

MLA Producer Demonstration Site Application - background, criteria and process

May 2015

All MLA Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) applications must meet the selection criteria and follow the process outlined below.

Background

The PDS program aims to provide a participatory learning environment for groups of producers to demonstrate best practice (but not commonly adopted) or to localise and validate MLA supported new research outcomes in a commercially relevant context. The PDS program delivers opportunities for red-meat producers to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to increase the rate of adoption of practices that improve business productivity, profitability and sustainability.

The role of the National Coordinator

The National Coordinators role is to coordinate the PDS program, build relationships with producer groups to enable effective implementation and delivery of PDS objectives and provide a link to MLA. Following initial contact with MLA by producer groups, the National Coordinator will follow up potential PDS projects to establish alignment with MLA selection criteria.

The National Coordinator role also includes:

- guidance on proposal development;
- brokering shared agreement on the PDS project between the producer group and MLA;
- facilitating annual review teleconferences with MLA and the producer group;
- guidance to the producer group for reporting of PDS result in quarterly and final reports; and
- Regular communication with group Chairs and facilitators on PDS progress.

The national coordinator is to be a link between the producer groups and MLA. Consequently a key role will be to keep MLA informed of issues with PDS projects as well as communicate good news stories to MLA that can be promoted through MLA's communication channels.

The role of the producer group

The role of the producer group is to engage with the PDS project and use their collective expertise and knowledge to implement the project and identify the tangible and intangible benefits of the project to their farming system.

The producer group's role includes:

- initiate and drive the development of the PDS concept;

- implement the project plan which includes site set up, implement treatments, take measurements and site management;
- organise a contractor / facilitator to analyze data and write progress and final reports according to project contracts;
- engage the wider producer community; and
- participate in learning activities associated with the sites.

The role of the PDS facilitator

Each PDS project is required to have appropriate professional support to oversee experimental design, take measurements not associated with routine farm management, coordinate the taking of routine farm measurements, undertake reporting requirements and lead group learning activities. The PDS facilitator is to support the producer group and oversee implementation of the project, but not fully lead or 'run' the project.

The role of the contracted organisation

The contracted organization is responsible for:

- ensuring the project is implemented according to the contract;
- the performance of the facilitator, including providing quality assurance of reports submitted to MLA;
- advising MLA of changes to the facilitator and scope of work, including when objectives will not be met. A project variation may be requested by the contracted organization; and
- submitting reports and invoices to MLA on time and in accordance with the contract.

Communications, reporting and evaluation

1. Project planning must be undertaken by the producer group facilitated by professional expertise.
2. Interpretation of results must be undertaken in close conjunction with the producer group.
3. Projects are required to report to MLA at least at six monthly intervals, but often at quarterly intervals. Minimum reporting requirements are one annual report and one progress report. Up to two additional teleconferences per year with the National Coordinator may be arranged to review progress. The contract between MLA and the contracted organisation will provide the official reporting schedule.
4. It is the responsibility of the contracted organisation to ensure facilitators provide reports of a professional standard that reflects actual site progress.
5. The group will agree to work with MLA communications staff to develop communication materials for MLA communication channels. At a minimum this would be a Feedback magazine article.
6. The minimum expectation for producer engagement outside the core group is one annual field day.
7. The producer group may be asked to provide positive, non-identifying photos to demonstrate elements of the project for use in MLA communication channels.
8. An evaluation process will be designed in conjunction with MLA. The producer group will be required to provide information to an appropriate standard as advised by the national coordinator.

Budget and funding

1. Up to \$20,000 per group per year for up to 3 years unless otherwise agreed by MLA.
2. The budget amount is dependent on expenditure costs which are to be outlined in the application form and upon approval by MLA.
3. Payments are made upon approval of milestones by MLA and on receipt of a tax invoice.
4. Any money uncommitted at the end of the project must be returned to MLA.

Activity not funded

1. MLA does not fund the cost of capital items and encourages groups to seek sponsorship or establish leasing arrangements for these items.
2. MLA will not fund activity that has significant private benefit, for example, one-on-one coaching or genetic testing. Producer groups will be asked to contribute to such activities.

PDS requirements

Projects should incorporate the following attributes:

- PDS projects should demonstrate, develop and influence adoption of MLA research findings and technologies for local, commercially relevant environments or demonstrate and influence adoption of best practice productivity and sustainability in a commercially relevant context.
- Monitoring of the PDS with objective measures is required for 'before and after' analysis of impact of the project. Projects should have an appropriate level of experimental design to enable analysis and conclusive results.
- Demonstration of a producer group committed to hands-on involvement in participatory learning activity for the duration of the project, with a facilitator who is responsible for overseeing monitoring, collation, analysis and reporting.
- Demonstrate, and where possible quantify, how the project supports on farm change within the group members and the broader community.
- Communication and engagement activities that increase the awareness and engagement of producers outside the core group.
- Commit to the development of a monitoring and evaluation plan (template will be provided) and collection of monitoring and evaluation information for knowledge, skill, confidence and practice change as directed by MLA.

PDS selection criteria

- PDS projects must be initiated by producer groups (minimum of 10 producers) or through MLA initiated campaigns* aligned to priorities identified through the MLA consultation model. Producer initiated PDS projects will be given priority.
- PDS applications should conform to one of the definitions of a PDS:
 - a. Demonstrate principles and procedures aligned with the market majority program curriculum (i.e. demonstrating best practice in commercial settings);
or

* MLA initiated PDS's will be solicited by Expression of Interest.

- b. Demonstrate, localise or integrate new research outputs that align with the above.
- PDS applications will have assessment criteria for the group, technical component, learning and communication, and Monitoring & Evaluation.
- PDS projects must demonstrate a minimum level of design for demonstration purposes i.e. control vs treatment, 'before and after baseline measurements', or multiple sites that share common characterisation.
- PDS projects should be implemented at a commercially relevant scale and be conducted on more than one property.
- Projects must demonstrate committed producer involvement for example, implementation of PDS protocols, participation in group meetings, participate in communication of PDS outcomes beyond the core group.
- Demonstrate a commitment to the collection of knowledge, skill, confidence and practice change information aligned with MLA's M&E program
- All PDS projects require professional support to:
 - a. Facilitate group learning and involvement;
 - b. Ensure that project protocols are adhered to, project measurements are conducted in a timely manner and to an appropriate standard; and
 - c. Conduct and report on M&E and milestone/final reporting to a professional standard.
- All PDS groups must demonstrate commitment to communication / extension activities to promulgate findings across the PDS network and red meat producers generally.
- Projects should clearly show value for money.

The selection of PDS projects is a competitive process. Due to limited funding not all applications meeting the selection criteria will necessarily be funded. Feedback will be provided to unsuccessful applicants.

Application process

Producer groups can apply for PDS funding at any time. There will also be twice-yearly project calls (budget depending) timed to enable Autumn and Spring project commencement.

The following steps should be followed:

1. Establish a producer group, supported by a facilitator (may be a partnership with an organisation that has a common purpose). All groups must include a person experienced in trial design, data collection and evaluation of on-farm projects.
2. Define and describe what the PDS intends to achieve using the project requirements below as a guide.
3. Identify the PDS site management team and producer Chair.
4. Submit a Preliminary Application (max 2 pages) outlining your proposed project
The Preliminary Application should be submitted at a minimum of 12 weeks prior to the desired project commencement date.
5. Discuss your proposal with the PDS Coordinator or relevant MLA Manager:

MLA PDS Manager: Renelle Jeffrey, rjeffrey@mla.com.au

PDS coordinator: Russell Pattinson, miraclerog@bigpond.com

6. Once your Preliminary Application has been accepted, prepare a full application using the PDS Application Form.
7. If your PDS will be contracted through a supporting agency, e.g. DPI or Landcare group, submit your PDS application to the management of the participating supporting agency for review and endorsement.
8. Submit the PDS application to MLA at applications@mla.com.au (or to the PDS project manager) for evaluation against the selection criteria and competing applications.

Application forms are available at www.mla.com.au/producersupport

Updated May 2015