamb promotion offering six Australian lamb dishes: lamb chops, lamb albi (Korean grilled dish made with marinated meat), kebabs, lamb salad, stew and roast lamb. Around 1,575kg of Australian lamb was consumed in the promotion. The restaurant's sales are rated the second highest among hotels in Seoul and its Australian lamb volumes for the month increased 114% year-on-year.

Left: Australian lamb being promoted in a Korean buffet restaurant.

20,578
people visited the Korean buffets during the one month Australian lamb promotion

Steak sales spring into action

An Australian beef steak promotion contributed to patronage increasing 16% year-on-year and overall sales increasing 10% year-on-year in the Seven Springs restaurant chain in Korea. The restaurant's average monthly Australian beef consumption is 10 tonnes across its 25 outlets. MLA partnered with the restaurant to provide free Australian tenderloin steak meal vouchers to customers who ordered any cuts of Australian steak. Around 5,700 vouchers were distributed during the month-long promotion.

10 tonnes
of Australian beef consumed monthly in Korean restaurant chain

2 JAPAN

Beef Meisters down under

Five young Japanese beef industry representatives visited Australia in June with MLA Japan's in-house Aussie beef butcher, Konosuke Shimizu, (pictured above) to gain a better understanding of Australia's beef production and supply chain. Called the 'Meisters' (Masters), the group visited a grassfed producer, feedlot and processing plants and sampled Australian beef in fine dining restaurants. The program was tailored for under 30's with two to five years' experience working with major importers and wholesalers who handle Australian beef daily. The five Meisters were chosen from 39 ambassadors in the overall program. MLA developed this

ambassador-style training program to educate the next generation of the Japanese trade and end users about the benefits of Australian beef. The Meister program will run again in two to three years, shifting focus to young chefs.

3 AUSTRALIA

Grocers celebrate iconic burger

MLA corporate chef Sam Burke served 2,500 grassfed beef burgers over three days to attendees of the annual Independent Grocers of Australia (IGA) expo on the Gold Coast in July. This year IGA developed a 1960s-style burger bar, themed with a juke box, which celebrated the iconic beef burger. Around 4,500 owners and managers of 1,400 stores, attended from around Australia. IGA has an 8% overall market share of the Australian retail environment (Nielsen Homescan) with stores featuring heavily in Australian regional centres.

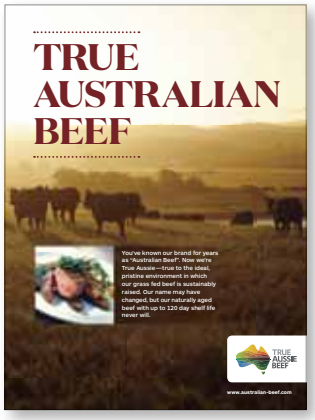
MLA has been involved in this event for many years to raise the profile of the meat section in IGA stores and support the chain by showcasing on-trend meal ideas and value-added products to encourage customers to purchase new and entertaining meal concepts.

2,500

Aussie beef burgers served up at the IGA expo

4 NORTH AMERICA

Australia's attributes hit the press



With 'True Aussie' rolling out globally, MLA showcased the brand to the US retail sector with editorial coverage in *Progressive Grocer* magazine.

The advertising focused on the continued popularity of Australian grassfed beef in the US and its positive attributes – safety, quality, traceability, shelf-life and Australia's ability to produce it sustainably. The 90-year-old magazine is known for its wide reaching influence on 'progressive' retailers wanting to stay ahead of trends. MLA will track online click-through reports and print messaging success of the ads to gain new business leads and base future ad design and development from.

37,170

copies of *Progressive Grocer* distributed, featuring sustainably-raised 'True Aussie' grassfed beef

5 THE PHILIPPINES

Beef Upload's social success

To increase Australian beef's penetration of the Philippines' foodservice sector, particularly in family and fine-dining restaurants, MLA ran a 'Beef Upload' social media campaign in Manila, which saw diners posting pictures of their meals online to win prizes. The competition tapped into the Filipino penchant to use social media when dining out. More than 100 posts were generated during the campaign and 20 new restaurants now serve Australian beef as a result. Australian beef volumes increased 30% during the campaign period.

20 new restaurants selling Australian beef due to campaign

On the ground

European Union

Michael Crowley
MLA Regional Manager
European Union and Russia
E: mcrowley@mla.com.au

The EU is Australia's highest value per kilogram market, with volumes increasing in 2014.

MLA has been partnering with EU supply chains to capitalise on opportunities to grow their businesses, and, over time, the result has been incremental increases in volumes while maintaining value and a supply chain which has been able to ensure supply.

European companies (importers and distributors in particular) have proven to end users that they can consistently source and supply high quality Australian beef and lamb.

The mainstream end users include large scale butchers, further processors, cash and carry's (foodservice supermarkets), retail stores and foodservice outlets.

For lamb, the main market remains the UK, while Australian beef is balanced across the EU continent, with grainfed shipments typically making up the most cuts.

As beef and lamb prices at foodservice and retail increase, consumption comes under pressure as consumers are still feeling the pinch of the economic downturn. Although price conscious, customers are prepared to pay high prices, provided the quality meets or exceeds expectations.

The emergence of the "foodie" has led to a renewed focus of online red meat sales and niche marketing opportunities. These consumers (mid-30s, dual income households who love cooking shows and don't have time to shop) are emerging as a target for a growing home delivery segment and internet sales.

Australia has taken advantage of this by continuing to consistently deliver high quality product, which in turn has been a big driver of increased demand.

To complement this, MLA's marketing programs have focused on raising the awareness of Australia as a high quality red meat producer with consistent year-round supply.

Sheep projections

Lamb outlook remains bright

For the first six months of 2014, the Australian lamb industry was, once again, one of the shining lights of Australian agriculture.

While Australian sheepmeat supplies are forecast to be lower, the demand outlook looks positive, with strong growth in export demand, especially from Asia, the US and the Middle East drawing lamb away from the domestic market.

Strong export demand absorbed historically high kill numbers in 2013 and was reflected in favourable comparative returns to Australian lamb producers.

The record drought-induced lamb slaughter in 2013, combined with lower joining rates, is expected to tighten lamb supplies later this year and into 2015. As a result, lamb production in 2014 is forecast to decline 1.6% year-on-year, to 462,000 tonnes cwt (see figure 1).

The lower production is underpinned by a forecast 3.1% decrease in lamb slaughter for the year – slightly offset by an increase in carcase weights.

Even though the forecast for El Niño conditions for the second half of 2014 has weakened, concerns about the potential for a dry finish to the year in southern Australia continue to have a significant impact on producers' expectations and plans heading into 2015.

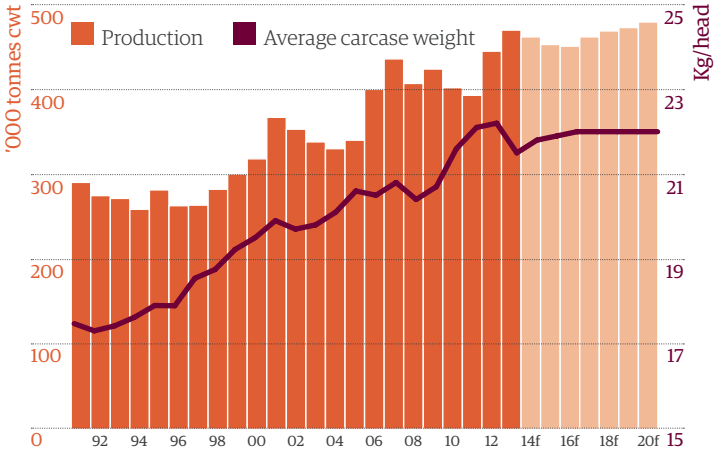
However, given the underlying confidence in the lamb industry, the national flock is forecast to increase gradually from 2015 to 77 million head by 2020, following a reduction of 2.7% to 72.2 million head as at 30 June 2014 (see figure 2).

Sheep slaughter is expected to be lower in 2014, given the rise in slaughter levels in 2013 and forecast to be back 7.4% year-on-year, at 8.9 million head. In line with tightened supplies, mutton production is forecast to contract 7.8% on last year, to 200,000 tonnes cwt (see figure 3).

Domestic lamb consumption in the Australian market is forecast to fall 6.4% year-on-year, to 206,000 tonnes cwt in 2014.

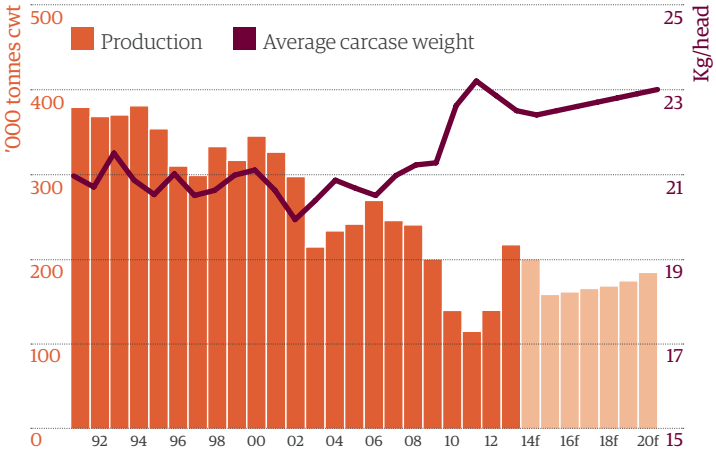
Growing global demand, coupled with reduced available supplies from New Zealand throughout the year, is expected to see total lamb shipments set a new calendar year record in 2014, at 218,000 tonnes swt, up 2% year-on-year – accounting for 55% of Australia's lamb production for the year (see figure 4).

Figure 1 Australian lamb production



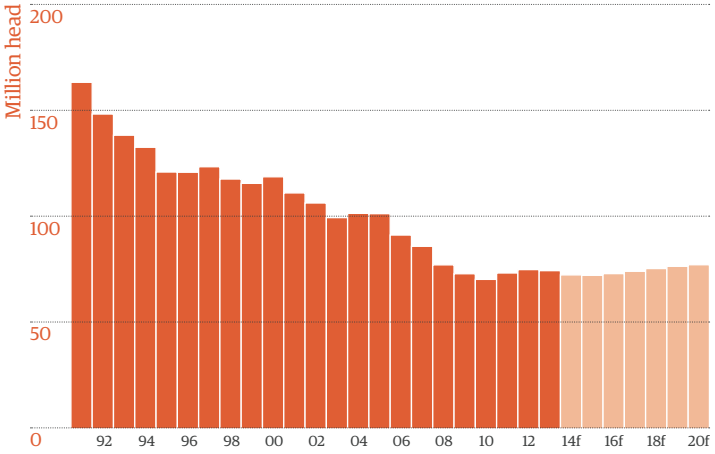
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, MLA forecasts *f = forecast*

Figure 3 Australian mutton production



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, MLA forecasts *f = forecast*

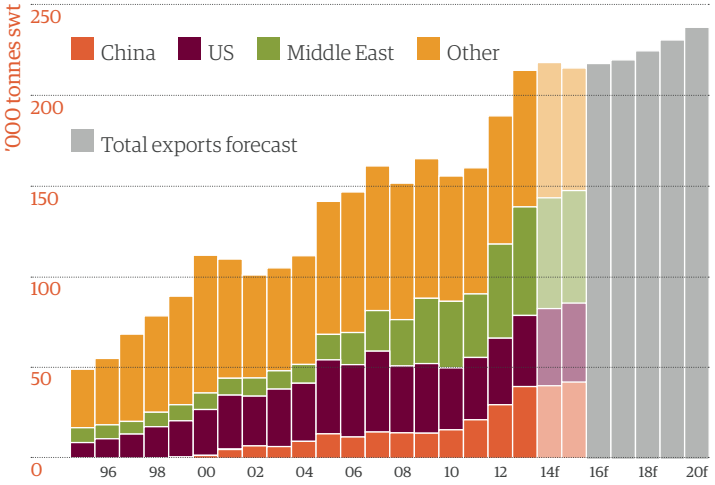
Figure 2 Australian sheep flock



As at 31 March up until 1999, then as at 30 June from 2000

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, MLA forecasts *f = forecast*

Figure 4 Australian lamb exports



Source: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, MLA forecasts *f = forecast*

Shipments to the Middle East are projected to reach 61,000 tonnes swt in 2014, up 2% on last year, with most markets in the region maintaining a strong buying pattern despite rising prices and robust competition, as well as a strong Australian dollar.

Similarly, lamb exports to the US are forecast to increase in 2014, up 8% year-on-year, to total 42,500 tonnes swt – the highest annual total to the US since 2007. A positive development in the US lamb trade so far in 2014 has been the increasing proportion of chilled lamb in the export mix.

During the first six months of the year, lamb exports to China were consistently above year-ago levels, with the growth in shipments largely attributed to the booming demand for hot pot in the foodservice sector. Lamb exports to China for 2014 are forecast to total 40,000 tonnes swt – 1% higher than the record volume of 2013.

Mutton shipments are projected to decline 7% in 2014, to 160,000 tonnes swt, underpinned by lower available supplies.

Similar to lamb, most mutton markets in the Middle East have had increased trade volumes so far in 2014, with total shipments to the region forecast at 44,000 tonnes swt for 2014 – 8% higher than the previous year. In contrast, mutton exports to China are expected to be 17% lower year-on-year, to 48,000 tonnes swt in 2014, with tighter supplies from Australia impacting shipment volumes.

Adding to the positive outlook for lamb demand over the medium term is a steady recovery in livestock export demand, helped by the reopening of potentially large markets, particularly in the Middle East. Australian live sheep exports are forecast to reach 2.3 million head in 2014, up 16.6% on the 1.97 million head exported in 2013.

Tim McRae, MLA
E: tmcrae@mla.com.au

Read the *2014 Sheep Industry Projections – mid-year update* at **www.mla.com.au/Australian-sheep-industry-projections**

Sydney, NSW // MLA Challenge finale

After 12 months of working on their respective businesses, the MLA Challengers took time out to celebrate with each other, their mentors, sponsors and the judges at the MLA Challenge finale dinner in July.

All participants were congratulated on the changes, both small and large, they made to their businesses and the involvement acknowledged.

The winners of the People's Choice Award, Andrew and Megan Miller, and the overall MLA Challenge, John and Annie Ramsay, were announced at the event.

The MLA Challenge sponsors were Woolworths, Westpac and QantasLink and media partner Fairfax Rural Press.

More information: www.mla.com.au/challenge

MLA Challenge winners, Tasmanian producers, John and Annie Ramsay with MLA Managing Director Richard Norton.

The MLA Challengers. From left – Andrew and Megan Miller, Matthew and Angela Pearce, Lachlan and Anna Hughes, John and Annie Ramsay, Bill and Georgia Wilson, Marcus and Shannon Sounness.

MLA Challenge People's Choice Award winners Andrew and Megan Miller.

Upcoming events

Find more events and information at **www.mla.com.au/events**

Red Meat Advisory Council Regional Consultation workshops

Be part of the Red Meat Advisory Council's consultation process where producers, processors and livestock exporters can help inform and identify the limiting factors and future opportunities facing their sectors.

When and where:

17 September, Katherine NT
17 September, Launceston Tas
23 September, Toowoomba Qld
25 September, Rockhampton Qld
26 September, Townsville Qld
30 September, Armidale NSW
1 October, Charleville Qld
2 October, Perth WA
9 October, Broken Hill NSW
13 October, Wagga Wagga NSW
14 October, Attwood Vic
16 October, Hamilton Vic

More information: Angus Hobson // E: angus@rmac.com.au
www.rmac.com.au

South Australia//Farm Communication workshop

Improved communication in the workplace and business transition were the focus of a workshop held in South Australia's mid north – the first of three workshops the Women in Wool group is hosting with co-funding from Making More from Sheep (MMfS) and Sheep Connect South Australia and supported by Partners in Grain – a Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) initiative.

The deliverers, from Ag Consulting Co, stimulated group discussion throughout the day giving the participants some 'real life' scenarios to consider. The workshop also linked closely with the MMfS module, Capable Confident Producers (Module 4), with participants engaging with a number of tools from the module.

Communication specialist Judy Wilkinson was one of the authors of the GRDC publication *A Guide to Communication for Farm Families* and gave the group examples of how she is able to assist farming families during transitional periods.

To make the event more 'family friendly', childcare was offered and children were welcome in the room.

More information: organiser Nat Sommerville // T: 0427 507 132 or South Australian MMfS State Coordinator, Natasha Morley // T: 08 8841 4500 E: natasha.morley@makingmorefromsheep.com.au

www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au

Workshop participants Mary Hall and Ruth Sommerville with MMfS SA Coordinator Natasha Morley.

Working on communications in South Australia.

Download *A Guide to Communication for Farm Families* at:
www.grdc.com.au/Resources/Bookshop/2011/01/A-Guide-to-Communication-for-Farm-Families

Bred Well Fed Well

A hands-on workshop about breeding and feeding to make more money. Topics include: improving ewe nutrition, developing a breeding goal, developing a feed budget and breeding better ewes.

When and where: 19 September, Curban NSW

Bookings and for more information:
RSVP by 16 September, David and Danielle Bonnington // T: 0402 211 657
E: bonnayr@hotmail.com,
Chad Taylor // T: 0458 453 608
E: chad@mumblebone.com.au
www.mla.com.au/events

BeefEx 2014

BeefEx is the Australian Lot Feeders' Association's pinnacle event, with a program that is designed to encourage big and creative thinking and embrace the odd elephant in the room.

When and where:
7–9 October, Gold Coast Queensland

Bookings and for more information:
1800 177 636 or
www.feedlots.com.au

MLA Annual General Meeting 2014

At MLA's AGM and Producer Forum the MLA Chairman and Managing Director will present a full update on the company over the last financial year. The Producer Forum will provide members with the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the activities that the company is involved in and the opportunities that exist for their business.

When and where:
13 November, Chatswood NSW

More information:
www.mla.com.au/agm

MLA IS YOUR COMPANY HAVE YOUR SAY...

MLA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND PRODUCER FORUM

Thursday
13 November

The Concourse
409 Victoria Avenue
Chatswood
Sydney, NSW

Action dates

2 October	**Return your levies notice or lodge online to receive your full voting entitlement** **Submit your nomination form for the MLA Board Selection Committee** **Last day to sign up for MLA membership to participate in the 2014 AGM**
7 November	Submit your questions on notice for the AGM at **www.mla.com.au/agm**
11 November	Return your proxy form or submit online by 2.00pm AEDT
13 November	Attend the MLA AGM and Producer Forum

For more information visit www.mla.com.au/agm or call 1800 675 717

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MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA