

FEEDBACK

MLA – FOSTERING PROSPERITY

DECEMBER 2020/JANUARY 2021



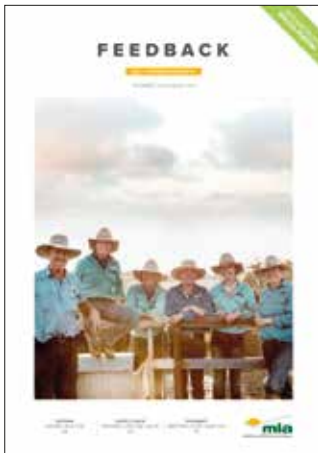
ON FARM
GAINING AN EDGE
24

SUPPLY CHAIN
PROVING CARCASE VALUE
43

IN MARKET
MEETING COVID HEAD-ON
40

FEEDBACK

MLA fosters the long-term prosperity of the Australian red meat and livestock industry by delivering world-class research, development and marketing outcomes.



Cover (page 40): Western Queensland beef producers Dan and Karen Penfold and their daughters Bonnie, Molly, Jemima and Matilda, used MLA CoMarketing support to reposition their 'Four Daughters' beef brand during COVID-19. Image: Josh Kelly from Jack Harlem Photography.

Have your say!

We'd love to hear from you

✉ info@mla.com.au

☎ 02 9463 9333

🌐 mla.com.au

📱 @meatandlivestockaustralia

🐔 @meatlivestock

📺 meatandlivestock

Feedback is produced and published by Meat & Livestock Australia Ltd (ABN 39 081 678 364).

MLA acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

This magazine was printed on Sumo Offset Laser, an environmentally responsible paper manufactured under the environmental management system ISO 14001 using Elemental Chlorine Free (ECF) pulp sourced from sustainable forests. Sumo Offset Laser is FSC Chain of Custody (CoC) certified (mixed sources).

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in Feedback are not necessarily those of MLA, its employees or agents. Feedback content is provided as information not as advice and you should make your own enquiries before making decisions concerning your interests. All material in Feedback is copyright. Reproduction of the material is encouraged, however due acknowledgement to Feedback is required.

A NOTE FROM THE MD...



Welcome to the December/January edition of Feedback magazine where we take an up-close look at a critical factor affecting the longevity of our industry – sustainability (see pages 20–36).

Red meat producers and industry representatives tuned in to MLA's 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 19 November – the first time this event has been held exclusively online.

This year's AGM was going to be held in Toowoomba, but in July we decided to make it a virtual event due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. The AGM followed a free, five-part webinar series hosted by MLA, which focused on redefining resilience (see page 7).

As I mentioned in my address at the AGM, 2020 will be remembered as a year of great historical significance.

Red meat supply chains have been under extreme pressure and although the devastation from COVID-19 will be felt across many industries for many decades to come, our industry remains in a strong position (see pages 6–7).

Despite the challenges shared globally, we have seen countless examples of hard work, resilience and unity shine through. This certainly applies to our industry (see pages 40–42). While hard work and resilience is nothing new for red meat producers, we have much to gain if we are more united in the face of adversity.

Our industry faces many challenges. They include natural disasters, climate volatility, pests and diseases, trade tensions, global competition, political uncertainty, alternative proteins, and the

denigration of our industry by those with vested interests.

With those challenges before us, together with the negativity of some within our own industry, you could easily be forgiven for thinking the sky is falling – but it's really not.

After enduring horrendous conditions during the past three years, the red meat industry has emerged in fantastic shape with a very promising outlook. Many years of work into diversifying our red meat markets paid off this year, as pandemic woes and geopolitical tensions are ridden out with minimal disruptions to export volumes and values.

Australian red meat is highly regarded around the world – our reputation for delivering on eating quality, traceability, sustainability, food safety and of course taste, is second to none (see pages 38–39).

With a forecast global protein shortage and demand set to grow at unparalleled levels as consumers become increasingly affluent, we are looking at a three- to five-year window of prosperity.

Given this, for me, I see our greatest challenge is how our whole industry can be united in seizing the opportunity this unprecedented global demand for protein provides.

However, it is only by working together more effectively that we will reach our true potential. ■

Have a question for me?

Jason Strong

MLA Managing Director

✉ E: jstrong@mla.com.au

CONTENTS

COVER STORY

- 40** Helping red meat brand owners ride the COVID-19 curve

IN BRIEF

- 5** Mapping out the road to CN30
- 5** Seasonal toolkits to keep you a step ahead
- 6** Positive outlook for red meat
- 8** Year in review

SUSTAINABILITY FEATURE

- 20** Why sustainability matters from paddock to plate
- 22** Genetics and vegetation part of carbon neutral recipe
- 24** CEO mindset helps producers plan for the future
- 25** Are you ready for the new normal?
- 26** Polled gene testing for a more sustainable herd
- 27** Back on track and better than ever
- 28** Clare has the 'perfect' solution to attract youth to ag
- 29** Leading the industry forward
- 30** A bright future in agricultural research
- 31** How red meat fits into a healthy, sustainable diet
- 33** Red meat's positive perception grows
- 34** 'Clean' isn't a dirty word for WA beef and lamb brand
- 36** Grand plans for a better beef brand

ON FARM*

NORTHERN CATTLE

- 10** Five steps to a productive wet season and beyond
- 14** Tips to tap into leucaena benefits
- 15** Leucaena lifts its weight
- 19** Genomic selection driving fertility

SOUTHERN CATTLE

- 11** Tips for Victorian producers to improve MSA compliance

SHEEP

- 12** Down the track: John and Annie Ramsay
- 16** Lamb finishing: is it worth it?
- 17** Brassica convert boosts lamb weights
- 18** Tom's lamb survival mission is possible

IN MARKET

- 38** Red meat perfectly positioned for post-pandemic health boom

SUPPLY CHAIN

- 43** Measurement technologies drive new supply chain benefits
- 44** ALMTech serves up red meat innovations
- 46** Building a sustainable future
- 47** A roast fit for Christmas

Correction: In the September/October 2020 edition of *Feedback*, page 10, one of the project snapshots was incorrect. It should have read:

X marks the spot: Multi-energy X-ray Absorptiometry (MEXA) technology has demonstrated the ability to measure shear force and intramuscular fat percentage in lamb, which could support implementation of cuts-based MSA grading of lamb carcasses.

*Many of the on-farm articles in this edition appear within the sustainability feature.



Record-breaking year for MSA



A record-breaking 3.8 million cattle were graded through Australia's globally recognised eating quality grading program, Meat Standards Australia (MSA) in 2019–20, representing 46% of the national adult cattle slaughter and an increase of 3% on the previous year.

It's the highest number of cattle graded in a year since MSA's inception in 1998, according to the 2019–20 MSA *Annual Outcomes Report*.

MSA delivered an estimated \$172 million in additional farm gate returns to MSA beef producers in 2019–20. Based on the average carcase weight of 279kg of MSA cattle in 2019–20, MSA beef producers potentially received an estimated \$75 per head in additional returns for young, non-grainfed cattle and \$35 per head for cattle that met grainfed specifications. ■

Download the *MSA Annual Outcomes Report* at mla.com.au/msa-annual-outcomes

Summer listening guide



Have you caught up on the latest MLA podcasts?

Episode 5 of MLA's *Feedback* podcast is now available and covers:

- Connecting Australian consumers and red meat production, with South Australian sheep and grain producer, Natalie Sommerville
- Building a carbon neutral brand, with MLA Program Manager – Sustainability and CN30, Doug McNicholl and NAPCo General Manager – Corporate and Commercial, Stephen Moore
- A cuts-based MSA sheepmeat model is in sight, with MSA Program Manager, David Packer and Murdoch University Emeritus Professor, David Pethick.

MLA's other podcast, *On the ground*, covers the latest from international markets. ■

Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts or visit: mla.com.au/feedback-podcast and mla.com.au/on-the-ground



New dung beetles fly in from Morocco

A new species of dung beetle has landed in Australia, signalling a landmark stage in the Dung Beetle Ecosystem Engineers (DBEE) project, which is supported by MLA.

More than 300 of the *Onthophagus andalusicus* beetles recently arrived at Canberra's CSIRO importation facility after starting their journey from their native Morocco in 2019. The beetles underwent stringent cleaning and rearing in a facility based in Southern France prior to their arrival in Australia.

This species is active in late winter and spring, in both beef and sheep dung, and it is expected to thrive in the climatic conditions of central and southern WA, south-east SA, north-west Victoria and central and south-west NSW. ■

For more information about the DBEE project visit dungbeetles.com.au

Forums coming soon

After a hiatus in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, the red meat industry's MeatUp and BeefUp forums will be back in 2021.

These events are developed by producers for producers. They give attendees the chance to hear about leading research, technologies and tools, and deliver regionally relevant insights to drive business profitability and productivity.

The forums provide a unique opportunity for producers, expert speakers, advisors and researchers from the red meat industry to come together to share information and build networks.

MeatUp forums are held across southern Australia for beef, sheep and goat producers. BeefUp forums are held across northern Australia for beef producers.

Events are scheduled to take place in SA, NSW, WA, NT and Queensland throughout the year, beginning in February. ■

For more information, visit mla.com.au/meatup and mla.com.au/beefup



Save the date

**Beef Australia 2021
Rockhampton
May 2 – 8**

For more information visit beefaustralia.com.au



Mapping out the road to CN30

The Australian red meat and livestock industry has released its Carbon Neutral by 2030 (CN30) Roadmap, reinforcing its reputation as a global leader in sustainable food production.

CN30 is an ambitious target for the Australian red meat and livestock industry to achieve net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030. This means that by 2030, the industry aims to make no net release of GHG emissions into the atmosphere.

CN30 provides consumers, customers and the community with a world-leading offering to reduce net emissions from the red meat industry and be the trusted source of the highest quality protein.

CN30 aligns with doubling the value of red meat sales as the trusted source of the highest quality protein, under the Red Meat Advisory Council's *Red Meat 2030* strategy.

Research undertaken by a consortium of organisations led by CSIRO has

shown it's possible for the Australian red meat and livestock industry to achieve CN30 while maintaining animal numbers, through continued efforts to avoid greenhouse gas emissions and store carbon in vegetation and soils.

The *CN30 Roadmap* describes what a carbon neutral Australian red meat industry means, why industry has set the target, the work areas industry will focus on between now and 2030, and how the industry can execute those work areas.

MLA will take a lead role in working with all stakeholders in the search for opportunities for the industry to transition to a carbon neutral future. ■

✉ To keep across the latest news and opportunities to get involved, sign up for the CN30 newsletter by contacting CN30@mla.com.au

🖥 For more information on CN30, visit mla.com.au/CN30

CN30

What will the CN30 initiative deliver?

Achieving CN30 will deliver multiple benefits to the industry, the environment, livestock, customers, consumers and the community.

Benefits for industry:

- increased productivity and reduced net GHG emissions through adoption of novel technologies and practices on-farm, in feedlots and for processing facilities
- improved drought resilience through adoption of technologies and practices that boost soil health and improve soil moisture utilisation
- increased value capture from low carbon or carbon neutral red meat products.

Benefits for the environment:

- a reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions from the red meat industry, alongside enhanced

biodiversity and stewardship of natural resources.

Benefits for livestock:

- improved animal health and wellbeing through improved availability of nutritious feeds and access to shade and shelter.

Benefits for consumers:

- knowledge that Australian red meat production and consumption is environmentally responsible.

Benefits for communities and government:

- knowledge that the red meat industry is making a substantial contribution to Australia's international commitments on climate change. ■



Seasonal toolkits to keep you a step ahead

MLA's one-stop online seasonal hubs continue to grow, with a suite of resources for producers to support on-farm decision making through summer and into autumn.

A northern wet season and a southern summer hub have been added to the suite and combine seasonal tips and tools covering key management practices specific to different production types and regions.

Here's a snapshot of the topics on the summer hubs, supported by guides, case studies and tools.

Northern wet season hub

- strategies for wet season spelling
- reducing parasite and disease risks in your herd
- reducing calf loss
- managing the impacts of extreme weather events or seasonal conditions.

Southern summer hub

- options for filling the summer feed gap
- tips for setting up a containment feeding system
- managing the impacts of extreme weather events or seasonal conditions
- bushfire preparedness and recovery.

MLA has developed other online hubs for producers, saving time searching for resources, including for:

- livestock genetics: genetics.mla.com.au
- mental health support: mla.com.au/mental-health
- dung beetles: mla.com.au/dung-beetles
- leucaena: mla.com.au/leucaena
- phosphorus: mla.com.au/phosphorus
- COVID-19: mla.com.au/covid-19-resources
- pain relief: mla.com.au/pain-relief ■

🖥 mla.com.au/seasonal-hubs

Positive outlook for red meat



Directors Alan Beckett, Andrew Michael and Russell Lethbridge were re-elected to the MLA Board.

At MLA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 19 November, MLA Managing Director Jason Strong outlined the strong position of Australia's red meat industry and the positive outlook.

"After enduring drought, fire, floods and a global pandemic, the Australian red meat industry has emerged in fantastic shape with a very promising outlook," Jason said.

"MLA will continue to protect and promote your credentials as red meat producers and proud custodians of our land and livestock, but we will do so with maturity and perspective, backed up by facts and insights."

As part of the formal proceedings of the AGM, MLA members voted to re-elect three directors to the MLA Board:

- Victorian cattle producer, professional services expert in audit, corporate services and risk management, and current MLA Chair Alan Beckett
- Queensland cattle producer and northern cattle production systems specialist Russell Lethbridge
- South Australian sheepmeat and wool producer Andrew Michael, who specialises in sheep and cattle breeding techniques.

MLA members also voted on the election of three producer representatives to the MLA Board Selection Committee:

- Daniel Radel was elected as the cattle producer representative
- Tony Fitzgerald was elected as the lot feeder cattle representative
- Mark Wootton was elected as the sheep producer representative. ■

Watch the recording of the MLA AGM at mla.com.au/AGM-speech

Where are the big projects up to?

Here's an update on how the big industry projects have progressed since they were announced at previous MLA AGMs.

CN30

- ✓ CN30 Roadmap launched
- ✓ producer carbon accounting workshops delivered
- ✓ novel feed and supplement research trials underway.

Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA)

- ✓ five lamb and two beef units installed or under construction
- ✓ fast-track plan for a further nine DEXA units.

Australian Beef's Olympic and Paralympic partnership

- ✓ Virtual Classroom schools' program delivered to more than 3,000 students
- ✓ Virtual Classroom program extended into 2021 to introduce cooking into classroom sessions.

Accelerated Adoption Initiative

- ✓ \$7.4 million invested into the initiative to date
- ✓ 200 producers attended the Bred Well Fed Well at no cost
- ✓ increased uptake of Sheep Genetics analysis resulting in improved overall data quality
- ✓ spike in adoption of key Livestock Production Assurance products.

More information on these major projects is available at:

CN30: mla.com.au/CN30

DEXA: turn to page 44–45

Australian Beef Olympic and Paralympic partnership: australianbeef.com.au/campaigns/olympics

Accelerated Adoption Initiative: mla.com.au/AAI



MLA AGM highlights

MLA Managing Director Jason Strong provided an update on key MLA projects at the 2020 AGM.

Driving demand for red meat in Australia

Production has started on MLA's latest summer lamb campaign which will launch in early January. As anticipated, this campaign will be topical, tongue-in-cheek and will hero lamb as the meat of choice to unite us. You never know, it might even include Sam Kekovich driving an army tank.

MLA's 'Beef. The Greatest.' summer campaign is in full swing with a three-part video series featuring 'The Beef BBQ Squad' providing tips, tricks and inspiration to help Australians take their BBQ pride to the next level this summer.

MLA's sponsorship of MasterChef in 2020 attracted the biggest entertainment audience of the year, reaching 12.4 million viewers, almost doubling traffic to the Australian Beef website and resulting in a majority of viewers feeling more favourable about Australian Beef.

For more information visit australianbeef.com.au and australianlamb.com.au

International markets

Against a backdrop of increasing global competition, MLA's focus remains on building relationships, driving consumer demand and improving market access.

Japan has regained the top position as Australia's largest beef market in both volume and value – MLA's priority is to ensure Australian red meat is front of mind for Japanese consumers.

MLA's largest annual consumer campaign in Japan reinforces the messaging that 'Aussie Beef is Genki' which translates as 'Aussie beef is good for health, vigour and the spirit'.

Turn to page 38 for more information.

Livestock exports

MLA continues to invest in the Livestock Export Program, which funds research and development to improve animal health, welfare and productivity throughout the livestock export supply chain.

If counted as a single market, live export would be Australia's fourth largest export market. It's worth \$1.8 billion a year and represents 10% of the Australian livestock industry's export sales.

The live export trade is incredibly valuable for Australia's industry and has played a vital role in opening markets that have grown to become significant for Australian boxed beef, such as Korea.

Research, development and adoption

All MLA research programs will have clear adoption and extension pathways from the start, so that red meat producers can successfully implement practical solutions for their farm businesses.

MLA launched the Northern Breeding Business program in 2020. It aims to deliver an additional \$20m a year in net benefits by 2027 to northern beef enterprises by improving reproductive rates, decreasing mortality, increasing turn-off weight and improving genetic potential in northern herds.

The Sheep Reproduction Strategic Partnership also launched in 2020. It's a long-term program of work aimed at improving sheep reproductive performance and ewe and lamb survival, through optimising management of pregnant ewes, increasing weaning rates and decreasing lamb and ewe mortality. ■

Tune in and redefine resilience

In the lead up to the 2020 AGM, MLA hosted a free, five-part webinar series providing updates, insights and inspiration for a resilient future for Australia's red meat and livestock businesses.

You can watch – or re-watch – the recordings and access resources to build the profitability and resilience of your business at updates.mla.com.au

MLA Updates webinar snapshots

Redefining resilience through producer innovation



Practical, outcomes-focused advice for producers wanting to be leaders in change and innovation. Learn how using genetic information can improve the profitability and resilience of your business through selected livestock traits.

Redefining resilience through sustainability



Adopt new research outcomes to contribute to a sustainable future for Australian red meat. Learn more about the CN30 Roadmap and what post-farm gate innovation is happening to improve the sustainability of red meat.

Redefining resilience through innovation across the value chain



Diversify and develop on and off-farm practices that customers, consumers and the community perceive as beneficial to contribute to greater economic and environmental resilience for our industry.

Redefining resilience through growing market opportunities



Hear positive stories about how Australian red meat is positioned strongly for future market growth, despite COVID-19 disruptions. Understand the global red meat market and know what consumers want in order to improve, build and develop your business.

Building resilience through community trust in the red meat and livestock industry



Understand how the community perceives the Australian red meat industry and the work industry is doing to maintain community trust and confidence in red meat products through effective marketing and communications.



YEAR IN REVIEW

Haven't had a chance to read MLA's Annual Report 2019-20 yet?

Here are some highlights from major projects MLA led, managed or contributed to in 2019-20. For more, visit: mla.com.au/annualreport

\$6.35m

worth of new R&D investment funded through the producer-driven annual call process



>\$100m

expected in additional returns to the Australian red meat industry from the easing of shelf-life restrictions in the Middle East



Sheep genetics data now easier for producers to access due to database improvements

56.7%

reduction in CO₂ emissions by Australia's beef industry since 2005



\$172m

in additional farm gate returns through Meat Standards Australia



MLA's school resources were accessed by students and teachers

15,500

times



MLA's Strategic Plan 2025 was launched

New mobile-friendly electronic National Vendor Declaration (eNVD) system launched, making it easier to complete livestock consignments



102

producers received access to one-on-one support following natural disasters



27

new beef and lamb dishes were added to Australia's top three commercial caterers' menus following MLA masterclasses



ON FARM

RESEARCH IN ACTION



NATIONAL
SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS
20

NORTHERN CATTLE
LEUCAENA TIPS
14

SOUTHERN CATTLE
CARBON NEUTRAL FUTURE
22

SHEEP
FAST-TRACK TURN-OFF
16

Five steps to a productive wet season and beyond

As manager of ‘Lara Downs’, a 33,000ha property north of Julia Creek, beef producer Colin Burnett knows all too well the impacts a variable climate can have on production.

Here, Colin shares some timely tips for building business resilience:

1. Focus on grazing land management strategies and nutrition

“I manage the amount of feed available at all times to ensure there’s a margin of safety with the quantity and quality of feed. Good groundcover also gives us the chance to provide agistment for extra cash flow,” he said.

Due to the variable wet season, Colin gives all paddocks a spell every second wet season rather than strict rotational grazing. Maintaining good groundcover enables paddocks to be spelled to rejuvenate. He uses plain-wire electric fences to keep cattle in areas where there’s been a reasonable season.

“Conservative grazing land management strategies give us plenty of options during the dry season so we’re not forced to sell, allowing us to be price makers rather than price takers.”

Colin sets clear decision points to assess how the wet season has performed.

“Mid-February is the key wet season decision point where, if the season hasn’t been good enough, cattle are sold to avoid running into trouble with grass later in the year.”

Changing strategies around production feeding has allowed Colin to improve turn-off time and enhance grass production, removing unnecessary seasonal risks from his operation.

“From the middle of the year a big flood, drought or average wet can happen by the end of the year. We feed small weaners through to October so we can sell to live export before the break of the season. This way, they’re gone before either drought or flood,” Colin said.

“Nutrition has been a game changer. We understand what’s in the soil and monitor grass at different times of year to see how cattle respond to it in terms of performance.”

Colin watches the commodities market to find the most economical feed concentrates available, such as whole cottonseed meal, grain and molasses, to maximise profit.

2. Maximise breeder efficiency

Colin has increased weaning rates from 50% to 68% after deciding to wean down to 100kg on a breeding block separate to Lara Downs, giving the cows a chance to return to body condition to rebreed and boost calf survival.

“There are two rounds of weaning a year at the breeding block, with

weaners anywhere between 100–200kg live weight. Good quality lucerne hay is fed to fresh weaners for six weeks to get them to market weight more quickly,” Colin said.

On the more productive Lara Downs country, higher weaning rates and better growth paths provide replacement heifers and heavier weaners from the core breeding herd.

“At Lara there’s an 80–85% weaning rate, with three weaning rounds per year. We wean down to 180kg, monitoring the body condition score of the cow. We keep breeders around condition score three or over at calving so they can be back in calf again before weaning.

“The heavier (180–220kg) weaners go straight onto fresh spelled grass. A 10% urea block in the yards, along with their hay, kicks their rumen into gear before they go onto better feed.”

3. Diversify to boost resilience

The average rainfall variability is 42% at Julia Creek, which means breeding operations at Lara Downs can be quite risky due to the enterprise’s high dependence on steady rainfall.

Trading cattle ensures some drought and ‘market shock’ resilience which allows Colin to focus on using seasonal pasture growth and selling down (reducing cattle numbers) when it’s dry.

About 40% of Lara Downs’ turn-off is destined for live export markets, with the remaining 60% sold into



Northern beef producer Colin Burnett at Lara Downs, Julia Creek.
Image: Colin Burnett

feedlots, abattoirs and local restockers.

4. Keep hormone and disease management in check

Focusing on improving the herd through hormone and disease management allows Colin to make sure even the smallest and lightest cattle are of reasonable quality.

Hormone and disease management strategies include:

- every Brahman female (except for replacement heifers) receives hormone growth promotants
- all cattle receive an annual botulism vaccine
- bulls are vaccinated for vibrio
- young cattle get Dectomax® Pour-On for internal and external parasites.

5. Invest in your people

“We place importance on upskilling and training people in the business to ensure our business continues to grow,” Colin said.

Tips for Victorian producers to improve MSA compliance

Victorian beef producers targeting Meat Standards Australia (MSA) requirements are coming into what's historically the most challenging time of the year for achieving MSA compliance.

The 2019 Australian Beef Eating Quality Insights report has revealed that average MSA non-compliance for Victorian producers throughout 2017–19 was 4.4%, peaking in February and March 2019 at 7.7% as a result of high pH, which is meat pH greater than 5.70.

Ultimate pH is heavily influenced by on-farm practices and there are two major components to this: nutrition and stress.

Carcase pH levels are driven by muscle glycogen, which is built up through good nutrition and then depleted by stress and exercise.

Here are some tips to address issues of non-compliance to pH:

- maximise the amount of glycogen at the point of slaughter by optimising nutrition and minimising stress
- monitor feed on offer and pasture quality to achieve the desired rate of growth and a rising plane of nutrition
- ensure cattle are achieving growth rates of at least 0.9kg/day, to help reduce the risk of dark cutting
- a high-energy ration for at least 30 days before slaughter can increase muscle glycogen and reduce the risk of dark cutting.

Other strategies in the lead-up to slaughter include:


- muster and handle stock as quietly and efficiently as possible
- familiarise animals to handling and train stock persons in handling skills
- maintain animals in their social groups – don't mix mobs within 14 days of dispatch
- ensure livestock always have access to water prior to consignment. ■

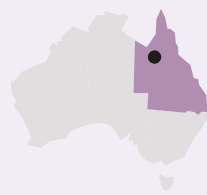
✉ Laura Garland
E: lgarland@mla.com.au

🖥 To access MSA carcass feedback, order MSA vendor declarations or brush up on MSA standards and training, visit myMSA.com.au



SNAPSHOT:

Colin Burnett,
Julia Creek,
Queensland 



Area:
36,400ha

Enterprise:
Backgrounding and
fattening cattle

Livestock:
4,000 Brahman-cross cattle

Pasture:
Open Mitchell grass downs

Soil:
Cracking clays, river plains

Rainfall:
520mm annual average
(963mm received in
February 2019)

✉ Colin Burnett
E: col_burnett@
hotmail.com

🖥 mla.com.au/weaning
Read Colin Burnett's
Nuffield report at
[nuffield.com.au/
colin-burnett-2018](http://nuffield.com.au/colin-burnett-2018)

Hear Colin share
how he's built
business resilience
and his top tips on
preparing for the wet
on MLA's podcast
(episode four):
[mla.com.au/
feedback-podcast](http://mla.com.au/feedback-podcast)

"Focusing on mental health is also vital because I believe you get more out of your employees if you're not pushing them too hard. This way, if a big event happens, you have the mental capacity to respond to it."

Former Nuffield Scholar Colin also makes sure he's regularly upskilling to ensure his business grows. ■

The extended version of this case study was written by Lindsey Perry (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Cloncurry Beef Extension Officer) for *GrazingFutures* and is available at futurebeef.com

GrazingFutures is an initiative of the Queensland Government to improve drought preparedness and resilience for Queensland producers.

Down the track

In this series, *Feedback* catches up with producers who have been profiled in the past to see how their business is evolving in response to new challenges and opportunities.

Looking back

In 2014, Tasmanian sheep producers John and Annie Ramsay won the inaugural MLA Challenge after transforming their business in just 12 months using MLA tools and resources. Their focus on people and rigour in decision-making, as a result of the challenge, has taken their business from strength to strength.



The MLA Challenge participants shared their journey in *Feedback* throughout 2013–14, with the Ramsays named winners in the August 2014 edition.

LESSONS LEARNED

- > Do the research, access all available resources and apply due diligence.
- > Put a good team around you who can support you through any change.
- > Don't procrastinate – positive change is really important for your business.

Looking ahead

Six years ago, Tasmanian sheep producers John and Annie Ramsay were selected for the inaugural MLA Challenge – what they didn't realise was they were embarking on a journey that would reshape their business.

Through the MLA Challenge, a group of six beef and sheep producers set out to improve efficiencies and productivity within their farming operations over 12 months, using the best tools, resources and advice available.

At the time, John and Annie wanted to move into a livestock and cropping system but were unsure how to go about it. They thought the Challenge sounded like a good way to be helped through the process.

Prior to the Challenge, the Ramsays were running about 5,000 ewes. They had 500ha of cropping – poppies and cereals – and were finishing around 1,000 to 2,000 Merino-cross lambs.

Since then, they've increased their turn-off of crossbred lambs to 10,000.

Here's a look at how they did it.

Under the microscope

As part of the Challenge, MLA provided producers with a mentor, farm consultant, tools and resources. Participants – who came from a range of enterprises – were assessed quarterly against various key performance indicators.

These differed for each producer, but for John and Annie included:

- setting the correct stocking rate
- putting the rams out on time
- lamb marking percentage.

MLA looked at how well the producers were using resources and assessed the extent to which they conducted research, drew on their mentors and used MLA's online tools.

They were also judged on how well they conveyed their story, via a quarterly blog and social media.

The Ramsays' mentor and consultant helped them recognise that Merinos weren't the best fit for their wet, exposed irrigation country.

During the MLA Challenge year, in addition to moving away from cropping, they sold their Merinos and moved into composite ewes.

Part of the prize was 12 months' advice from MLA Challenge judge Sam Newsome of Newsome Agriculture at Tamworth, and the Ramsays have retained him as their advisor.

Rigour around decisions

The lessons the Ramsays took from the 12-month Challenge continue to benefit their business today.

The biggest shift has been the rigour John and Annie now apply to their decision-making.

"We'd decide how many ewes we ran on a particular paddock by what 'felt right,'" John said.

"If I'd used MLA resources and put some rigour around the decisions back then, I would have made better decisions and more money."

People power

The Challenge also taught John to focus on the people side of the business.

"I went into the Challenge with a pure production emphasis, but hats off to Sam. He showed me that you need the right team on the ground to get results. That was a real eye opener for us.

"Now when I think 'team', I think about our farm team, but I also think beyond that. It's your agronomist, your accountants, your consultants, your wife or your business partners or the whole HR set-up. It's the people that make it work."



John Ramsay with daughter Matilda.

Goal setting

John and Annie now set goals around measures such as return on assets, soil health, labour efficiency and lambing percentages.

“Our top goal is a return on assets (ROA) managed of more than 5%,” John said.

Other KPIs are:

- lambing percentages above 140%
- lamb growth rates above 200g/day
- stocking rate of about eight ewes/ha
- poppy yields grossing \$4,000/ha
- labour efficiency of one labour unit/7,500 DSE (dry sheep equivalent).

They’re hitting their goals more often than not, apart from the 5% ROA, but John reckons they’re a bit hard on themselves with this measure as they record some labour and expenses as direct costs, when they are actually capital costs.

Networks

Following the Challenge, John founded the Fat Ewe Group, a group of seven producers who are graduates of the Lifetime Ewe Management course.

The group, who all operate composite ewes and irrigation systems, meet seven times a year with one visit to each farm.

“It’s been terrific. There are no silver bullets, unfortunately, but it’s been educational on many fronts. It’s great to learn through that process.”

Tools and resources

John was introduced to MLA’s stocking rate calculator during the Challenge and has continued to use it for lambing and to determine how many ewes to run per hectare.

He also uses an Excel-based feed budgeting tool, based on soil and pasture growth rates and livestock consumption information from MLA.

In addition to his producer group and industry publications, John sources information from MLA’s website, MLA’s Facebook and *Friday Feedback*.


Since completing the Challenge, the Ramsays bought land they were leasing at Bridport, Tasmania. They’ve also put on two more irrigators at Bothwell and bought some more water.

John said he has realised the value of ‘pushing the envelope’.

“During the Challenge, we really pushed our stocking rate. I thought, ‘I don’t know if we can do this’, but we had all the people and tools and help saying, ‘yes you can’. And it worked.

“Now, we’re always looking to grow the business. That’s one of our goals. The Challenge has taught me to look at every opportunity that arises.” ■

SNAPSHOT:

John and Annie Ramsay, and their children Alex, Henry, William and Matilda, Bothwell and Bridport, Tasmania 



Area:

1,200ha at Bothwell and 800ha at Bridport

Enterprise:

Sheep, 100ha of poppies, 60ha of potatoes plus grain cropping for feed

Livestock:

11,500 composite ewes

Pasture:

Bothwell: 550ha irrigated mix of fodder including ryegrass, white clover and forage brassicas, 450ha dryland pasture
Bridport: Cocksfoot, fescue, phalaris, and sub-clover pastures

Soil:

Ranging from heavy clay loams to sandy loams

Rainfall:

Bothwell: 500mm
Bridport: 750mm

✉ John Ramsay
E: ramsayag@bigpond.com

📺 Read the wrap-up of the MLA Challenge in the August 2014 edition of *Feedback*:
mla.com.au/feedback

Subscribe to *Friday Feedback* and other MLA e-newsletters:
mla.com.au/enews

Check out MLA’s decision-support tools at: mla.com.au/calculators

The Ramsays were one of six families to participate in the MLA Challenge. One of the Challenge participants, Lachlan Hughes from Dulacca, Queensland, sadly passed away in a farming accident in 2018. Lachlan’s family created the Lachlan Hughes Foundation to support leaders in agriculture:
lachlanhughesfoundation.org.au

Tips to tap into leucaena benefits

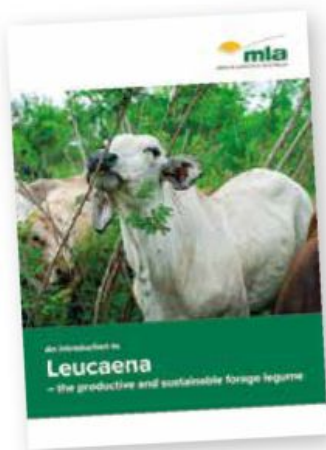
A new edition of the guide *Leucaena – the productive and sustainable forage legume* is being developed to give producers practical information to adopt leucaena-based pasture systems for finishing cattle.

✉ Bron Christensen
E: admin@leucaena.net
Nigel Tomkins
E: ntomkins@mla.com.au

🖥 The Leucaena Code of Practice: leucaena.net/the-leucaena-code-of-practice

Find out more about leucaena establishment and management at The Leucaena Network: leucaena.net

Access leucaena resources, including *An introduction to Leucaena – the productive and sustainable forage legume*, at mla.com.au/leucaena



Here are some of the main considerations for successfully establishing and managing leucaena:



Ensure soils and climate are suitable

Successful leucaena establishment depends on fertile, well-drained soils and good levels of phosphorous and sulphur. Avoid crop failure by matching soil and land type to the requirements of the selected leucaena variety.



Prepare paddocks 6–12 months in advance

Plant leucaena into a clean, weed-free seedbed. This may require cultivating the paddock, up to 12 months in advance, depending on the quality of established grasses in a paddock. This is critical as leucaena seedlings are susceptible to competition from weeds and grasses. High weed competition can double the time to first grazing and permanently stunt plants.



Sow at the appropriate depth

Sow leucaena at a suitable depth, ideally with soil moisture. This may range from 20mm–30mm depending on location and soil type. It's generally accepted that the shallower depth aids germination and emergence, but only where there's sufficient soil moisture.



Carefully manage grazing

Young leucaena seedlings are fragile and should not be grazed until the plant has been able to establish its tap root, at around 1.5m tall. A light graze at this point assists with plant development and branching. Avoid heavy grazing at this point as it will stunt plant growth, remove the plant from the soil, or prevent plant regrowth and development. Leucaena can be more heavily grazed and incorporated into a property's grazing system when plants reach around 2m in height. High-intensity, short-duration rotational grazing is the best practice to maximise leaf production and to manage leucaena height and leafy growth.



Manage for weeds

Carefully monitor leucaena crops and immediately spray out plants that germinate outside of planting zones, including in the inter-rows and outside the paddock. To prevent leucaena going to seed, manage the plant's height with grazing or cutting prior to 18 months of age.



Adhere to the Leucaena Code of Practice

Review and comply with the industry's code of practice. This sets out recommendations such as avoiding planting in riparian zones and flood channels where seed could be dispersed, and to maintain a buffer of strong grass between leucaena rows and between leucaena and external fence lines. ■



Leucaena lifts its weight



Bruce Mayne, pictured with leucaena being grazed in the Fairview trial.
Image: The Leucaena Network

Could leucaena deliver a four-fold increase in production benefits by increasing weight gain and carrying capacity?

An MLA-supported weight gain trial for steers grazing the forage legume, Redlands leucaena, has set out to answer this question and early results are positive.

The trial is being hosted by Redlands leucaena growers and seed producers, Bruce and Lucinda Mayne, at their property 'Fairview' in central Queensland.

The trial began in June 2020, with 80 weaner steers from several local properties grazing a 40ha paddock of Redlands leucaena for a year. The steers' weights are recorded every eight weeks.

Bruce said the first weigh-in recorded average weight gains of 0.28kg/day for the first eight weeks – greater than the 0.1kg daily weight gain of steers on a control block of native grasses, despite the steers being slow to take to the leucaena.

Once the steers settled in, they gained 100kg/head during the first six months of the trial. In comparison, the steers on grass gained

37kg/head over the first six months of the trial.

On this region's native grasses, producers could expect cattle to gain 120kg/year, but those involved in this trial hope to achieve 250kg/head/year on leucaena.

"You can also run twice as many cattle on the leucaena, so there's potentially a four-fold benefit to planting it if you have the right country."

"We're hoping that's something this trial can prove."

The trial will conclude in June 2021, when cattle are sold at the CQLX 2021 Special Weaner and Feeder Sale.

A grower's guide to leucaena

With more than 30 years' experience growing leucaena in central Queensland, Bruce knows the importance of management to ensure the investment pays off.

"Leucaena is expensive to establish and in its early growing stages can be labour-intensive to manage," he said.

Bruce has some tried and tested strategies to successfully establish and manage leucaena.

Paddock selection and preparation

"With leucaena, it's imperative that you have well-drained soil and a weed-free seedbed. Some of our country here wasn't well drained so we've built banks in these areas to grow the leucaena on," Bruce said.

"You also need good levels of phosphorous and sulphur. With phosphorous, 25+ parts per million (ppm) is required to grow leucaena over any length of time."

Planting

Bruce said it's critical to plant leucaena very shallow – no deeper than 30mm – as seed can get lost if it's planted too deep.

Seedling management

The fragile nature of young leucaena plants means they need to be carefully managed from germination until they're about 1.5m high.

"After that, you can start grazing it and planting improved pastures around it for greater paddock productivity."

Weed management

Although leucaena brings many benefits, there's a responsibility when growing it to ensure it doesn't become a weed.

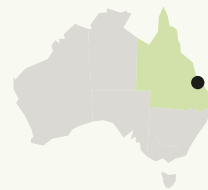
"If you see a bush come up outside the paddock, you need to spray it out immediately," Bruce said.

"It's a continuing but very manageable job."

If producers have the equipment, they can cut leucaena down to keep it from seeding, maintain a manageable height for grazing and reduce shading out grasses below. ■

SNAPSHOT:

Bruce and Lucinda Mayne, 'Fairview', Calliope, Queensland



Area:
1,500ha

Enterprise:
Trade heifers, Redlands leucaena seed producer

Livestock:
1,000 head, range of breeds

Pasture:
Native and improved pastures, Redlands leucaena

Soil:
Heavy loam, light forest soil

Rainfall:
925mm

✉ Bruce Mayne
E: brucemayne@outlook.com

LESSONS LEARNED

- > Leucaena delivers strong production benefits for weight gain and carrying capacity.
- > Manage leucaena carefully until plants are around 1.5m high to reduce risk.
- > Monitor planting area for any escaped plants and spray these out to prevent spread into other areas.

Lamb finishing: is it worth it?

High-performance forage crop and perennial pasture systems were put to the test in NSW's Monaro region in an MLA-funded Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) to see how finishing lambs stacked up compared to the traditional store lamb system.

The result was a tick for farm profitability, with average net profits from establishing and finishing lambs on the pasture and crops ranging from \$305/ha to \$1,492/ha over the two years of the PDS, despite poor seasonal conditions in the second year.

In comparison, the region's traditional system of turning-off lambs as stores by the end of December, at average sale weight of 29kg, had an average total enterprise gross margin of \$161/ha.

This PDS was run by Monaro Farming Systems (MFS) producer group, with technical support from consultant Doug Alcock.

It followed an earlier project by Doug and the group, where they used GrassGro modelling software to quantify the benefits of finishing lambs.

It reflects the changing enterprises in the region, which is traditionally a Merino grazing area.

"In the last decade, as wool prices waned in relation to sheepmeat prices, there's been a lot of opportunistic joining to terminal sires or Border Leicesters," Doug said.

"The vast majority of those animals end up in the store market, unfinished."

MFS chairman John Murdoch said the

group invested in GrassGro modelling to quantify the relative profitability of retaining these store lambs and finishing them on specialised, high quality pastures.

"The modelling showed that in nine out of 10 years you're going to be significantly better off, economically, by finishing lambs on specialised pastures," John said.

The PDS was aimed at giving producers confidence these modelled figures could be replicated in real-life.

Real-world test

The PDS involved 10 paddocks on host properties with pastures and crops in the original modelling:

- lucerne/phalaris/cockfoot
- lucerne
- perennial ryegrass/white clover
- Hummer fescue/white clover/sub-clover
- white clover/lucerne/chicory/plantain
- Winfred forage brassica
- Pallaton Raphno forage brassica
- Leafmore forage brassica
- plantain/chicory
- chicory/plantain/white clover.

All paddocks were grazed with weaned crossbred lambs, with 50 in each mob eID tagged as a monitor group for weighing.

"As the PDS wasn't conducted under strict pasture trial conditions, the systems cannot be directly compared to each other," Doug said.

"However, the results indicate producers on the Monaro should feel confident in the reliability of increased profit from lamb finishing, regardless of the pasture/crop system chosen."

RESEARCH UPDATE

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Does finishing lambs on high quality forage crop and perennial pasture systems increase farm profit relative to store lamb systems?

WHY IT MATTERS

This PDS confirmed modelled data, giving Monaro, NSW, producers confidence to pursue lamb finishing on specialised crops and pastures.

WHERE IT'S UP TO


 Finalised


WHO IS INVOLVED

MLA, Monaro Farming Systems

Takeaway messages for producers from the PDS include:

- The highest levels of production per hectare were achieved on systems where the crop was used solely for grazing lambs.
- Significant supplementary feeding resulted in good lamb growth rates, as well as very high rates of pasture utilisation. (The performance of lambs on finishing crops with and without supplementary feeding will be the subject of another MFS PDS this summer.)
- Allocating land to specialised lamb finishing can double or even triple its profitability, more than compensating for any minor reduction in carrying capacity for breeding stock. ■

 Doug Alcock
E: doug@grazprophet.com.au

 MLA calls for applications for PDS projects on an annual basis. Applications for the next call will open in April 2021. For information on how to apply go to mla.com.au/PDS

Below: Winfred brassica beside perennial ryegrass and white clover at Cathcart, NSW, as part of the Monaro PDS.

Brassica convert boosts lamb weights

NSW producer John Murdoch has a new appreciation for annual forages after participating in an MLA-funded lamb-finishing Producer Demonstration Site (PDS).

John is chairman of Monaro Farming Systems, which ran the PDS (see story page opposite). His family business, Murdoch Bubbenluke, hosted some of the trial paddocks.

The Murdochs operate three properties in the Bombala district of south-east NSW where they produce Angus cattle and Merinos. They turn off about 3,000 first-cross and Merino wether lambs a year for the domestic market.

While John went into the PDS confident his lucerne-based system would prove the most cost-effective and efficient way of finishing lambs, he came away with an appreciation of the value of annual forages.

Grazing system

The Murdochs' livestock graze on 60% native pastures and 40% improved, lucerne-dominant finishing pastures.

"We turn off the first-cross lambs, then our Merino wether weaners go onto the improved pastures, then our weaner cattle through the winter," John said.

"We keep processing our bred inventory through on finishing pastures, year-round, to their earliest, high-value target weight."

They sell most crossbred lambs in January and February, at an average



Monaro sheep producer John Murdoch with a Maschio Speed Tiller in a paddock prepped for sowing forage brassica in October.

18–20kg carcass weight, and aim to have them all gone by March.

John planted two pastures for the PDS:

- Hummer fescue (90%) with some white clover and sub-clover, sown on basalt soil
- Leafmore forage brassica, sown on granite soil in the paddock's first year out of a rundown pasture. (Spear thistle contamination discouraged lambs from fully utilising this crop, so another paddock was sown and monitored in the second year.)

In the first year of the PDS (2017–18) the fescue paddock achieved \$828/ha net profit, while the brassica crop (with thistle contamination) achieved a net profit of \$123/ha.

In the second year, with lower rainfall, the net profits were \$209/ha for the fescue, and \$572/ha for the brassica.

Surprising performance

John said he was surprised by the fescue's performance, as he hadn't considered it suitable for lamb finishing.

"Because of bloat issues with lucerne, we can get a bit stuck in summer for higher-performing cattle feed options, so we've always had fescue as a cattle feed, but I was surprised by how well the lambs did on it," he said.

"We supplemented them with about 120g/day of lamb pellets and they gained 180–200g/head/day on the fescue.

"The brassica allowed us to finish our lambs at the same time, but at a little higher weight – 20–22kg carcass weight."

Steers grazing the stubble in winter also put on 1–1.5kg/day.

John's now incorporating brassicas into his rotation for the dual benefits of grass weed control and additional carrying capacity and is also planning to try grazing canola.

He's also going to participate in a new Monaro Farming Systems PDS to examine the costs and benefits of supplementing lambs on finishing crops. ■

SNAPSHOT:

John Murdoch,
Bombala, NSW



Area:
2,400ha over three properties

Enterprise:
Cattle, first-cross lambs and wool

Livestock:
5,500 Merino ewes, 350 Angus breeders

Pasture:
60% native pasture and 40% improved, predominantly lucerne-based pastures

Soil:
Basalt, granite

Rainfall: 640mm

✉ John Murdoch
E: j.p.murdoch@bigpond.com
Hilary Connors
E: hconnors@mla.com.au

LESSONS LEARNED

- > It makes sense for Merino breeders on the Monaro to incorporate a lamb-finishing system in their enterprises.
- > If you already have a lamb-finishing system, don't be afraid to tinker with it.

Tom's lamb survival mission is possible



Murdoch University PhD candidate Tom Clune is seeking to improve lamb survival in maiden ewes.

MLA-supported Murdoch University PhD candidate and veterinarian Tom Clune is on a mission to improve lamb survival from maiden ewes.

His research, which wraps up in 2021, builds knowledge about the poorer reproductive performance of maidens compared to older ewes, with around 10–15% lower marking rate.

“Maiden ewes generally have lower scanning rates and lower survival of lambs, but they may also be more susceptible to diseases that impact pregnancy and viability of lambs,” Tom said.

Tom has studied maiden ewe flocks across Australia to find out why this occurs.

“Lamb loss immediately before and after birth is an important contributor to lamb losses in maiden ewes,” he said.

“We also found in-utero losses during pregnancy contribute to a substantial part of the losses on some farms.”

Preliminary data from six ewe lamb sites showed mid-pregnancy abortions occurred in five of the flocks, with up to 47% of foetuses lost between the two pregnancy scans conducted (mid and late pregnancy).

While the scanning data still needs to be matched up with lambing records, Tom said the trend had continued

in some ewe lamb flocks, with mid-pregnancy abortion contributing to lamb losses despite ewes being otherwise healthy and meeting condition score targets.

Tom found abortion could occur in ewes without obvious signs that may alert producers to a problem.

“Ewe reproduction is impacted by a number of factors, but nutrition plays a major part,” he said.

He's also expanding on preliminary findings of potential disease causes and has ruled out toxoplasma, neospora and Q-fever as major contributors. However, the research is investigating chlamydia infections as a potential cause of some abortions.

As well as receiving an MLA postgraduate research scholarship, Tom's PhD research is part of a broader MLA-supported project investigating lamb survival.

“The research will help improve reproductive efficiency in sheep – we're in a flock-rebuilding phase nationally so reproductive efficiency is important.

“Our recommendations from the project will also improve animal welfare.”

After Tom finishes his PhD in 2021, he plans to combine clinical practice and research, perhaps with some teaching as well. ■

Five tips for lamb survival

Tom said producers should aim to follow industry guidelines to improve lamb survival and reproductive efficiency, including:

1. Manage ewes to reach target body weights and condition score pre-joining and at lambing.
2. Before joining, discuss local diseases with your vet and implement vaccine programs where appropriate.
3. At lambing, reduce mob size to increase lamb survival, provide shelter to combat adverse weather events and maintain nutrition.
4. Scan for multiples and provide multiple-bearing ewes with targeted feed. Measure and benchmark for future reference.
5. Collect aborted lambs, including the placenta if possible, and take to your local vet or agricultural department for testing. The results could help identify the presence of an infectious disease and guide management strategies. When handling aborted lambs or ewes suspected of aborting, wear gloves and wash hands after contact.

✉ Tom Clune
E: t.clune@murdoch.edu.au
Johann Schröder
E: jschroder@mla.com.au

🖥 Lamb survival research:
mla.com.au/maternal-dystocia-review

Genomic selection driving fertility

Improved fertility of northern beef herds is on the horizon, with more research to improve the accuracy of estimated breeding values (EBVs) for female reproductive traits.

The second stage of the MLA-supported Repronomics project is now underway, building on the first phase, which concluded in 2019.

The initial Repronomics project delivered numerous production benefits including an 18% increase in the accuracy of the days to calving EBV and increased rates of genetic progress for Brahman, Santa Gertrudis and Droughtmaster cattle.

The project is led by Dr David Johnston of the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit and aims to expand the foundation for increased effectiveness of genomic selection in tropical beef breeds.

It's developing information and tools for producers to confidently select genetically highly fertile stock, to ultimately increase calving rates.

The project includes research herds in the NT, Queensland and NSW to improve EBV accuracy for region-specific breeds and enhance fertility.

One component of the research is a herd that has been specially bred over 30 years and is currently run on three NT research farms: Douglas Daly, Beatrice Hill and Victoria River.

NT Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade Livestock Officer, Gretel Bailey-Preston, manages these NT herds and oversees the research on them.

She said the unique adaptation of these cattle is critical to delivering benefits for NT producers from Repronomics II.

"The herds we run here have been selected for fertility and production outcomes in the NT environment, so they're tropically adapted and suit this region," Gretel said.

While the NT contribution to Repronomics I only focused on Brahmans, the second phase of research has been extended to include the tropical composite herd.

The tropical composite herd brings together the tropical adaptability of *Bos indicus* and the fertility of *Bos taurus* breeds like Charolais, Hereford and Shorthorn, as well as hybrid vigour from combining several breeds.

"There's very limited data on cattle like these and their genomics," Gretel said.

"Collecting data from Brahmans and composites will help to improve overall fertility in northern herds through establishing more accurate selection for fertility in these climates and developing across-breed EBVs."

The project involves intensive data collection, including frequent ovarian scans of heifers to determine when they start cycling and when they return to cycling after their first calf.

RESEARCH UPDATE


WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Repronomics II will build on the findings of the Repronomics I project to increase the effectiveness of genomic selection in tropical beef herds.

WHY IT MATTERS

Improving female reproductive traits in tropical beef herds will drive greater levels of productivity and profitability for producers.

WHERE IT'S UP TO

 Just started

WHO IS INVOLVED

MLA, Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit, NT Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Other data collected from the herds includes calving dates, mating dates and bull soundness testing, which all contribute to fertility EBVs.

Cow and calf weights, body condition score, hip height, fat depth and eye muscle area are also being recorded to improve accuracy of other EBVs and maximise the potential benefits to producers from the project. ■

✉ Gretel Bailey-Preston
E: gretel.baileypreston@nt.gov.au
Caris Jones
E: cjones@mla.com.au

🖥️ Read more about the project at futurebeef.com.au/projects/repronomics-ii

Brahman heifers in the NT herd.
Credit: SBTS and TBTS



Why sustainability matters from paddock to plate

Sustainability is more than a buzzword – it's a critical factor in ensuring the longevity of Australia's red meat and livestock industry.

Sustainability is much broader than the environment and strategies such as reducing emissions. The future of the industry relies on sustainability across other areas including its people, animals and economic resilience, to meet expectations from consumers and customers.

This *Feedback* special feature looks at what sustainability is, how red meat and livestock businesses are adopting sustainable practices, and what it means for their productivity and profitability.

Here, three industry leaders share what sustainability means to them and why it's critical to meet the challenges from today's social climate.



Michael Crowley
MLA – General Manager of RD&A

✉ E: mcrowley@mla.com.au

🗨️ MLA supports producers to use best practice methods of pain mitigation for livestock:
mla.com.au/pain-relief
Learn how MLA supported a project with Tasmanian brand Greenham Cape Grim Beef, to apply the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework at the value chain level:
mla.com.au/cape-grim-sustainable

What does sustainability mean to you?

I look at sustainability in its broader definition of covering environmental and social aspects and being productive and profitable along the supply chain. I think all those need to work hand-in-hand to achieve a sustainable industry.

Why should sustainability matter on-farm?

It's preparing us for a future where livestock businesses can be more resilient to handle fluctuations in seasons and markets.

To achieve this, we need to make sure we deliver positive, productivity-led environmental and animal wellbeing outcomes.

It's also a case of meeting ever-changing consumer expectations. We have enviable market access, our livestock are free from exotic diseases and our systems are

Frameworks for sustainability

The Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (ABSF) defines sustainable beef production and tracks the industry's performance and progress. It has four key themes: animal welfare, economic resilience, environmental stewardship, and people and community. Progress is transparently tracked and reported against the themes and the priority areas and indicators. The Australian Sheep Sustainability Framework (SSF) is due to launch in early 2021.

The Frameworks are industry-led and have been developed in recognition of the changing expectations of customers, investors and the community.

MLA manages the ongoing reporting and stakeholder engagement for the ABSF and the SSF on behalf of industry.

world-class, but they aren't immune to changes in what consumers view as important.

Strong, evidence-based sustainability credentials will help us meet and exceed customer and consumer expectations to keep us ahead of our competitors.

These expectations include how we look after land and livestock, that we are transparent and that we have evidence to support our claims, which is the primary purpose of the Australian Beef and Sheep Sustainability Frameworks. It's through these evidence-based frameworks that we'll be able to meet growing expectations from our customers.

How is MLA contributing to a sustainable future for the industry?

We've set some ambitious targets, including to achieve the industry goal of being carbon neutral

by 2030 (CN30). This will open new opportunities for us as a global leader in producing environmentally sustainable protein with net zero emissions.

To meet this goal, MLA is investing in research to develop technology to:

- reduce methane emissions from livestock
- advance carbon sequestration methods through land and pasture management
- measure carbon storage in soils and vegetation.

We're also making sure sustainability is directly connected in other investments, including in animal productivity, animal health and welfare, livestock genetics, feedbase and across our adoption program to ensure we're connecting our production system to support evidence-based sustainability credentials.





Professor Bruce Allworth

Australian Sheep Sustainability Framework Steering Group – Chair

✉ E: ballworth@csu.edu.au

🖥 Australian Sheep Sustainability Framework sheepsustainabilityframework.com.au

What does sustainability mean to you?

It's the ability for our industry to continue producing products into the future that meet consumer demand, look after the land we're on and service our communities while remaining financially viable.

Why should sustainability matter to producers?

Without sustainable practices, there can be no future to this industry. That being said, sustainability has always mattered to producers, because farming is long-term and in order to be profitable you need to look after your land and animals.

We hear more about sustainability now because

of the push from consumers to understand what we're doing as an industry to be sustainable and to see the data around it.

What does sustainable sheep production look like?

It looks like animals and the environment being appropriately treated and well looked after, steps being taken to reduce emissions and preserve our resources, and that the people involved in our industry are well looked after.

Should producers be concerned about the costs associated with sustainable practices?

As a producer myself, it's top of mind that meeting evolving consumer

expectations can mean increasing costs. But if we don't move forward to meet these expectations, Australian sheepmeat and wool may no longer hold a premium.

Why is the Australian Sheep Sustainability Framework important?

It will allow us to demonstrate our sustainability credentials by providing data to customers and those who service us, such as the financial sector.

The Framework does not replace the sustainable practices producers are already carrying out, but it does give us a chance to show people what these are.



Tess Herbert

Australian Beef Sustainability Framework – Chair

✉ E: Tess_Herbert@gundamain.com.au

🖥 Livestock Production Assurance integritysystems.com.au/lpa

Australian Beef Sustainability Framework sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au

Why should sustainability matter to producers?

For businesses to remain productive and profitable in the long-term, they need to be sustainable.

Customers and consumers aren't just interested in industry stories about sustainability – they're interested in verifying these stories through data. For our products to keep achieving a high level of market access and gain new markets, we need to demonstrate our sustainability credentials.

Why is the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework important?

The Framework was formed because questions were being asked about our industry – not just by customers but also by others who could influence customers. We needed a way to verify our responses with data.

The Framework also serves to identify which measures

or indicators are important to stakeholders, and whether there's anything we should be measuring but aren't. There are areas of improvement for the beef industry, so tracking data for these is critical.

The Framework is now being referenced not just by our own industry, but by government to secure trade agreements, and by retailers and global and domestic customers in their corporate reporting.

What are some key highlights of the Framework's 2020 update?

Our industry is moving forward and meeting indicators that stakeholders see as important. These include a 57% reduction in emissions from the beef industry since 2005 and the significant increase in pain relief usage when performing animal husbandry techniques. It's important to highlight this as it shows continuous improvement and the way our industry values sustainability.

What does sustainability mean to you, especially as a feedlot operator?

Sustainability is about producing beef in a socially, economically, environmentally and animal-focused way. It also means we're actively mitigating risks to our product by meeting consumers' expectations of what sustainable produce is.

In the feedlot sector, things such as antimicrobial stewardship plans and the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme are critical to demonstrate how the industry is measuring compliance to sustainable practices.

Another thing that's very important to me is the sustainability of our people in this industry. Looking after mental health, safety on-farm and future leadership capacity building is crucial to longevity. ■



CARBON NEUTRAL 

Genetics and vegetation part of carbon neutral recipe

Victorian cattle producers Olivia and Tom

Lawson, Paringa Livestock, have their sights set on a recipe to improve productivity and carbon neutrality.

They see genetics that drive higher reproductive rates and faster turn-off, combined with grazing management that promotes carbon storage, as important to deliver carbon neutrality to southern beef producers.

The right ingredients

For the past nine years Paringa Livestock has bought industry-leading Australian and US genetics, which are tested for feed efficiency.

Tom Lawson said such genetics deliver emissions reductions via faster turn-off (which means animals emit less methane in their lifetime) while lifting reproductive outcomes, such as weaning rates and weights.

Tom and Olivia use the Stabilizer® planned crossbreeding and additive selection system, which can potentially produce 20% more beef per hectare and reduce carbon impact (as reduced carbon dioxide equivalent emissions) by 38%.

They've also focused on carbon storage and reducing emissions for more than 10 years through a vegetation improvement program.

Expansion is constrained in an area with high productivity and land values, so they've had to think strategically about planting areas. Strategies include:

LESSONS LEARNED

- > Carbon accounting is important for benchmarking.
- > Carbon neutrality requires innovative solutions.
- > Genetics will have a large role to play in reducing cattle emissions.



Tom Lawson, Paringa Livestock.
Image: Charlie Kinross

- fencing off remnant native trees and replanting around them
- fencing off waterways and replacing with local indigenous grasses, shrubs and tree species, with water reticulated to troughs.

These tree plantings contribute to stored carbon on Olivia and Tom's properties, as well as providing benefits such as shade and shelter for livestock, which supports productivity.

Digging deeper into soil carbon

Tom and Olivia wanted to dig deeper into exactly what makes a difference when calculating a beef enterprise's carbon account. So, Olivia joined more than 50 other producers in MLA's pilot carbon accounting workshops in 2020, which gave her a handle on where their enterprise stood.

"I've been looking into carbon accounting in more detail in the past 18 months and we're keen to support the industry

goal of achieving carbon neutrality," Olivia said.

These workshops guided producers through the process of determining their net greenhouse gas position as the first step to identify how to achieve a carbon neutral livestock enterprise. The two key parts of carbon accounting are calculating emissions and calculating stored carbon.

Olivia and Tom both have agricultural science degrees and Olivia recently started a diploma in sustainable agriculture – providing a useful background as they head towards carbon neutrality.

They believe that while carbon neutrality is achievable across their whole enterprise, it won't be easy.

Portions of their land are leased, which requires lessee and lessor agreement on financing any large investments in improvements like revegetation and permanent fencing.

Carbon accounting tips: tree planting

- Consider tree planting in the context of the whole-farm system and your goals for your operation.
- Consider the other benefits of tree planting, such as shade and shelter for livestock, which can increase productivity.

The University of Melbourne has created a free spreadsheet for producers to enter their greenhouse gas emissions and calculate the emissions component of their carbon account. Download the carbon accounting calculator from: greenhouse.unimelb.edu.au/Tools.htm

Four benefits of a carbon account

Developing a carbon account can support:

- 1. Benchmarking:** An account provides a baseline for measuring the impact of various scenarios on carbon output and to measure gains.
- 2. Trading:** To identify high-level opportunities for entering the carbon market and the selling of approved carbon units or offsets.
- 3. Market opportunities:** To participate in low carbon or carbon neutral supply chains.
- 4. Knowledge:** To gain an understanding of exactly how much carbon is emitted and stored by farming practices and to identify opportunities for improvement.

Another challenge is accounting for the mixed vegetation species they have planted, which includes permanent stands of eucalypts, stringy barks, peppermint gums, yellow box, blackwoods and wattles.

“Mixed native species have increased our biodiversity, which we value,” Olivia said.

However, the carbon accounting tool used in the MLA pilot workshop currently only enables inputs of single species: softwood or hardwood. This means that tree carbon sequestration estimates in Olivia and Tom’s account may be under or overestimated.

The primary driver of the pilot workshops was to undertake market research on the carbon accounting process to inform refinement and upgrades.

Since Olivia participated, MLA and the research organisations involved have already invested in improving the carbon accounting tool used in the workshop.

One of the major improvements was combining the sheep and beef tools, which eases the carbon accounting process for mixed production systems. Future improvements are planned to include input options for more regionally diverse, mixed and single-tree species. This will enable a more accurate estimate of carbon stored in vegetation.

Practical steps

Tom and Olivia are also improving their carbon outcomes in other areas:

- 1. Genetics:** Increased production efficiency and weight for age are key methods for reducing emissions intensity.

“Implementing a well-managed crossbreeding program is the simplest and lowest-cost way to increase efficiency and weight for age,” Olivia said.

Paringa Livestock measures, monitors and benchmarks its genetic progress through Australia’s BREEDPLAN and the global \$Profit® database, which compares purebred and multi-breed genetics around the world.

For example, Angus Australia includes an estimated breeding value for net feed efficiency in BREEDPLAN, which Tom and Olivia use to measure cattle for feed efficiency gains.

Angus Australia collected data on the net feed intake

trait from thousands of progeny through the Angus Sire Benchmarking Program, which was supported by MLA. This information is available to producers.

Tom and Olivia also seek out genetics from around the globe ranked highly for \$Profit® traits such as feed to gain and intake.

- 2. Soil management:** Data from baseline soil carbon measurements are required for soil carbon management to be considered in a carbon account.

When Tom and Olivia first measured their agronomic soil carbon 10 years ago it was at 2% – two years later it was at 4%.

Olivia suspects their soil carbon may have doubled again due to actions such as:

- sowing new multi-species perennial pastures using zero tillage at depth
- applying a sugar-based liquid (mixed with glyphosate in the sprayer) when spraying pastures out to feed soil biology
- using compost and mineral-based fertilisers instead of synthetic fertilisers.

“Livestock management is a key to growing soil carbon,” Olivia said.

Cattle are managed in large mobs based on year groups in a rotational grazing system of high intensity intervals to maximise year-round ground cover.

Olivia and Tom aim to continue to make soil carbon gains by reducing paddock size and increasing the intensity of rotations.

Conducting baseline measurements can be expensive, so MLA continues to invest in research aimed at reducing soil carbon measurement costs. ■

SNAPSHOT:

Tom and Olivia Lawson, Paringa Livestock, Murrindindi, north-east Victoria, and Clarkes Hill, central Victoria



Area:

600ha owned and leased

Enterprise:

Seedstock production specialising in Angus and Stabilizer® genetics

Livestock:

Bull breeding for high MSA-achieving production systems

Pasture:

Improved perennial pastures featuring a mix of sub-clover, phalaris, cocksfoot, microlaena and prairie, kangaroo and spear grasses, with multi-species pasture cropping on new lease blocks

Soil:

Red gravel mud flats

Rainfall:

550mm

✉ Tom and Olivia Lawson
E: paringalivestock@bigpond.com
Margaret Jewell
E: mjewell@mla.com.au

🖥️ CN30 overview:
mla.com.au/cn30
Carbon accounting tool:
greenhouse.unimelb.edu.au/Tools.htm
Paringa Livestock:
paringalivestock.com.au
Angus Sire Benchmarking Program:
angusaustralia.com.au/sire-benchmarking
BREEDPLAN:
breedplan.une.edu.au

CEO mindset helps producers plan for the future

North Queensland beef producers Kate and Alby Flood have a vision for their business: ‘Healthy, happy and harmonious people, land and cattle.’

Achieving this vision requires a suite of tools and on-farm measures, many of which they learned through attending MLA’s Business EDGE training.

Kate has even attended the course twice in her quest to improve their financial literacy.

Kate and Alby were part of her parents’ (Gerard and Elizabeth Lyons) business before they purchased ‘Junction Creek Station’ as part of succession in 2017.

“Mum and Dad have always been big believers in upskilling,” Kate said.

This mindset continues with Kate and Alby, who have signed up for any program that could add value to their business, including:

- MLA’s Business EDGE, Nutrition EDGE and Breeding EDGE
- RCS Grazing for Profit twice
- Bred Well Fed Well genetics field day
- courses and field days on workplace health and safety and using chemicals
- grass budgeting with the local Landcare group and RCS
- soil management, working dog and horsemanship schools.

“When we attend a course, we’re always thinking about how small changes can add up to big impacts,” Kate said.

Think like a CEO

Kate and Alby believe objectivity is critical to their future success and they credit Business EDGE with helping them adopt a ‘CEO mindset’.

“We can’t afford to make decisions purely based on emotional reasons.

“We want a profitable, sustainable business, so we need to be sure we’re thinking like the CEOs of a multimillion-dollar business,” Kate said.

As well as giving them the tools and confidence to run the numbers of farm scenarios, these courses have positioned the Floods to engage in the family succession process.

“Thanks to Business EDGE, we were able to go through our own numbers and put together proposals to the bank and QRIDA (Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority) to successfully negotiate a loan for the first time,” Kate said.

They went in with a clear understanding of their stock flows, overhead and direct costs, and the earnings required to meet debt obligations and be viable.

“It gave us confidence in backing ourselves and the business we were stepping into,” Alby said.

Financial sustainability

Kate and Alby’s goal is to build enough equity in the business to assist their children – Mac (13), Grace (12) and Sam (10) – achieve their own business and career goals.

“Our children are under no ‘dynasty illusions’, but we do want to give them the same opportunities we had, whether they choose to work on the land or not,” Kate said.

Here are some of the ways the Floods have turned their off-farm learnings into practical measures.

1. Year-round supplementation

Through MLA’s Nutrition EDGE, they identified their cattle perform better with consistent supplement. They customised a supplement program to reflect herd nutritional requirements and seasonal grass quality.

2. Rotational grazing

Since taking over the set-stocked property, Kate and Alby have been



LESSONS LEARNED

- > Be open to new ideas, surround yourself with like-minded people and never stop learning.
- > Maintain a CEO mindset and run your property as a business, not a lifestyle.
- > Remember small changes can add up to big impact.

laying the foundation for rotational grazing. They fenced 22 paddocks into 34 and move cattle through these in six mobs. Ongoing investment in fencing and waters is part of a detailed, five-year plan.


3. Improved pastures

Kate and Alby aim to increase carrying capacity from 3,000 adult equivalents (AE) to 5,000 AE in the next 10 years through property development, pasture improvement, and grazing and land management.


They have a target of 100% improved pastures (30–35% of the property is currently improved with seca stylo) within 5–10 years.

Kate and Alby host an MLA-funded pasture trial, managed by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, examining alternative legume and grass species for red and black basalt country in the dry tropics.

They have also accessed NQ Dry Tropics land management funding, to develop their property vision sooner. ■

 Kate and Alby Flood
E: acc.jck@gmail.com
Alana Boulton
E: abouton@mla.com.au

 MLA’s EDGE network
mla.com.au/edge

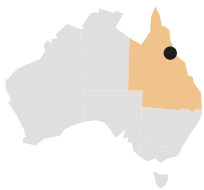
CARBON NEUTRAL 



Kate and Alby Flood.

SNAPSHOT:

Kate and Alby Flood,
MGS Pastoral, Junction
Creek Station, north-west
of Charters Towers,
Queensland



Area: 22,800ha

Enterprise:

Beef cattle supplying multiple
export and domestic markets

Livestock:

Brahman base herd with red
composite and Brahman bulls –
1,200 breeders plus progeny (3,200
on property)

Pasture:

55% Indian couch, 45% mix of native
and native plus seca stylo

Soil:

Predominantly red basalt, 18%
black basalt and 30% lighter
goldfields country

Rainfall: 600mm

Are you ready for the new normal?

What if the so-called
'unprecedented'
weather events across
Australia in 2020 – catastrophic
bushfires, floods and heatwaves
– became normal in the next 10
years? What would this mean for
livestock producers?

The climate landscape could be
completely different by 2030, with
increasing temperatures, declining
rainfall, longer droughts and
repeated extreme weather events.

Failure to adapt is a major risk to the
red meat industry's sustainability,
with research tipping a 27% decline in
production and profitability by 2030*.

The NEXUS project – a collaboration
between MLA, University of
Tasmania, University of Melbourne
and CSIRO – is exploring profitable,
sustainable livestock businesses in
an increasingly variable climate.

University of Tasmania lead
researcher, Associate Professor
Matthew Harrison, said the project
would address climate challenges
by exploring the strengths and
vulnerabilities of farming systems
from Tasmania to north Queensland,
to test different adaptation strategies.

"NEXUS will focus on climates between
2030 and 2050 with an emphasis on
increased extreme weather events,
which do most of the damage, rather
than gradual climate change," he said.

**"The project will deliver
adaptation strategies
in December 2024 –
they will be profitable,
practical, environmentally
sustainable and targeted
towards future market
opportunities."**

The project will provide resources
and strategies to help producers
adapt to future climates that may
impact production systems, such
as higher frequency of livestock heat

stress in summer, an earlier end to
spring growth in southern systems,
and greater loss of soil carbon
due to declining rainfall and more
frequent droughts.

The project is exploring
adaptation strategies to improve
profitability of red meat production
businesses, including:

- **feedbase:** summer-active
pastures, deep-rooted forages
and heat-tolerant pastures
- **animal genetics:** improved
reproduction, feed conversion
efficiency and heat tolerance
- **land management:** raising soil
fertility, grazing management, using
trees for shade and shelter
- **technology:** virtual herding and
seasonal forecasts.

The project will also look at alternative
income sources or business models,
such as carbon sequestration, or
biodiversity credits. ■

*The Southern Livestock Adaptation study, 2012.

Three things to do now to prepare for future climates

1. Plant deep-rooted legumes
and trees to increase soil
carbon sequestration.
2. Focus on livestock production
efficiency to reduce emissions
intensity.
3. Use rotational grazing to
maintain ground cover and
soil carbon.

✉ Matthew Harrison
E: matthew.harrison@utas.edu.au
Joe Gebbels
E: jgebbels@mla.com.au
Doug McNicholl
E: dmcnicholl@mla.com.au

🗨 Visit mla.com.au/climate to find
out about MLA research
underway to respond to climate
variability and what resources
are available for producers.

Polled gene testing for a more sustainable herd

Improved animal welfare, economic benefits to producers and a positive community perception are just some of the impacts that come from breeding polled cattle, paving the way towards a more sustainable beef industry.

While 73%* of registered cattle are already genetically polled (calculated from seedstock), advances in testing for the polled gene – which will guide the purchase of polled sires – is an important step towards increasing the percentage of polled cattle within the Australian herd. MLA is supporting research to achieve this.

Evolution of poll gene testing

University of New England Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit Research Fellow, Dr Natalie Connors, is well versed in polled genetics and testing. She's spent five years researching and improving understanding in this area and, along the way, she's witnessed the evolution of testing for polled genetics.

"The original poll test was a microsatellite DNA test rolled out in 2012 under the Beef Cooperative Research Centre," Natalie said.

"It required breeders to provide a DNA sample from their animals, such as tail hair, and a phenotype, like horned, scurred or polled, which was then tested to estimate a horned or polled genotype."

The genotyping landscape changed in 2017, with



Polled animals deliver economic, social and welfare benefits.

commercialisation of genotyping in Australia and an increase in labs.

This led to the adoption of the single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) test, which reads the DNA to pick up variations relating to polled animals. MLA's funding of the SNP test focused on improving its accuracy in *Bos indicus* animals.

"The advantage of the SNP test is that producers don't need to provide phenotypes, so it's a simpler, more efficient and more accurate test."

Testing for scurs

Natalie said while SNP testing has been successful in identifying polled and horned animals, there's still work to be done on testing for scurs (small horn-like structures that aren't usually attached to an animal's skull).

"Unfortunately, when some producers are dehorning, they're getting rid of anything that looks like a horn, including scurs, making collecting phenotypes for these animals very difficult," Natalie said.

"We already understand the genetics of horns, and adoption of the polled gene will result in breeding them out, but now the focus is on achieving the same with scurs."

A critical step in this process is genetic data from seedstock breeders.

"We're encouraging breeders who are aware they have scurs to contact their breed society or BREEDPLAN and submit the data for further research to be conducted by the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit," Natalie said.

"This will let us look at the genotypes of those animals, compare genomic data and develop a test for scurs that will further advance poll herds and industry benefits in the future." ■

RESEARCH UPDATE


WHAT IT'S ABOUT

More accurate poll testing is driving an increase in genetically polled cattle Australia-wide, helping to further the industry's sustainability credentials.

WHY IT MATTERS

Polled cattle achieve higher levels of animal welfare and production output, and respond to social expectations around animal husbandry practices.


WHERE IT'S UP TO


 Ongoing

WHO IS INVOLVED

BREEDPLAN software has been developed by the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit, a joint venture of the University of New England and NSW Department of Primary Industries with support of MLA.

*Australian Beef Sustainability Framework, 2020

 Dr Natalie Connors
E: nconnor2@une.edu.au
Caris Jones
E: cjones@mla.com.au

 Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit:
agbu.une.edu.au
Do your cattle have scurs? Contact your breed society or BREEDPLAN to submit your data for further research:
breedplan.une.edu.au
MLA genetics hub:
genetics.mla.com.au

Back on track and better than ever

More than 100 producers in bushfire-affected regions across Australia have benefited from farm business advice to get back on track since MLA launched the free Back to Business program in January 2020.

One producer who now knows the value of expert advice is Deb Gray. She said the one-on-one sessions with a local farm business consultant were the ticket to success when times were tough.

In early 2020, bushfires ravaged Deb's property at Araluen, NSW. More than half of her land was damaged and she lost livestock. On the back of recent severe drought, Deb said the emotional and financial toll on her and the business were extreme.

"We got through the drought and 2020 was already going to be a tight year financially, but then the fire hit and it just shattered us," Deb said.

"We came back after being evacuated and my last three paddocks of feed had been burnt to the ground.

"Our neighbours and Rural Fire Service volunteers had been amazing in saving our house and what stock and pastures they could, but in that moment I didn't know what to do."

Deb said she didn't have a set recovery plan after the fires – just the goal to reach May and sell calves on the ground for cash flow.

"I was treading water during that period," Deb said.

"I had tight finances and my only plan was getting to May."

It was during this time Deb saw the Back to Business program advertised in MLA's e-newsletter, *Friday Feedback*.

"Accessing a consultant wasn't something I'd done before, but I was willing to try anything," Deb said.

"Alastair of RaynerAg was assigned to us and from the first session I had with him, we started to map out a plan of recovery."

Deb said the sessions laid out short, medium and long-term plans for her business, and helped it grow in strength.

Her goals were:

Short-term

- weed management
- retaining calves originally earmarked to sell to rebuild the breeding program.

Medium-term

- shopping for bulls, using estimated breeding values and growth weights to turn stock off sooner and to produce a genetically stronger herd.

Long-term

- developing strategies to increase carrying capacity from 60 to 80 head
- identifying additional revenue streams to complement the beef business, such as producing lucerne hay.


Transformation


Deb said the three consultation sessions she accessed through Back to Business have transformed her operation and her mental mindset.

"It really helped me get back on my feet and feel excited about farming again," Deb said.

"Personally, the consultation sessions have been so valuable for us that we've actually renewed Alastair on a new 12-month contract.

"Having a consultant come in with an unbiased view to look at our business has seen its potential grow enormously, and it really was a godsend when we needed it most." ■

 Deb Gray
E: bellaringah@bigpond.com

 Listen to Deb's story in episode two of the Feedback podcast: mla.com.au/feedback-podcast
MLA's Genetics hub: genetics.mla.com.au

SNAPSHOT:

Deb Gray, 'Bellaringah', Araluen, NSW



Area: 135ha

Enterprise:
Commercial cattle

Livestock:
60 Angus cows but reduced following fires and drought

Pasture:
Native pasture mix, sub-clovers, Bimbil oats

Soil:
Decomposed granite

Rainfall: 630mm

NSW producer Deb Gray.
Image: Hilary Wardhaugh

LESSONS LEARNED

- > MLA's free Back to Business initiative gave producers affected by bushfire access to advice to get their business back on track.
- > External advice can improve a business' potential productivity and profitability.
- > It's important to have short, medium and long-term plans when recovering from natural disasters.



BUILDING CAPABILITY 

Clare has the 'perfect' solution to attract youth to ag

A young Tasmanian producer and teacher has used a global research trip to tackle the question of how to attract young people to agriculture.

Clare Peltzer, who received the 2019 MLA-supported Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarship, said future-proofing the rural workforce begins early and requires industry groups to work together.

Here, Clare explains how her Nuffield report highlights the need for industry bodies to align to ensure secondary school students are exposed to the vast array of career opportunities in agriculture:

I picked this topic because I'm lucky enough to wear two hats. I taught agriculture at the local secondary school and I'm the livestock manager on our family's sheep enterprise in Tasmania, turning off 8,000 prime lambs a year.

As an educator and red meat producer, I realised we need to frequently expose students to high quality programs in agriculture.

It's important to attract youth to agriculture because they're an untapped source of energy and they bring fresh eyes and ideas to the industry.

Agriculture is facing natural resource constraints, market pressures and food

supply targets, so the industry needs to fill our future workforce with people who have a wider skill set to meet these challenges.

Young people can be discouraged from pursuing a career in agriculture because the career prospects aren't well understood.

Many students believe agriculture is 'not for me' due to negative media coverage of droughts, floods and hardship. Perception is a powerful concept and currently repels some youth from pursuing a career in agriculture.

There's also not a clear line of communication to help young people learn about agriculture. Our agriculture industry is diverse with 15 industry bodies independently trying to attract students to their sector.

I believe the agricultural industry can attract youth by broadening the perception and taking a unified approach.

Young people need exposure to high quality interactions with agriculture strategically between 12–16 years old.

We need to let young people know agriculture is not 'just farming' as this is the most influential limiting factor to attracting them into the industry.

All career opportunities in agriculture should be recognised under the following umbrella terms – or the

PERFECT acronym, developed by Dr Hlami Ngwenya from South Africa – to broaden the perception of agriculture:

- P** – Policies
- E** – Education and training
- R** – Research
- F** – Finance and farming
- E** – Entrepreneurship and extension and advisory services
- C** – Communication
- T** – Technologies and trade.

We also need to bridge the gap between producers and consumers by creating one independent and non-political body, which is a centralised point for agriculture, responsible for talking to youth about all facets of the agricultural industry. ■

 Clare Peltzer
E: clarepeltzer@gmail.com

 Read Clare's Nuffield report at nuffield.com.au/clare-peltzer-2019
Producers can share the story of red meat with their local community as part of MLA's advocacy program: mla.com.au/promoting-the-industry

Below: MLA-supported Nuffield scholar Clare Peltzer investigated the need to develop a strategic framework to encourage young people to pursue a career in agriculture.
Image: Alice Bennett

Three ways producers can attract youth to agriculture

1. Start the conversation with young people about agriculture, foster this relationship and help them make connections in the industry.
2. Farm open days create two-way communication between families, so open the 'gates' to your community.
3. Embrace social media and spread awareness of our diverse agriculture industry. Show our future workforce what you do every day and inspire them to join us.



BUILDING CAPABILITY 

Leading the industry forward



The red meat and livestock industry depends on leaders who are capable, so MLA invests in current and emerging leaders to build their skills through a range of professional development, graduate training, mentoring and scholarship opportunities.

Here are four ways MLA is building leadership capability for a sustainable industry:

1. Internships

Following two successful Livestock Consulting Internship programs in 2016–17 and 2018–19, a third program has been launched.

Participants will undertake internships with livestock consulting businesses over a two-year period. The project is co-funded by MLA, Meridian Agriculture (who manages the project) and the contributing employer to pay for the wages of interns.

Ten employers from around Australia will take part in the program over the next two years, to support 10 interns.

The internship includes workshops and retreats

to build skills useful to the consulting sector such as people management, network building and presentation skills.

One of the new aspects of the 2020 program includes interns spending four weeks working with another livestock consulting business to gain more experience.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, the training became virtual with interns accessing webinars run by guest speakers and experts to develop their training skills.

From the first two programs, 63% of interns are currently working with the employer they signed up to the program with.

A further 21% remain in livestock consulting and 10% still work in the livestock industry, reflecting the success of the program in boosting the number of new entrants to the livestock consultancy field.

2. Global research

MLA supports several scholarship programs that bridge the gap between education and agricultural research, including the Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarships.

The program aims to increase practical farming knowledge and management skills, with Nuffield scholars awarded the opportunity to travel overseas with the expectation they will return to Australia with research findings that can be applied across the industry.

In 2020, MLA's Nuffield Scholar was Nicholas Krebs from Moura, Queensland, who currently works as the Aggregation Manager for Hewitt Cattle Australia, across four adjoining properties.

His research is focused on attracting and retaining people in agriculture.

3. Entrepreneurial producers

Farmers2Founders is a unique entrepreneurship program designed to attract proactive, innovative producers looking to grow their businesses through the adoption of new technologies.

The program focuses on developing producers' skills in entrepreneurship, as well as their technology development and commercialisation

capabilities to solve critical industry challenges and bring new ag-tech and food-tech to the market.


The pilot year of the four-year Farmers2Founders program – which evolved from MLA's Producer Innovation Fast-Track program – concluded in March 2020. More than 200 producers were among the more than 400 attendees at 16 workshops across Australia.

4. Livestock leaders

In 2020, MLA initiated the Livestock Leaders program to identify future leaders within the Australian red meat and livestock industry and upskill them – such as with media training – so they can confidently represent and defend the industry to the wider community.

Livestock Leaders, managed by The Livestock Collective, aims to engage a variety of advocates from around Australia each year to ensure industry voices are heard from all sectors and are adding maximum value across the red meat supply chain. ■

 Fiona Thompson
E: ftompson@mla.com.au

 Find out how you can play a part in promoting your industry as a Livestock Leader: mla.com.au/promoting-the-industry

Learn more about MLA's leadership programs at mla.com.au/capability-building

BUILDING CAPABILITY 

A bright future in agricultural research

The future of red meat and livestock research is bright, thanks to the Livestock Productivity Partnership's (LPP) support of postdoctoral researchers, PhD and honours students.

The LPP has employed 20 students and researchers to work on projects that aim to lift productivity in the grazing sector, ranging from reducing business emissions to improving the feedbase in different climates.

It's a win-win, bringing research benefits to red meat producers as well as attracting young people into agriculture to build future industry capability.


LPP coordinator Dr Tom Davison said these research opportunities are critical for the industry's future.

"Producers want to see young people dedicating themselves to this industry and programs like the LPP allow this to happen," Tom said.

"The LPP allows these 20 postdocs and postgrads to bring their ideas and abilities to the grazing sector and is just one of the ways we can build future capability and show agriculture as an attractive place to work."

"In the long-term, we hope many of these students and researchers will continue to support other young people considering a career in red meat." ■

✉ Jonathan McLachlan
E: jmclach7@une.edu.au
Tom Davison
E: thomas.davison@une.edu.au

 The Livestock Productivity Partnership (LPP) is a partnership between MLA Donor Company, NSW Department of Primary Industries, CSIRO, University of New England, University of Melbourne and Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture. The goal is to develop regional and system-specific feedbase options, new animal phenotyping and farm management tools. mla.com.au/lpp



LPP-supported researcher, Dr Jonathan McLachlan.

Growing northern sustainability

Meet Dr Jonathan McLachlan, one of the LPP researchers who is working on a project to ensure the sustainability of the red meat industry.

He's a research fellow in pasture nutrition at the University of New England (UNE) and his current research project – phosphorus management and requirements of tropical legume pasture swards – focuses on building a stronger feedbase for northern producers.

I got to where I am today by pursuing my interest in pasture production and livestock grazing systems. I grew up on the NSW mid-north coast where my grandparents had a small hobby farm – that's where the interest started. After I finished my Bachelor of Rural Science, I started thinking more seriously about pasture production. I completed my PhD and then started working in this area of research at UNE.

A day in my life is spent conducting experiments that look at the growth of pastures under different environmental conditions and phosphorus levels.

My research matters to red meat producers because legume persistence is quite low in many northern grazing systems, leaving a gap in potential animal production due to pasture quality. If we can improve legume persistence and identify which species are compatible for growth in different areas, we can develop a stronger feedbase, fix more atmospheric nitrogen and increase animal productivity.

Outcomes of my research so far are observing differences in phosphorus efficiency and yield potential between grasses and legumes. Although we still have some way to go with our research, we're now identifying grass-legume mixes that may enable greater legume persistence in tropical climates, so producers can be more selective with what they grow for greater production benefits.

Being involved in the LPP means I can work on a project that's very important to northern Australian producers. There hasn't been much research in this area to date, so having the LPP's support to investigate tropical legumes further is an important step in filling these knowledge gaps. ■



How red meat fits into a healthy, sustainable diet

The CSIRO has served up new information about the role Australian red meat is playing in a healthy and sustainable diet.

MLA co-funded the CSIRO research, which compared the environmental footprint of the current Australian diet to the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*, which provides recommendations on the types and amounts of foods Australians should eat to meet nutritional requirements.

The findings help to understand the type of changes needed to ensure dietary impacts are healthy and within planetary boundaries for water, cropland and carbon.

This concept of planetary boundaries provides an objective framework to find ways to feed a growing population with limited natural resources. Planetary boundaries set limits on the amount of resources to produce food to achieve both nutrition and environment goals.

Here, MLA Senior Manager – Food and Nutrition Veronique Droulez, explains what the research means for the role of red meat in a sustainable diet.

What are the key findings from the CSIRO research?

There are three ways to reduce the environmental impact of the Australian diet:

1. Reduce overconsumption of food by only eating the amount of foods recommended for good health.
2. Adopt efficient production practices to reduce food's environmental footprint.
3. Reduce food waste across the supply chain, including household waste.

How can Aussies eat red meat in a sustainable diet?

The research suggests Australians can maintain current red meat consumption and remain within planetary boundaries if:

- guidance is provided on meal portion sizes to help Australians eat in line with amounts recommended for good health
- industry adopts efficient production practices across the supply chain, many of which are already happening on-farm.

Continued overleaf

How red meat fits into a healthy, sustainable diet
continued

To reduce the overconsumption of food, MLA's balanced meal approach helps Australians enjoy red meat in balanced meals, which are in line with the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*. The red meat supply chain has also implemented many environmental stewardship practices which underpin programs, such as the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework, the Sheep Sustainability Framework (see page 20) and the industry's goal to be carbon neutral by 2030 (CN30) (see page 5).

What does this mean for the red meat supply chain?

This new Australian data explains how red meat is part of a healthy and sustainable Australian diet.

CSIRO's research suggests enjoying Australian red meat in balanced meals in line with dietary guidelines is not only good for health but is also an easy way for Australians to reduce the environmental impact of their diet.

Meal ideas



An example of meal ideas from MLA's new resource, *A guide to balanced meals*, which translates the Australian Dietary Guidelines into portion size amounts for everyday meals.

MLA will use this research to continue telling Australian red meat's story in the context of sustainable eating to inform stakeholders such as nutrition professionals, and agricultural and public health policy-makers about its role in the Australian diet. ■

✉ Veronique Droulez
E: vdroulez@mla.com.au

🖥️ Learn more about meal portion size at mlahealthymeals.com.au

Sustainability in action

MLA's quarterly foodservice e-magazine, *Rare Medium*, works with some of the country's best chefs to raise the profile of Australian red meat on menus and educate the foodservice sector about Australian beef and lamb from paddock to plate.

The latest issue of *Rare Medium* explores what sustainability looks and tastes like and features:

- Josh Lewis of Fleet, La Casita and Ethel Food Store – a chef

and restaurateur walking his own path and shaping his own sustainable model.

- Australian beef brands about what sustainability means to them – what does it look like in practice and ultimately, what does it taste like?
- Producer Tim Eyes on how he wants to show that agriculture can mitigate climate change.

🖥️ Read the latest issue of *Rare Medium* at raremediummag.com



Beef tongues are used across two of chef and restaurateur Josh Lewis' venues – minimising waste and showcasing carcass usage.

Red meat's positive perception grows

New research paints a positive picture for the sustainability of red meat consumption, with consumer perception of the industry improving.

MLA's latest consumer sentiment research also shows knowledge of the industry among consumers in metropolitan Australia is growing.

This research has been conducted annually since 2010 by strategic consultancy firm Pollinate on behalf of MLA to measure and track consumer sentiment towards the Australian red meat industry.

It's used to inform the industry's community engagement strategy to address community concerns, as well as benchmark the impact of MLA's programs on building community trust in the beef and lamb industry.

MLA Managing Director Jason Strong said this year's consumer insights reflected a growing acknowledgement of cattle and sheep producers and the work of the industry among metropolitan consumers.

"Despite an environmentally, socially and economically challenging year, perceptions of the red meat industry are improving," Jason said.

Results include:

- 67% of consumers feel 'good' or 'very good' about the Australian beef industry
- 62% feel 'good' or 'very good' about the Australian sheep industry.

"Consumers are hearing more positive messages about the industry, particularly in relation to industry standards and the positive impact on the Australian economy," Jason said.

"Within this is a real acknowledgement that producers do a good job and are widely respected.

"This is very encouraging, particularly in a year where a number of significant events have impacted the red meat industry across Australia including drought, bushfires and the global COVID-19 pandemic."

Consumption insights

The research also showed overall red meat consumption has remained stable.

Most red meat eaters have not reduced their consumption, nor are they planning to do so in the future, with 62% of consumers eating about the same amount of red meat compared to a year ago.

The number of consumers in metropolitan Australia who claim to be vegetarian has remained stable since 2016, at 7%. Interestingly, 39% of claimed vegetarians still eat meat.

Perceived industry knowledge has increased, with around one in three consumers feeling they have a 'good knowledge and understanding' of the Australian beef and lamb industries.

"However, consumers are less informed about the specifics, highlighting the need for the industry to continue to increase awareness and engagement with community and consumers," Jason said.

The research shows that consumers turn to a wide range of sources for information about the industry including the internet, industry bodies and health professionals.

While one in three consumers use the internet to find information about Australian red meat in relation to its environmental impact and animal welfare credentials, this year has seen consumers increasingly turning to supermarkets and butchers as sources of information about the industry.

"Given strong consumer patronage of supermarkets and butchers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it's not surprising we're seeing these channels become increasingly important sources of information for consumers," Jason said.

This research significantly informs the community engagement and marketing activities MLA undertakes on behalf of the red meat industry, explaining production systems and demonstrating producers are ethical and responsible custodians of livestock, land and natural resources. ■

New consumer insights include

2 in 3

Australians feel good about the red meat industry



1 in 3

Australians feel knowledgeable about the red meat industry



MLA's community engagement priorities are:

Community sentiment



Tell our positive stories



Share our world-class practices



Leverage partnerships



✉ Fiona Thompson
E: ftompson@mla.com.au

💻 For more information on the consumer sentiment research, visit mla.com.au/community-sentiment
For an overview of how MLA will use the research, visit mla.com.au/community-programs

'Clean' isn't a dirty word for WA beef and lamb brand

The food industry can be a crowded space, so WA-based Wide Open Agriculture has partnered with MLA's CoMarketing Program to help differentiate its Dirty Clean Food brand in retail, online and foodservice markets.

The publicly-listed company partners with WA producers to bring them along on the journey of producing beef and lamb, which takes into account social and environmental impacts.

Wide Open Agriculture Supply and Logistics Manager, Warren Pensini, said their approach was built on three goals.

The **first** is to build soil carbon, to tap into multiple environmental and economic benefits.

"You're building fertility, water holding capacity, and so on. All those good things," Warren said.

The **second** goal is to enhance biodiversity, which Warren said is much more than simply fencing off trees.

"Yes, it's about trees and native areas and habitat, which leads to beneficial biodiverse flora and fauna. But the one that people tend to miss is soil biodiversity – the bacterial and fungal make-up of soil – that's a key one.

"We're learning more and more all the time about

biology and its importance in the soil, alongside physical and chemical aspects."

The **third** is to improve mineral and water cycles, which he said go hand in hand.

"All three goals are interrelated. If you're improving soil carbon, you're improving the water cycle and biodiversity."

Wide Open Agriculture's approach also taps into the energy required to produce cattle and sheep and market a differentiated brand – something Warren understands all too well from producing and marketing his own 'Blackwood Valley Beef' on his Boyup Brook, WA, farm for eight years.

While he still does a bit of this, he now mainly sells his beef through the Dirty

Clean Food brand, alongside other producers such as UltraWhite lamb suppliers Col Bowey and Ash Baldwin from CB Farming near Albany on the South Coast. Warren can speak first-hand on the impact to productivity and environmental considerations if producers try to do 'everything' themselves.

He reckons production can't be sustainable if the emotional and financial aspects aren't accounted for alongside environmental and animal health aspects.

This is where the broader support base and marketing opportunities offered by Wide Open Agriculture can smooth the way for producers to supply a niche grassfed product and achieve recognition and reward for it



LESSONS LEARNED

- > Differentiated marketing can return a premium to producers.
- > Networking and workshops can support producers as they change farming practices.
- > Production cannot be sustainable if the emotional and financial aspects are not accounted for.



Wide Open Agriculture's Supply and Logistics Manager Warren Pensini and his wife Lori produce beef for the Dirty Clean Food brand.
Image: Wide Open Agriculture

without having to do all the marketing themselves.

And while Dirty Clean Food may be niche at the moment, plans are in place to grow the brand.

A step to achieving this is to clearly communicate to consumers the credentials of their branded products.

Connecting consumers

Connecting consumers to this message is vital, and Wide Open Agriculture is using MLA's CoMarketing Program funding to provide opportunities for consumers to taste their products.

"We sell through independent retail outlets and getting food into people's mouths at point-of-sale is really important," Wide Open Agriculture Marketing Manager Marilyn Elson said.

"We'll use the CoMarketing Program to hold tastings in-store to demonstrate our products.

"We believe our product tastes really good. It's good for the planet and it's good for the consumer."

She said the funding would also be used to produce some point-of-sale signage – although this would be limited to avoid creating unnecessary waste, which reflects the company's commitment to being an eco-brand along their whole supply chain.

"We're keen to push for better packaging solutions for meat, but because of our size and current business structure, we're 'technology takers' in that regard for now," Marilyn said.



Wide Open Agriculture is using MLA CoMarketing funding to support in-store product demonstrations to give consumers a taste of their beef and lamb. Image: Wide Open Agriculture

"We're working to become carbon neutral as a business and back through our supply chain. We'll be engaging with our farming network to find creative ways to achieve this."

The company also plans to use CoMarketing funding to help improve their search engine optimisation for online sales, as well as to create engaging content.

"Our aim is to deliver a premium price back to producers, to reward them for their work," she said.

The company also takes practical steps to support producers through workshops and networking to ensure moving towards new ways of operating is not difficult.

"There are a lot of producers doing really great things and there's demand from consumers to know where

their food comes from. Producers also want to know where the food they produce goes. It's about two-way communication." ■

✉ Warren Pensini and Marilyn Elson
E: info@wideopenagriculture.com.au
Majella Fernando
E: mfernando@mla.com.au

💻 Wide Open Agriculture
wideopenagriculture.com.au
dirtycleanfood.com.au

The Collaborative Marketing (CoMarketing) Program is an MLA initiative to collaborate with Australian red meat brand owners to market their brands globally. For more information visit comarketing.mla.com.au

How MLA CoMarketing fits with CN30

MLA's Collaborative Marketing (CoMarketing) Program helps brand owners develop effective marketing campaigns for red meat and supports a range of business development and brand marketing activities.

The CoMarketing Program is offering additional support for certified carbon neutral brand producers as an added incentive to help move the industry towards being carbon neutral by 2030 (CN30).

💻 For more information, visit comarketing.mla.com.au

A guide for carbon neutral marketing is available at mla.com.au/cn-brands

For more information about the industry's CN30 goal, visit mla.com.au/cn30

Turn the page to learn how another red meat brand owner is creating a sustainable business in Tasmania.



Grand plans for a better

Tasmanian producers **Sam and Stephanie Trethewey** are pedalling hard to get their beef brand to market.

While Sam reckons the challenge comes from 'building the bike as they pedal', it could also be said they are actually custom-designing the bike rather than sticking to a proven formula.

The Tretheweys founded the Tasmanian Agricultural Company (Tas Ag Co) on their passion for restoring native ecosystems and rebuilding soil health through data-backed management practices and carbon farming. Along the way, they're creating a nutritious and sustainable food product for conscious consumers.

While it's early days – the data is yet to come in and the beef is yet to go to market – Sam and Stephanie's passion and commitment is solid.

They're taking an innovative approach in their aim to produce great, grassfed Wagyu beef from multi-species pastures, and don't own a single breeding cow.

This minimised the initial outlay required for the agricultural start-up. Here's how it works:

- Sam and Stephanie supply the Wagyu genetics – either as semen for AI or as live bulls – to nine Tasmanian dairy farms.
- They then buy back all the first-cross calves from the dairies – providing a market for bobby calves and producing calves for Tas Ag Co without the need to own breeding stock.

At this stage, the Tretheweys are running 1,600 head and will soon expand by another 700 head.

Brand plans

The Tretheweys are currently preparing to launch their product and have relied on MLA's CoMarketing Program to get off the ground.

"The capital up front is really tricky when you're building a new brand," Stephanie said.

"MLA's CoMarketing Program has been critical for us. We've put the funding into things like photography, building our website and our brand design.

"The program has helped us with a lot of those big-ticket marketing items. We couldn't have done it without it."

Stephanie and Sam are buoyed by early interest from chefs, butchers and retailers.

As a young couple with a growing family, they're under pressure but said it's exciting rather than scary.

"It's a two-man show and it's hard work, but there's no turning back now," Stephanie said.

"I think a lot of farming families can relate to that. We're taking a risk but it's exciting. We're just going to have a crack.

"For us, it's about what consumers will increasingly start to demand, and a growing number are environmentally conscious."

Carbon farming

In 2019, Tas Ag Co became the first Tasmanian farm to register a soil carbon project through Australia's \$2.5 billion Emissions Reduction Fund. Their aim is for their

enterprise to sequester more carbon than it emits.

They're using a soil carbon measuring protocol eligible under the United Nations Paris Agreement.

Another important tool is MLA's greenhouse gas emissions calculator, provided through the University of Melbourne, which enables the Tretheweys to examine their on-farm emissions sources and carbon storage options.

"Our approach and philosophy is that we need to reverse the damage done to our soils," Sam said.

They're taking a three-pronged approach involving time-controlled grazing, multiple-species pastures, and avoiding the use of synthetic pesticides, fungicides, herbicides or granular fertilisers.

While Sam acknowledges some of these practices aren't for everyone, he believes the direction they're going in is where the red meat industry needs to head.

In time, the Tretheweys aim to have data that proves their approach is at least as profitable as conventional methods, while having better environmental outcomes.

"I'll be one of the trial dummies. I'll see how it works. Maybe in time people will look at what we and others are doing, see the numbers and be inspired to do it too," Sam said.

Strategies

The Tretheweys describe their approach to planting a diverse mix of feed options rather than a single species as mimicking mother nature.



Sam Trethewey, pictured with Tas Ag Co cattle.
Image: Andrew Wilson Photography

beef brand



Sam and Stephanie Trethewey have used MLA CoMarketing funding to help build their Tas Ag Co beef brand.
Image: Andrew Wilson Photography

SNAPSHOT:
Sam and Stephanie Trethewey,
Deloraine, Tasmania



Area:
400ha

Enterprise:
Beef cattle genetics

Livestock:
1,600 Wagyu

Pasture:
Multi-species pastures sown over clover/ryegrass base

Soil:
Red basalt

Rainfall:
1,000mm

✉ Sam and Stephanie Trethewey
E: sam@tasagco.com.au
E: stephanie@tasagco.com.au
Majella Fernando
E: mfernando@mla.com.au

🖥️ [MLA Carbon Calculator greenhouse.unimelb.edu.au/Tools.htm](https://greenhouse.unimelb.edu.au/Tools.htm)
The Collaborative Marketing (CoMarketing) Program is an MLA initiative to collaborate with Australian red meat brand owners to market their brands globally. For more information, visit comarketing.mla.com.au
Tas Ag Co tasagco.com.au

“Our species mixes include at least one of each of the five main groups – brassicas, legumes, cereals, grasses and chenopods. Sometimes we use two or three species of each group. We’ve used up to 26 species in a mix.”

They use a custom-designed pasture renovator to over-sow paddocks, which uses a small amount of tillage to remove existing grass species so they can sow about 25% of the paddock to multi-species.

“Once that’s established, the cattle prefer the multi-species; they enjoy the diversity,” Sam said.

Stocking density is also an important part of grazing management, and the Tretheweys run 28 DSE/ha.

“I’ve seen the producers who focus on soil health have the most resilient land. They’re the last to go into a drought and the first to come out of it,” Sam said. ■

LESSONS LEARNED

- > An agricultural start-up with an eye to launching a brand needs to tap into support and funding opportunities.
- > Cattle thrive on diverse pastures with a mix of species.
- > Managing soil health is important for resilient land.

RED MEAT POSITIONED FOR POST-PANDEMIC HEALTH BOOM

The global health and wellness industry is estimated to be worth US\$4.2 trillion¹ and red meat has a seat at the table as it feeds consumer demand.

Ageing populations, an emerging middle class with higher disposable incomes, increasingly busy lifestyles and the importance of raising a healthy family are all drivers behind the community's growing interest in wellness activities and lifestyles.

Throw in a global pandemic and the way consumers think and shop for health is changing, with consumers gravitating towards brands they trust and foods with nutritional benefits.

MLA's General Manager – International Markets, Andrew Cox, explains why consumer behaviour is changing during the COVID-19 pandemic and what this means for red meat.

"In the climate of uncertainty created by the pandemic, nutrition through food is one thing consumers have been able to control," Andrew said.

"People are always searching for ways to eat well and stay healthy and this accelerated in 2020.

"For example, 80% of Chinese consumers indicated they would put increased focus on healthy eating due to the pandemic².

"This is a great opportunity for Australian red meat because it's nutrient rich and offers consumers exactly what they're looking for."

References:

1. Global wellness economy monitor, October 2018
2. Nielsen Social Intelligence Survey on Coronavirus, February 2020
3. Coronavirus impact survey – Chinese consumers' meat consumption behaviour changes, April 2020
4. Datassential, Report 5: Sheltered, 27 March 2020
5. Kantar roots of growth: Building for resilience in the fresh food market in Asia, July 2020

MLA's responding to this movement with a new global strategy on nutrition and immunity to position Australian red meat positively through a nutritional lens, empowering consumers to feel confident about including red meat in their diet.

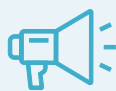
The strategy includes:



Education programs to help consumers understand the nutritional benefits of Australian red meat



Nutritional toolkits to arm international wholesale, retail and foodservice partners with tools to promote nutritious Australian red meat



Marketing material to promote the nutritional benefits of Australian red meat.

Here are some of the ways MLA has adapted international marketing activities to respond to the health and wellness megatrend in our key export markets.

✉ Andrew Cox
E: acox@mla.com.au

🖥 Find out more about MLA's International Markets program at mla.com.au/international-markets



JAPAN

MLA Regional Manager – Japan and Korea, Scott Walker

Health and wellness is big business for Japanese consumers because one-third of the population is now over 65 years old and the birth rate is declining.

COVID-19 has amplified Japanese consumers' appetite for immune-boosting foods and they're now more health conscious than ever.

MLA's long-standing *Are you genki?* campaign drives demand for Australian beef in Japan, capitalising on the health and wellness trend.

The campaign aims to convince busy Japanese women that Aussie beef is 'genki' (which means healthy in English) by raising awareness of iron deficiency and the role lean beef can play in avoiding it.

Over the past four years, the *Are you genki?* campaign has driven awareness of Aussie beef's health attributes with last year's campaign reaching 33 million Japanese consumers.

✉ E: swalker@mla.com.au



MLA Japan's *Are you genki?* campaign raises awareness of iron deficiency and the role lean beef can play in avoiding it.



CHINA

MLA Country Manager – Greater China, Joe Zhu

Chinese philosophy believes the human body is a balanced system of *yin* and *yang*, so the intake of nutrition through healthy food dictates one's level of wellness.

MLA's consumer insights revealed COVID-19 has had a profound impact on Chinese consumers' dietary habits, with one-third of consumers intending to eat more Aussie beef in the future³.

Before the pandemic, the top three considerations when purchasing Aussie beef were safety, freshness and quality. Interestingly, throughout the pandemic, beef's immune-boosting attributes became the second most popular considering factor.

During the pandemic, the importance of healthy and nutritious food from a trustworthy source was paramount and families were cooking more at home.

This presented an opportunity for Aussie red meat, so we implemented:

- a 'How to cook Australian meat at home' education series on MLA's WeChat channel (China's most popular social media platform)
- a social media campaign encouraging social media influencers to share their True Aussie meat moments.

✉ E: joezhu@mla.com.au



MLA's China team implemented an education series showing consumers how to cook Australian meat at home on MLA's WeChat channel.



NORTH AMERICA

MLA Business Development Manager – North America, Catherine Golding

We've gone straight to the source when it comes to health and wellness trends.

Social media influencers often start the health and wellness trends, so we've incorporated an influencer program as part of MLA's seasonal beef and lamb campaigns for the past three years.

We engaged high-profile nutritionist influencers to educate consumers on the nutritional benefits of red meat, demonstrate how to cook red meat and share red meat recipes with their thousands of followers.

MLA consumer insights indicate 25% of US consumers⁴ are eating healthier foods more often since the COVID-19 pandemic started, so it was important to dial up the health benefits of red meat in our 2020 campaigns:

- The *Eat Better. Feel Better* summer campaign positioned Australian beef as an excellent source of nutrients that support health and wellbeing.
- The *Simply Spring* campaign educated consumers on the versatility, ease and nutritional benefits of cooking with Australian lamb, providing resources for stress-free, healthy meals to make at home.

Both campaigns included influencers to expand our reach, producing great results:

- *Eat Better. Feel Better* included seven influencers who created 22 recipes and shared 74 Aussie beef social media posts, reaching 3.86 million Americans. This was part of the overall campaign of digital media, PR and retail activations, which reached 19.93 million Americans.
- *Simply Spring* included six influencers who created 31 new lamb recipes, reaching 2.31 million Americans, which was part of a larger campaign reaching 74.2 million.

✉ E: cgolding@mla.com.au



SOUTHERN ASIA

MLA Country Manager – Indonesia, Valeska Valeska

The health and wellness trend was already gaining pace in Southern Asia before the pandemic, but COVID-19 accelerated it, with consumers paying more for products with compelling provenance stories, assured food safety and immunity credentials⁵.

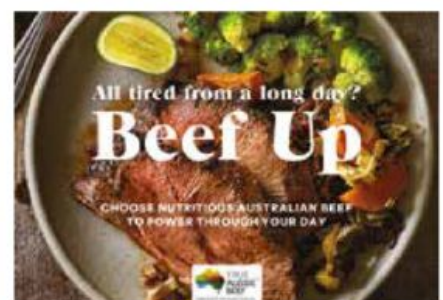
MLA has capitalised on this opportunity with our *Beef Up* campaign, highlighting Aussie beef as the trusted protein for families and the key ingredient to building resilience.

True Aussie Beef seized the opportunity to remind those in need of a power-up that life's always better with nutritious Australian beef, summed up in the campaign tagline, 'when life gets tough, beef up'.

The *Beef Up* campaign is a year-long campaign promoted across Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

In 2020, the campaign reached 6.02 million people on social media and promoted nutritional messages through brochures, recipe cards and pop-up events in retail stores. ■

✉ E: vvaleska@mla.com.au



The *Beef Up* campaign reminds consumers from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore that life's always better with nutritious Australian beef.

Helping red meat brand owners ride the COVID-19 curve

Rewind to March 2020 – when most Aussies were focused on ‘flattening the curve’ – red meat brand owners were also dealing with the curve ball COVID-19 threw at the foodservice sector.

As the country went into lockdown, foodservice sales plummeted and brand owners needed to find new channels for their red meat.

Australia exports almost 75% of its red meat and higher value cuts of meat are mainly consumed through the foodservice sector. So, when COVID-19 forced a global foodservice shutdown, an oversupply of higher value cuts in Australia needed to be sold to support overall carcass and livestock prices.

MLA reacted quickly to the rapidly changing market, introducing short-term financial support measures through the CoMarketing Program to help brand owners find new avenues for high value red meat cuts.

Participants received 75% co-contribution for investment in COVID-19 eligible activities implemented from March–July 2020, which aimed to boost sales of high value cuts, such as developing direct-to-consumer promotions or developing online sales platforms.

✉ Majella Fernando
E: mfernando@mla.com.au

🖥 Find out more and apply for CoMarketing support at comarketing.mla.com.au



MLA's CoMarketing funds helped the Penfold family develop stickers so their packaging was suitable for domestic supermarket shelves.

Here, three red meat brand owners share how they used the COVID-19 CoMarketing funds to grow demand for red meat during the pandemic.

Building an adaptable brand

The Penfold family – owners, Four Daughters

Western Queensland beef producers Dan and Karen Penfold, along with their daughters, Bonnie, Molly, Jemima and Matilda, established the appropriately named ‘Four Daughters’ in 2019.

Four Daughters is a 150-day grainfed black Angus beef brand for the Chinese market. They export directly to a meat wholesaler in Wuhan, China, which services retail and foodservice sectors.

The Penfold family have grown their business from processing 50 head/month to 150 head/month.

How was your business impacted by COVID-19?

We were exporting Four Daughters beef directly to Wuhan – the global COVID-19 epicentre – so our business came to a grinding halt.

Overnight we went from turning over \$500,000/month down to \$50,000. We had 900 head of cattle in a six-month program to meet the supply contract but no export market.

Then our meat processor in Casino, NSW, was suspended from exporting meat to China. We weren't able to secure another processor so, as demand in China eventually came back, we couldn't meet the supply requirements.

This forced us to look at how we could market our beef domestically and sell directly to consumers.

How did you use the COVID-19 CoMarketing support?

MLA's support was a lifesaver as it helped fund the design of product packaging so it was suitable for the domestic market and update our website to allow customers to order online.

What were the results?

We're now processing 12–15 head/month at a domestic processing facility and delivering 150–200 beef boxes a month to homes across south-east

Queensland. We also have our beef on the shelves in one supermarket and hope to expand this.

How will your business be different moving forward?

We've scaled back the feeding program for our branded beef but we're still talking to other buyers across the globe. Our focus is on brand-building and looking at opportunities to expand our branded beef model domestically.

LESSONS LEARNED

- > **Build your brand** domestically and internationally.
- > **Diversify your markets** rather than relying on one export market.
- > **Develop networks** with organisations that can provide support.

✉ Dan and Karen Penfold
E: karenpenfold@me.com



Dan and Karen Penfold and their daughters Bonnie, Molly, Jemima and Matilda.
Image: Josh Kelly from Jack Harlem Photography

ners

Provenance proves best

Linda McKenzie – owner, Strathbogie Goat

COVID-19 CoMarketing support highlights

31

red meat brand owners
received support

86%

of participants increased sales
of premium cuts previously
destined for foodservice

93%

of participants established
new online or retail
distribution channels

\$950,000

shared by 28 beef brand owners*

\$39,000

shared by 5 lamb brand owners*

\$13,000

for 2 goatmeat brand owners*

*Individual brand owner figures don't total 31 as some brands are beef, lamb and goat entities.



Goatmeat brand owner Linda McKenzie successfully entered the retail market by telling the provenance story of Strathbogie Goat. Image credit: Fiona Lake.

Linda McKenzie produces Boer goats on her property at Seymour, Victoria.

She created Strathbogie Goat in June 2019, in recognition of the challenges local restaurants faced in sourcing a reliable supply of quality goatmeat.

How was your business impacted by COVID-19?

We'd only been in business for six months but word had spread among local chefs so I had a full order book. In February we processed the goats, the freezer was full of stock – the next day we went into lockdown and every order was cancelled.

With a freezer full of goatmeat and nowhere for it to go, it was utterly devastating.

How did you use the COVID-19 CoMarketing support?

I used the funding to develop a retail goatmeat product and engaged a social media consultant to tell the provenance story of Strathbogie Goat.

I sold the goatmeat product in my local butcher shop, but the real success came when the Victorian Country Market, which home-delivers food throughout Victoria, approached me.

I used an MLA recipe as inspiration to create a fig and pistachio stuffed loin

specifically for the Victorian Country Market. Before COVID-19, I never used to sell a loin cut and now I'm constantly sold out.

What were the results?

The results have been fantastic. I'm now selling weekly what I used to sell monthly before the pandemic.

The social media campaign helped tap into the retail market by educating consumers on how to cook goatmeat at home and connect with them through our provenance story.

How will your business be different moving forward?

The pandemic forced us to find new (and successful) markets for our goatmeat brand, so we'll continue selling to both retail and foodservice markets.

LESSONS LEARNED

- > **Solve your consumers' problems** by matching your product with a consumer need.
- > **Get onboard with social media** as it's an integral part of how consumers make purchase decisions.
- > **Tell your provenance story** because consumers care where their food comes from.

✉ Linda McKenzie
E: linda_mckenzie@bigpond.com



Linda McKenzie used MLA CoMarketing funds to develop a retail goatmeat product during the pandemic.

Continued overleaf

Bringing home the dining experience

Tim Burvill – Managing Director, South Australian Cattle Co

South Australian Cattle Co is a fully integrated beef operation including A Hereford Beefstouw steakhouse restaurants in Melbourne and Adelaide. Managing director Tim Burvill also developed Australia's largest export-accredited beef dry ageing facility, supplying dry aged beef to domestic and export markets under the Kings+Queens brand.

How was your business impacted by COVID-19?

Restaurant bookings declined from March. We had more cancellations than bookings, so even before lockdown the restaurants became unsustainable, with turnover dropping by 50%.

I also had thousands of dollars of dry aged beef just sitting in our butchery facility, so our priority was to get our Kings+Queens dry aged beef out to as many customers as possible.

We developed 'Hereford at Home' – customers ordered any cut of Kings+Queens dry aged beef and we delivered it to their door so they could cook it at home.

How did you use the COVID-19 CoMarketing support?

The funds were amazing. When everything was blowing up, the last thing you wanted to do was spend more money, but to know your marketing costs were partly covered was a godsend.

I used CoMarketing funds to promote 'Hereford at Home' through social media, update our website so customers could order online, create how-to-cook cards and invest in photography to ensure our marketing material was on-brand.

MLA's support gave me the confidence to go ahead with my idea. It was simple to apply and the funds were available quickly.



The Kings+Queens retail packaging appeared on the shelf at Drakes supermarkets across Australia in October 2020.



Tim Burvill pivoted his business model during the pandemic by creating 'Hereford at Home' so consumers could enjoy their Kings+Queens dry aged beef at home.

What were the results?

It was a tale of two cities. In Adelaide, sales were unbelievable – we made the equivalent of our restaurant sales in 'Hereford at Home' sales. We were selling more Kings+Queens dry aged beef than we would normally sell with all restaurants running.

However, Melbourne sales were less because we limited the delivery zone. It wasn't feasible to service the entire Melbourne metro area.

The pandemic forced us to think outside the square and it put an urgency on getting our beef brand, Kings+Queens, out there and moving. I reached out to Drakes supermarkets and our meat hit the shelves in October, which was a big win for our business.

How will your business be different moving forward?

The success of 'Hereford at Home' helped build the Kings+Queens brand and exposure of our restaurants, so we'll continue to offer this in Adelaide.

When restrictions eased and we opened up the restaurant, it's never been busier – we had our biggest August in nine years. ■

LESSONS LEARNED

- > **Data is king.** Marketing Kings+Queens dry aged beef was easier because over the last 10 years we've collected customer data, so we had a large database to market to.
- > **Diversify your business.** Look at ways you can bring in multiple streams of income by adding another string to your bow.
- > **Don't damage your brand.** Move quickly but make sure new activities are consistent with your brand to ensure long-term success.

✉ Tim Burvill
E: tim@a-h-b.com.au

SUPPLY CHAIN

DELIVERING VALUE

OBJECTIVE MEASUREMENT



Measurement technologies drive new supply chain benefits

Red meat producers are set to see benefits flowing back through the supply chain to the farm gate thanks to new technologies that measure carcass value more accurately than ever before.

The first four-year phase of the Advanced Livestock Measurement Technologies for Globally Competitive Australian Meat Value Chains (ALMTech) project has been completed, leading to increased competitiveness of Australian red meat as a result of improved measurement and characterisation technologies.

These technologies have positioned the industry to meet evolving market demands and minimise value-chain wastage, which is estimated to cost the beef industry \$130 million/year.

The results of ALMTech will also improve management decisions for producers through access to more accurate descriptions of the attributes that influence the value of their livestock: carcass lean meat yield, eating quality and compliance with market specifications.

Adoption of these technologies and services remains critical for the benefits to be realised, so the next phase of the project – ALMTech II – focuses on supporting industry to make best use of the measurement technologies developed. ALMTech II will also continue to provide calibration and supporting accreditation of these technologies as required.

RESEARCH UPDATE

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Delivering validated measurement technologies to drive profitability along the supply chain.

WHY IT MATTERS

Improvements in measurement and characterisation of red meat will increase global competitiveness and profitability as producers are rewarded for true carcass value.

WHERE IT'S UP TO

ALMTech I  Finalised

ALMTech II  Underway

WHO IS INVOLVED

This project is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources as part of its Rural R&D for Profit program in partnership with Research and Development Corporations, commercial companies, state departments of agriculture and universities. A full list of funding partners is available at almtechau.com/funding-organizations

Turn the page to see how ALMTech innovations are already making their mark on the red meat industry.

ALMTech serves up red meat innovations



Handheld microwave scanners are being used to measure fat depth in lamb and beef carcasses.

Many of the innovations supported through ALMTech I have already entered the red meat supply chain following testing and commercialisation.

Here's a look at how these technologies are benefiting producers.



Lamb DEXA

Dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) systems have been developed for lamb processors. ALMTech is providing the on-site calibration required to commercialise this accurate measurement of lean meat yield (LMY) in a carcass.

DEXA delivers the most accurate commercial measurement of the true composition of a carcass, supporting accurate feedback for producers and new trading models.

Lamb DEXA systems have been installed and calibrated in three Australian abattoirs. A fourth unit is being calibrated and a fifth installation is underway. When completed this will see about 30% of lambs being measured for LMY, further enabling these processors to explore value-based pricing models.



Lamb Value Calculator

The Lamb Value Calculator uses carcass weight and girth rib (GR) fat depth or DEXA to estimate retail cut weights and estimate the carcass's profitability.

Through ALMTech, the calculator has been enhanced to improve functionality to describe and compare different cutting specifications and determine which one is expected to be the most profitable for the carcass type.

Two lambs of the same weight can yield greatly varying levels of saleable meat due to their fat composition. So, when processors adopt the Lamb Value Calculator, the benefit flows to producers as products can achieve the highest possible profit margin.



One of the beef grading cameras under development.



Lamb boning optimiser tool

The lamb boning optimiser tool takes cut-weight predictions from the Lamb Value Calculator (which uses carcass weight and yield data, produced by DEXA systems) to determine the optimal carcass-to-market allocation to improve profit margins.

The tool supports decision making when boning lambs to most efficiently meet customer specifications.

In-plant modelling based on the optimiser tool has demonstrated the opportunity to increase carcass value by 10% when sending it to the best market based on the required cut specifications. This demonstrates the potential for greater profitability from industry adoption of this tool.



Beef grading cameras

ALMTech has supported the development of beef grading cameras to improve carcass grading. These devices use an image of the grading site to produce an objective measurement for Meat Standards Australia (MSA) and AUS-MEAT grading.

A grading camera developed by the German company, E+V Technology, has achieved AUS-MEAT accreditation for MSA (0–700) and AUS-MEAT (0–5) marbling score, meat colour and fat colour, with eye muscle area under development. This camera is currently installed in one Australian abattoir.

The Danish processing technology company, Frontmatec, has also progressed a grading camera. It is scheduled for final calibration and will seek AUS-MEAT accreditation in 2021.

Three additional developers – Cedar Creek, Meat Image Japan and Master Beef – also have grading cameras under development.



Intramuscular fat (IMF) needle probe

IMF needle probes are part of a new suite of technologies dedicated to predicting eating quality traits in beef and lamb carcasses.

In particular, they offer benefits to sheepmeat producers as the eating quality of individual lamb carcasses is currently not assessed.

These probes don't require a cut surface, so can increase the efficiency of boning runs as they can produce data on hot carcasses to guide sorting into chillers.

These probes are not yet commercialised.



Beef DEXA

Following the success of lamb DEXA, a beef DEXA system has been developed. Initial testing has delivered similar results in precision and accuracy to lamb DEXA.

A beef DEXA system is now installed in an Australian beef abattoir and undergoing calibration by ALMTech.

Industry collaboration is a key component in the success of DEXA projects, as experimental work supported by supply chains can lead to direct implementation of a device's rapid progression to commercialisation.



Microwave scanners

Fat depth scanners using microwave technology have been produced through ALMTech.

These handheld scanners aim to provide a low-cost tool to objectively measure fat depth in both lamb and beef.

Initial trials provide confidence to move to commercial trials in ALMTech II.



New genetic tools

Carcass value can be highly variable so tools that identify this variation to provide feedback for producers to improve genetics, management and finishing decisions can increase profit along the supply chain.

A key component of ALMTech is delivering outcomes that provide producers with new knowledge of what traits they should be selecting to target more profitable markets.

ALMTech will support new or improved estimated breeding values and genetic tools to achieve the most productive and profitable outcomes for producers based off the learnings of the project.



Supply chain officers

ALMTech, along with industry collaborators, supported high-level technical roles within the red meat industry.

The project supports MLA co-funded supply chain officers, employed by processors, to support business implementation of lean meat yield and eating quality opportunities, and bridge the gap between producers and processors to improve compliance to market specifications. ■

✉ Richard Apps
E: rapps@mla.com.au
Chris Ruberg
E: cruberg@mla.com.au

💻 For more information about ALMTech visit almtechau.com

Building a sustainable future



Here, Jacob talks to *Feedback* about his role.

Q:
What did you do before joining MLA?

I'm originally from Ipswich, Queensland, but spent the past 10 years in central Queensland and the Northern Territory. There, I used my environmental management degree to work with governments in vegetation management and with natural resource management groups in fire ecology, increasing biodiversity and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Sustainability has always been a passion of mine – the idea of using what you have to allow future generations to benefit from the same reliable resources, while also improving productivity and profitability. This, and wanting to take on a challenging national project, is what led me to MLA and the ABSF.

Q:
Why is this role important?

We're living in a world where customer expectations are rapidly developing to favour the products they purchase as being socially, environmentally and economically responsible.

The ABSF not only highlights key priorities and areas of development for the industry, but also communicates to interest groups the progress industry is making across four themes: animal welfare, economic resilience, environmental stewardship, and people and the community.

By demonstrating the industry's sustainability credentials, we can secure access to existing and new markets and provide a competitive edge over other beef-producing countries.

Q:
Tell us about a day in your life?

It's all about engagement and communication. I work closely with the industry-appointed Sustainability Steering Group, who are charged with driving the ABSF, to help Australian producers tell their stories to customers, consumers and the broader industry about why Australian beef is sustainable. We're constantly reporting on sustainability issues that matter most in our industry and tracking the performance of these.

Achieving this can be challenging. The climate our industry operates in is constantly changing, including what consumers are seeking to know and understand about products. Throw in a global pandemic and we're facing constant challenges to market access and engagement.

Q:
What do you enjoy about your job?

I work with people who share my passion for sustainability and want to bring some positive change in the world. Whenever I hear from a producer I've worked with, thanking me for my input into helping them create successful change, it's a feeling you can't beat.

Q:
What is your favourite red meat dish?

Nothing beats a good steak and mushroom pie.

Q:
What's something people don't know about you?

I enjoy refereeing soccer games and have officiated an FFA Cup match involving the current Australian champions, Sydney FC. ■

Jacob Betros joined MLA in 2020 as the new manager for Beef Sustainability, working with the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (ABSF) to meet changing expectations towards the industry.

His love of getting quality, sustainable produce onto plates was grounded in his family's fruit and vegetable shop in Toowoomba and honed during his time working in natural resource management.

✉ Jacob Betros
E: jbetros@mla.com.au

🖥 The Australian Beef Sustainability Framework:
sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au
Turn to page 20 of this edition of *Feedback* to learn more about the red meat and livestock industry's steps towards sustainability.

A roast fit for Christmas

MLA's butcher Doug Piper has created this tasty dish for your Christmas table – cranberries and oranges add some festive cheer to a classic roast. For more delicious beef recipes visit australianbeef.com.au

Cranberry-stuffed oyster blade roast with almond green beans

Serves: 6 • Preparation: 20 minutes • Cooking: 70 minutes

1.8kg beef oyster blade roast, denuded and butterflied

¾ cup dried cranberries

2¼ cups fresh breadcrumbs

1 small brown onion, finely diced

2 tbsp fresh rosemary, chopped

¼ cup orange juice

2 tbsp wholegrain mustard

1 tbsp olive oil

2 whole oranges, scrubbed and sliced

Salt and pepper

½ cup cranberry sauce, to serve

Almond green beans

½ cup slivered or sliced almonds, toasted

600g green beans, trimmed

2 tbsp olive oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

Zest from 1 lemon

2–3 tsp lemon juice

1. Preheat oven to 170°C, fan-forced. Line a large roasting pan with foil and arrange orange slices over the base. Open butterflied roast onto a board, with the fat-cap down, and allow to come to room temperature for 20 mins.
2. In a medium bowl, combine dried cranberries, breadcrumbs, onion, rosemary and orange juice. Season with salt and pepper and mix well.
3. Season the inside surface of the roast with a good pinch of salt and pepper. Spread stuffing evenly over beef, leaving a 2cm border around the edges. Roll tightly to enclose, and with the fat-cap on top, secure with string or food-grade bands every 3cm.
4. Transfer tied roast to the pan and place on top of the orange slices. Combine oil and mustard in a small bowl and spread over the top of the roast.
5. Roast the beef for 60 mins. Remove from oven, cover loosely with foil, and rest for 10 mins. Carve into rounds, removing ties as you slice. Serve with pan juices.
6. To make the beans, bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add green beans and cook for 1–2 mins until bright green. Drain.
7. Drizzle oil into a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for 1 min. Add the toasted almonds and drained green beans to the skillet, season with salt, pepper, and lemon zest, and toss to coat. Stir through lemon juice to taste. Serve warm or at room temperature with the roast.

TIPS

- To make fresh breadcrumbs, pulse bread in a food processor until crumbs form.
- Stir fresh orange zest through cranberry sauce for an extra flavour boost.



MLA updates

A free, five-part webinar series providing updates, insights and inspiration for a **resilient future** for your business

Watch now

updates.mla.com.au