

Feedback

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An analysis of the northern beef industry

A note from the Chair...



On behalf of the Board, I am pleased to announce Richard Norton has been appointed as MLA's new Managing Director, commencing Monday 2 June.

After an extensive executive search, we believe Richard is ideally placed to lead MLA. His proven experience in leading change and continuous improvement within a corporate environment positions him well for the Managing Director role.

Richard's previous roles include Managing Director of Landmark, and senior positions at Wesfarmers Dalgety, Toll Holdings, Woolworths and Coca Cola. He brings experience and knowledge of global agricultural retail supply chains as well as agricultural marketing and production systems.

The Board and I look forward to working with Richard as he builds on the work of MLA to invest in marketing and R&D, to create opportunities to add value to your business. As always the Board and I welcome any thoughts and feedback you may have, as we work to ensure the investments we make on your behalf are as effective as possible, and in the right areas.

Dr Michele Allan
MLA Chair
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Profit drivers pinpointed

The economic sustainability of Australia's beef and prime lamb industries has been analysed in three new reports funded by MLA, providing insights into both the major challenges and the wide ranging opportunities for each sector.

The reports investigated the drivers of on-farm economic performance in the northern and southern beef and prime lamb industries (table 1).


The analysis also provided some practical recommendations to help overcome the challenges. These were identified through an investigation into how top producers operate for long term profitability and economic sustainability.

The economic snapshot of Australia's beef and lamb industries considered herd/flock size, region and markets from 2001 to 2012, providing a follow-up to the original situation analysis reports from 2009-10.

In this edition, *Feedback* explores the detailed findings of the northern beef situation analysis on pages 26-29. Reports on southern beef and prime lamb will be covered in future editions.

Table 1 Key findings from situation analyses

	Northern beef	Southern beef	Prime lamb
State of play	The majority of northern beef businesses are economically unsustainable due, in large, to a growing debt burden. But profits remain steady despite lower prices on average in the past 12 years.	There is a sense of huge opportunity in the southern beef sector despite lower profitability per hectare compared to other enterprises. Long-term beef enterprise profits are lagging behind lamb and crop enterprises, but still exceed wool. The sector is making gains with labour efficiency.	Sheep enterprises are currently enjoying superior average profitability, compared to beef and dryland cropping, mainly due to optimising production per hectare.
Opportunities to improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase reproductive rates • Reduce mortality rates • Heavier sale weights • Lower operating expenses, largely through better labour efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimise stocking rate • Optimise age and weight at sale • Reduce cost of production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production per DSE, in particular growth rate to sale • Firm control over costs, particularly labour

 The three situation analysis reports are available for download:
 Northern beef situation analysis www.mla.com.au/nthbeefsituationanalysis
 Southern beef situation analysis www.mla.com.au/sthbeefsituationanalysis
 Prime lamb situation analysis www.mla.com.au/lamsituationanalysis

MLA Challenge leader board - third quarter

1. Andrew and Megan Miller
2. John and Annie Ramsay
3. Marcus and Shannon Sounness
4. Matthew and Angela Pearce
5. Bill and Georgia Wilson
6. Lachlan and Anna Hughes



Still on top of the Challenge

For the second successive quarter, Queensland producers Andrew and Megan Miller were named leaders in the MLA Challenge.

The Windorah cattle producers were judged the third quarter winners due to their decision to wean early, resulting in greatly improved condition in their cows for joining, which will hopefully lead to an additional 60 calves on the ground.

In spite of drought conditions, the Millers also added \$116/head to the value of the feedlotted steers following detailed planning and assessment of starting and finishing values, feed prices and daily weight gain.


"The difference, now that we are part of the MLA Challenge, is that we're improving the skills we require to farm in an extremely variable climate," Andrew said.

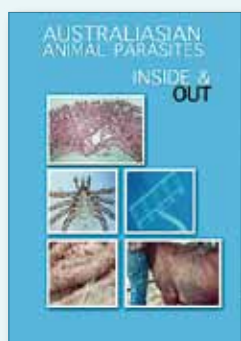
"We are making informed decisions after finding the information we need, talking each major decision through with our mentor and then committing to it. We feel in control, able to consider our options and make choices, even when the conditions are unfavourable."

All six participating producers have seen improvements in their business since joining the MLA Challenge, which has focused on improving their management skills and using tools and evidence as the basis for decision making.

MLA's General Manager Livestock Production Innovation, Peter Vaughan, said the third quarter had seen each of the families make the most of the information, tools and resources available to them, along with the advice of their mentors, to plan and make business decisions.

"The Challengers are really appreciating that, while they have little influence on the end prices, they do have significant scope for reducing their production costs," he said.

 www.mla.com.au/challenge



Online parasites

A new livestock industry e-textbook has been produced with funding from MLA.

Australasian Animal Parasites Inside & Out 2014 is produced by Australian and New Zealand parasitologists and published by the Australian Society for Parasitology. Developed as a teaching resource and reference for the Australian and Asian regions, the text provides insights, management and control techniques for endo- and ectoparasites with major economic impacts.

The e-textbook, which retails for \$33, is recommended for veterinary science, animal science and public health students, as well as veterinarians and livestock producers.



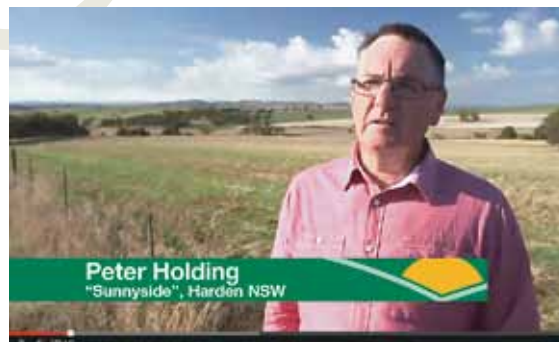
Purchase *Australasian Parasites Inside & Out 2014* at: www.cve.edu.au/animal-parasites-inside-out

Ones to watch

Get inspired by the decisions sheep producer Peter Holding is making by watching MLA's latest producer video. Peter is responding to climate extremes by making bold changes on his cropping and sheep properties at Harden, NSW – including the move to an indoor shedding system to finish his lambs with consistency.

Peter also shares the climate tools he uses to help him respond to climate variability, monitor moisture and avoid temperature shock.

www.mla.com.au/holding-climatevideo



Check out MLA's other recent producer videos:

Telemetry passes the test

Cattle and sheep producer Eric Harvey shares the set up and monitoring of his telemetry system. Mark Gardner explains the findings and labour saving benefits from the MLA-funded Producer Demonstration Site which used telemetry in hilly country in Geurie, NSW.

www.mla.com.au/telemetrypds



Raising the bar with barley

Sheep producer Darren Barker and researcher Garry Armstrong discuss the benefits of growing Moby barley as a feed gap filler at Nullawil, Victoria.

www.mla.com.au/nullawilpds



Ease of operation

Watch cattle and sheep producer David Slade demonstrate his labour saving initiatives and the benefits they return on his property at Mount Barker, Western Australia. www.mla.com.au/slade-labourvideo



Shelter me

See how sheep producer Tim Currie has integrated hedgerows at his Casterton, Victoria, property to enhance lamb survival. EverGraze researcher Anita Morant outlines how to establish hedgerows.

www.mla.com.au/hedgerows



Putting summer-sown legumes to the test

Western Australia cattle and sheep producer Simon Stead outlines the benefits of summer sowing hard-seeded legumes and researcher Brad Nutt shares the golden rules for their establishment.

www.mla.com.au/hardseededlegumes



Peter Whip - Climate Champion

Queensland cattle producer Peter Whip shows how reducing emissions from cattle production does not have to come at the cost of profit.

www.mla.com.au/whip-emissionsvideo



From the big smoke to the bush

MLA's Target 100 program recently partnered with TEDxSydney for its annual 'ideas festival' which brought together 2,500 people to propagate new ideas, inform and inspire.



Amelia Walkley and David Murphy experience a day in the life of a producer at Mt. Riddock.

Target 100 ran an online competition through TEDxSydney's social media platforms to send two urban-dwellers to the Cadzow family's Mt. Riddock station, 200km north east of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

The experience was filmed and turned into a short video that was shared with TEDxSydney attendees and broadcast via the ABC's live stream of the event. The competition winners also joined an expert panel hosted by ABC Landline's Pip Courtney to discuss the realities of the Australian cattle and sheep industry, how beef and lamb is produced and what the industry is doing to increase sustainability.

"Being part of TEDxSydney was a way to bridge the rural-urban divide and empower the audience with the knowledge that their choice to eat Australian beef and lamb is both sustainable and ethical," said Pip McConachie, MLA's Manager - Community Engagement.

And the winner is...

Amelia Walkley, who works for internet giant Google, won the trip to Mt. Riddock. The 26-year-old, who grew up in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, entered the competition to be pushed out of her comfort

zone and "learn about something so completely different to my everyday life".

Amelia has friends from the country and her grandfather was a CSIRO scientist who worked on optimising sheep production, but she had never spent much time on farms. Spending a day at Mt. Riddock Station with hosts Rebecca and Steven Cadzow was an unforgettable experience for her and her partner David Murphy. Here are Amelia's thoughts on the experience:

Before visiting Mt. Riddock, did you ever think about what went into producing red meat?

I've eaten meat my whole life and absolutely love it. But I think we are so disconnected from where our meat comes from because for us it involves going to the butcher or the supermarket and we only experience that last part of the journey. I think I was most surprised to learn that cattle can even be raised in the Northern Territory. For me, I thought the NT was dry and red and dirt and dust, but I was so surprised to see how much grass was actually growing out there at Mt. Riddock.

What did you do on your trip?

We experienced life through the lens of the people who work the land at Mt. Riddock,

doing everything they do in their everyday job! We rode quad bikes, checked out distance learning with the Alice Springs School of the Air, went in helicopters, mustered cattle, swatted away countless flies, checked the teeth of cattle and learnt about NLIS tracking and tagging.

What would you say to Australia's beef and lamb producers having seen what goes into producing the meat that ends up on your table?

Thank you for your hard work and dedication! Learn from each other, share best practice and embrace technological innovations so the whole industry can grow sustainably.

I certainly feel more confident about my consumer choices. From my experience with the Cadzows I think Australian producers are working incredibly hard to produce a great product, and that animal welfare is looked after during the process, so I'm proud to buy Australian.



Check out Amelia's trip to Mt Riddock at www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdISOUfd4fo

Consumer trends

The premium sales pitch



Australian cattle and sheep producers need to 'sell their story' to emerging markets to ensure ongoing demand for premium red meat.

That's one of the messages international food marketing expert Professor David Hughes (right) will share with audiences when he speaks at Lambex 2014 in July. He has issued a challenge to Australian producers to respond quickly to changing world consumption - otherwise, he warned "you'll be down the bottom of the commodity market, arm wrestling with buffalo meat from India."



International food marketing expert and Lambex 2014 guest speaker Professor David Hughes.

David Hughes is Emeritus Professor of Food Marketing at Imperial College London and travels the world talking to businesses, trade associations, governments and conferences on global developments in the food and drink industry.

He's been making regular trips to Australia for more than 20 years and has been closely observing the way worldwide consumer and demographic trends impact red meat industries.

According to David, the best opportunities for growing demand are in the emerging markets of Asia and Africa, but industries will have to work hard to "sell" the premium message.

"Beef and lamb are premium products with a premium price tag," he said.

"In the past five to 10 years we've seen consistent and increasing demand for higher value protein in emerging markets. Thank the Lord that's been happening, because demand has been muted in the more traditional markets.

"I tell red meat audiences to celebrate the fact they're premium, but understand it brings responsibility.

"You have to earn that premium every day. You have to work out what is your point of difference over much cheaper, alternative proteins and constantly reassert and articulate that message."

David tells his audience to imagine they are an emerging Asian consumer who has just picked up Australian beef or lamb in a supermarket.

"Say to yourself 'I'm willing to pay twice as much per kg for this than I'd have to do for my

pork and other meat because...' then finish the sentence," he said.

"Maybe it's because 'I know it's so tasty it makes me dribble with excitement' or 'the story of Australia and its safe, green and promised land is so reassuring'.

"Whatever it is, you have to finish the story."

What's going on?

While demand for meat protein is rising in less-developed countries, David said meat consumption per person in most developed countries was static at best and, in many areas, declining.

"These are mature markets and meat is under pressure," he said.

"There are a range of reasons, but the main ones are the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in Europe and North America, an ageing population in Europe and a worldwide focus on health and wellbeing."

The spend

According to David, the GFC put pressure on consumers in developed countries to reduce spending on relatively expensive meat protein.

"This translated as either trading down to cheaper cuts or, for those at the margin, eating less meat," he said.

"It was even visible in Australia's beef exports to Japan. During the GFC there was a switch away from grain-finished and chilled, to grass-finished and frozen."

Ageing population

David said the slowdown in demand for red meat during the GFC was exacerbated by another demographic trend: ageing.

"As they age, people tend to eat less and, in particular, they eat less meat," he said.

On the positive side, while older consumers want to eat less meat, David says they also want to buy better quality.

"If you're older and have money in these developed countries, you want to eat less meat, but better quality, and you're willing to pay more.

"So that's a good consumer trend for beef and lamb producers."

Healthy choices

One less positive trend is the continued perception that red meat is less healthy than white meat.

"This is a constant issue and it's a worldwide perception," David said.

"We've just had another burst of it in the UK with the release of research showing a link between major diseases and eating too much protein. It tends to be the red meats and processed meats that get the attention."

Future eating

David predicted further development of 'ready' meals.

"There's been a lot of talk in Europe of more cooking from scratch as people try to save money," he said.

"That suggests the trend towards convenience, ready meals is slowing, but I don't see that at all. In fact, there's been astonishing growth in this area in Australia over the past five years and I see that continuing.

"In UK supermarkets now you can buy stir fry kits with three interchangeable components - meat, cut vegetables and noodles. These are packaged separately but presented

together - a challenge for retailers who generally put produce in the produce section and meat with meat."

David also foresees niche trends such as 'paddock to plate' and 'sustainably produced food' becoming the norm in developed and emerging economies.

"Sustainability and environmental elements won't earn you a premium, but they will give you the ticket to enter premium markets where a great taste and story provide the impetus for a price premium," he said.

"Not getting over the 'green bar' will see you penalised with a price discount."



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www.profdavidhughes.com



Where:

Adelaide Showground

When:

9-11 July, 2014

Program:

A two-day conference featuring industry experts, informative sessions and trade displays relevant to all sheep producers.

More details:

www.lambex.com.au

Aussie, Aussie, Aussie; beef, lamb, goat!

Take one island nation, add a dash of pride, passion and Aussie spirit and what do you get? A global identity for Australian red meat.

Growing demand

MLA's new international brand campaign is designed to secure market share, product identity and industry reputation by promoting Australia's environment, production systems and food safety standards.

Brand Australia, with its 'True Aussie' tagline, will provide a marketing umbrella of consistent images and messages to underpin Australian exporter brand-building activities. It will reflect MLA's marketing to positively position Australian beef and lamb in overseas' markets through country-of-origin marks which reinforce generic attributes.



While the new 'Brand Australia' will be introduced during the next year, a sneak peek was revealed in May at Asia's food and beverage exhibition, SIAL, in China and the National Restaurant Association trade show in Chicago.

MLA's General Manager of Global Marketing, Michael Edmonds, likened Brand Australia to well-known country of origin marks like French Champagne, which invoke positive perceptions.

"In a competitive market, with shifting trade barriers and changing consumer demands, it's important to differentiate Australian product," he said.

"We can't control price influences like weather or exchange rates, but we can influence the opportunity to attract premiums which will ultimately benefit producers.

"True Aussie will do this by celebrating Australia's land, farmers, produce and principles, to create a positive image for red meat based on provenance, integrity and an aspirational way of life."

Brand new

But aren't there red meat 'identity' brands already in place?

"Various Australian country-of-origin brands were developed by MLA and its predecessor company AMLC (Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation) to address market needs," Michael said.

"For example, the Aussie Beef logo in Japan was created 20 years ago as a mark of discernment and quality, and then refocused to promote the clean and safe reputation of Australian beef after the US suspension into Japan due to BSE in 2003.

"The *Hoju Chungjung Woo* (Aussie Beef: Clean and Safe) campaign in Korea is another trust mark, contributing to Australia maintaining market share in Korea despite a 5% tariff difference between Australian and US beef in the past two years."

In developing True Aussie, MLA examined regional campaigns and the Australian lamb/Australian beef logos used by exporters.





“Our market research confirmed it was time to update our existing marks,” Michael said. “For example, using ‘Aussie’ instead of ‘Australian’ reflects our contemporary sophistication, relaxed and friendly nature, and is more distinct.”

Hey, true blue

Products will be labelled as True Aussie Beef, True Aussie Lamb or True Aussie Goat. The brand will refresh the existing Aussie Beef mark in Japan, while in markets like China, where there is not currently a distinct Australian brand identity presence, it will present opportunities to embed “True Aussie” from the ground up.

The True Aussie program is part of a long-term strategy to grow value for Australian red meat supply chains by differentiating Australian red meat from competitor products. It will build on industry systems such as National

Livestock Identification System, Livestock Production Assurance and Meat Standards Australia.

Nationally, Austrade is developing a ‘clean, green, safe’ food brand. While MLA works closely with Austrade, the distinct red meat brand allows beef, lamb and goat industries to tap into a more targeted strategy which will add value to specific markets.

“Being ‘clean and safe’ is one important part of the story but we require a more layered story to achieve our goals, one that resonates with emotive feelings towards Australia,” Michael said.

“We can maximise the advantage these programs offer through clear branding, to our trade customers (importers and wholesalers) and to consumers of Australian red meat around the world. This is what the True Aussie program is all about.”

Brand pillars

The True Aussie brand is built on three pillars:

→ **Ideal home:** showcasing Australia’s island status and environment.



→ **Trusted partners:** proud, passionate producer families treat their animals with care, respect the environment and consistently deliver red meat with the highest standards of safety and integrity.



→ **Pure enjoyment:** Australian red meat not only tastes great – it offers healthy, relaxed and shared enjoyment.

Pay-off to industry

By positioning the red meat industry as a global identity with a promise of consistent quality, delivery and integrity, True Aussie aims to deliver:

- Increased international market share
- Potential to access premiums
- Stronger positioning of Australian brands
- More efficient, consistent industry marketing campaigns
- Support for market initiatives to increase consumer awareness
- Support for growing and developing markets (such as Middle East/North Africa and China)

Want to know more?

In the next two years, existing brand logos will be pushed into the background, as True Aussie is rolled out.

Australian exporters can access consistent marketing material such as point-of-sale resources, brochures, websites and educational videos. Regionally relevant taglines will be developed so Australian beef, lamb and goat have distinct looks within the overall brand.

‘True Aussie’ will not be rolled out domestically to avoid implying there is significant imported product on the Australian market (only small quantities of New Zealand product are sometimes sold locally but always with country-of-origin labelling).



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In profile

Keeping the finger on the food pulse

Lorraine Elliott // *Blogger of Not Quite Nigella*



As David Hughes gears up to share some of his insights about emerging global food trends at Lambex (see pages 6-7 for a preview), *Feedback* spoke to one of Australia's most popular food bloggers, Lorraine Elliott, about food trends she's noticing in the domestic market - particularly those relating to red meat.

Her blog, *notquitenigella*, has more than 275,000 unique readers and 650,000 page views a month. The Sydney-sider has been blogging since 2007, turning her passion for food into a full-time job in 2009.

Lorraine keeps her finger on the pulse of what interests *notquitenigella* readers by noting which of her recipes are downloaded and interacting with subscribers via her 'comments' section. Here Lorraine shares her take on seven current food trends:



Slow cooking with secondary cuts - Winter is here so people are starting to think about comfort foods and bringing out their slow cookers. I'm also noticing people branching out into non-prime cuts, because they're cheaper and they suit slow cooking.



Paleo - There has been a strong trend for the high protein, low carb Paleo diet and that doesn't seem to have died down. I don't follow the Paleo diet, but I'll occasionally put up Paleo recipes and they're always popular.



Healthy food - The interest in healthy food usually only lasts to the end of January, but this year it's really enduring. I'm finding a lot of my healthy recipes are getting a great response in terms of downloads and comments.



Fermentation - People are seeing health benefits from eating fermented foods and it's becoming quite popular with Paleo and 'healthy' eaters.



Provenance - People are wanting to know more about the provenance of their food, particularly for meat, but also for vegetables. This has translated into two other trends - buying from butchers and home gardens.



Buying from butchers - Many people are now buying from butchers, as opposed to supermarkets. A butcher provides value-adding services such as helping prepare the food, for example stringing a pork loin, and they can tell you where the meat comes from. People are interested in where their meat is from, whether it's grass- or grainfed, and for pork, whether it's free range.



Home gardens - Home gardens are big with my readers. Many have chickens, to produce their own eggs, and vegetable gardens. I try to keep the blog seasonal because I know some vegetables run rampant at certain times. For example, if I put a zucchini recipe up when they're in season, people will make it straight away and let me know.



Building capability

We are the (farming) champions

Six passionate young Australians have been selected as the 2014 Cattle and Sheep Young Farming Champions.

Sponsored by MLA and run by Art4Agriculture, the Young Farming Champions program aims to develop the rising stars of the cattle and sheep industries to be advocates for agriculture and to prepare them to lead the next generation.

According to MLA's Community Engagement Manager Pip McConachie, investing in the Young Farming Champions is helping secure the future of agriculture.

"It's about equipping younger generations with the skills, knowledge and confidence to lead and educate others about the cattle and sheep industries," Pip said.

"Our Young Farming Champions are passionate about the industry and are driven to succeed in their chosen fields. It's great to see such enthusiasm from the next generation to not only work in agriculture, but to promote it through schools and the wider community."

The Champions will attend skills and knowledge workshops and connect with fellow champions from other industries. Through their training, they will be given unique insights into all aspects of the agricultural supply chain, as well as consumer attitudes and trends.

"For agriculture to thrive in the 21st century, we need a connected, cohesive and respected agricultural sector," said Lynne Strong, the National Program Director of Art4Agriculture.

Representing the Archibull Prize program - now in its fourth successful year - the Champions will also visit schools across Queensland, NSW and Victoria. The Archibull Prize is an in-school program encouraging students to learn about sustainable agriculture and environmental issues through art and multimedia.

Prue Capp: Hailing from Gresford in NSW's Hunter Valley, Prue is a true agri-all-rounder: she grew up on her family's beef property and is a sixth generation producer, she is an equine dentist, a veterinary science student, an Australian Stock Horse judge and is the 2013 Trans-Tasman National Rural Ambassador.

Tim Eyes: A farm consultant and manager of two commercial beef properties on the NSW Central Coast and a stud cattle show team in the Hunter Valley, Tim was dux of his year at Tocal Agricultural College. He believes in constantly striving for economic and ethical sustainability and demonstrates how you can be involved in agriculture without owning land.

Geoff Birchnell: Armed with a Bachelor of Commerce, Geoff works as an accountant in Brisbane but remains passionate about the bush and his family's Hereford cattle stud at Loomberah, near Tamworth in NSW, and their Sydney Royal Grand Champion bull, Avignon Absolute.

Meet the Champions

Josh Gilbert: An advocate from a different angle, Josh has a Bachelor of Commerce and is in the final year of a law degree. Josh's family runs a Bradford cattle stud and he dreams of building his own agricultural empire while providing legal advice to regional Australia.

Casey Dahl: As the fourth generation to breed beef cattle on the family property near Baralba in Central Queensland, Casey has embraced science and is completing honours research at the University of Queensland on the preservation of bovine semen. Casey believes that working together is the most effective way to share how wonderful agriculture is.

Anika Molesworth: Griffith, NSW-based Anika is an agribusiness banker who grew up on her family's Dorper sheep property near Broken Hill. She believes that the industry needs ambitious and innovative people who see past the status quo to embrace sustainable farming now and into the future.

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Learn more about the Young Farming Champions by searching their name at www.target100.com.au

Market compliance

Enhancing MSA

Producers can now use the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) Index to closely track how changes to their production systems impact the eating quality of their cattle.

The new index was created to help producers understand the direct impact of decisions relating to genetic traits, breed composition and animal management on eating quality so they can more consistently meet market specifications.

MSA Manager Richard Lower said the index represented an "enhancement" rather than a change to MSA, with MSA standards for livestock and grading unaltered.

"MSA currently predicts an eating quality score for 39 major cuts in the carcass, using measurements collected by qualified MSA graders," Richard said.

"The MSA Index is a weighted average of these scores, using the most common cook method for each cut.

"It only takes into consideration the factors controlled by a producer, making it a standard national calculation regardless of processor or location.

"Prior to the index, producers had to keep track of all the variable factors that impact on eating quality, such as marbling, hump height, ossification, sex and hot standard carcass weight.

"Now these are all rolled into a single numerical figure - the MSA Index."

Producers are not required to do anything different on-farm to prepare cattle and consign them for MSA. The only difference is they'll now receive an MSA Index score for each carcass that meets the minimum requirements for MSA grading.

Good grades

The score is a number ranging between 30 and 80, expressed to two decimal places (ie 54.62). The higher the score, the greater the potential eating quality of the carcass.

The factors with the most influence on the index are:

- Tropical breed content/hump height
- MSA marbling score
- Ossification (maturity) score
- HGP status
- Milk-fed vealer category
- Whether the cattle were delivered direct to processors or through the saleyards

Producers can access their MSA Index value, as well as a breakdown of the individual factors affecting these values, through the newly developed MSA feedback system, myMSA (www.mymssa.com.au).

The pilot myMSA website was launched in November 2013 and is undergoing refinements, based on producer feedback, so it is as user-friendly as possible. The updated version of myMSA is expected to be released next month.

"Producers can use the index to target those factors that impact the eating quality of their individual herd, such as marbling or ossification," Richard said.

"Processors may also use the index to indicate to producers the eating quality parameters expected for their brands, by nominating a preferred MSA Index range."

Working it out

Producers looking to increase eating quality can also use the new MSA Index calculator to predict the potential impact of production changes.

The calculator can be found at mymssa.com.au/msamobile

"Say, for example, a producer is receiving index results consistently below the level required by their particular processor," Richard said.

Fast facts

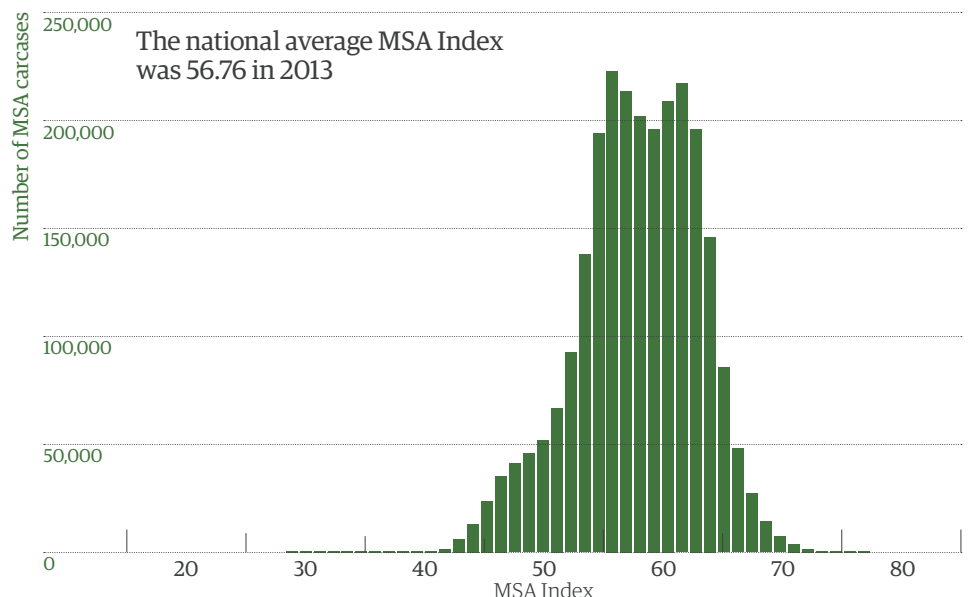
Two initiatives are being rolled out to enhance the value of the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) eating quality program:

1. MSA Index; and
2. MSA Optimisation.

The MSA Index is a **producer-focused** feedback tool designed to provide a standard national measure of the potential eating quality of a whole carcass.

MSA Optimisation is a **processor-focused** tool to assist in the way MSA carcasses are sorted in the abattoir according to market requirements.

Figure 1 Distribution of the MSA Index across MSA carcasses nationally in 2013



Source: Meat Standards Australia

"They can enter the carcase measurements from their feedback sheets straight into the calculator, modify the measurements to reflect some 'what if' scenarios (such as increased marbling or carcase weight) and see the impact of these production changes on the index value."

The myMSA site also contains historical data for all MSA-graded cattle since 2010, with MSA Index values calculated for these animals (see Figure 1 for the distribution of Index values of MSA graded cattle in 2013).

"This allows producers to benchmark their own index data for the last four years," Richard said.

"If a processor has asked for a certain index range in their company specification it will give the producers confidence to know what values their animals have been generating historically.

"If improvements are required, then they can use tools like the MSA Index calculator to assist them."

Online tips and tools

www.mymssa.com.au

mymssa.com.au/msamobile

Want to learn more about meeting market specifications?

Download the meeting market specs module of More Beef from Pastures at:

www.mla.com.au/mbfp/meeting-market-specifications

And the BeefSpecs calculator at:

www.mla.com.au/beefspecs



A screen shot of the MSA Index calculator



Richard Lower, MLA

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Feedback will cover MSA Optimisation in a future edition.

The index at work

MSA-registered producers selling stock to Wingham Beef Exports are now receiving MSA Index results on their carcase feedback sheets.

The Nippon Meat Packers' Wingham plant has been supplying the MSA Index results since February.

Livestock buyer Stephen Moy said the index was being used as the basis for pricing, replacing the former boning groups-based pricing system, for MSA-graded carcasses.

"We have three MSA-graded categories: an antibiotic-free program; our Wingham Blue brand, which is a 0-6 tooth product, both non-HGP and HGP treated; and our Manning Valley Naturally brand, which is HGP-free, 0-2 tooth and grassfed," Stephen said.

"Anything with an MSA Index of 50-plus will find a home on our MSA grid."

Stephen said Wingham Beef Exports had been spreading the word about the new MSA Index via a series of roadshows, run in conjunction with MLA's Livestock Supply Coordinator, Terry Farrell.

"We've done workshops in Wingham, Gloucester, Willow Tree, Armidale, Dorrigo and Singleton," Stephen said.

"They've been well supported and there has been a pretty smooth acceptance of the new system, particularly among the bigger producers."

Producer experience

Walcha, NSW, producers Rob and Maria Ireland sell 99% of their cattle to Wingham Beef Exports.

The couple run 650 cows on their property 'Bundagra' and fatten on two other properties.

While the majority of their steers go into the EU market, their 18-month-old cull heifers target the MSA-backed Manning Valley... Naturally brand.

"We've been MSA-registered for a long time but we only started selling MSA-cattle when Wingham launched their Manning Valley... Naturally brand a couple of years ago," Maria said.

"Now we're receiving the MSA Index results on our feedback sheets and I think it's a pretty good idea - it gives you a benchmark and an idea of how you're going."

"Wingham requires an MSA Index score of at least 54.5 for the Manning Valley... Naturally carcasses and our cattle have all gone over that so far - they've averaged about 58 or 59. Our most recent consignment of 54 heifers ranged from 56 to 62."

Maria said she hadn't tried out the MSA Index calculator but could see its potential in helping producers who weren't hitting their targeted grid, or wanted to target a new market.

"I think if you want to target a different market then the calculator could be quite useful to you, but we're in the right grid for the cattle we want to sell," she said.



Stephen Moy

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Wingham Beef Exports' Shane Rutledge at the Nippon Meat Packers' plant.

Research at work

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

In this issue

22// Forage findings

A 'fly on the wall' look at a pasture field day at Capella, Queensland.

24// Grazing and grain

Read the results of the first trials in MLA-funded dual-purpose crop research.

28// What's the situation?

Northern cattle producers, Bruce and Sam Cobb outline their strategies to keep ahead of the game.

30// Middle Eastern lamb

Organic lamb producers share their observations at one the largest foodservice fairs in the world.



Putting on some beef

Business management

More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) is achieving a sustainable increase in productivity by driving change within southern cattle enterprises.

MBfP National Coordinator Peter Schuster said increased productivity, measured by kilograms of beef/ha, was achieved by optimising the use of the available feedbase.

"The MBfP program engages with southern cattle producers and acts as the primary conduit for R&D outcomes," he said.

"More than 12,000 producers have participated in the program in the past three years and more than 5,000 of those indicated they intend to change or have already changed their practices as a result of participation in the program.

"Our focus is on practice change to deliver a marked impact on total agricultural production and to measure that impact.

"We work through private deliverers and, where possible, state departments to engage with people who really want to make change."

The *More Beef from Pastures producers' manual* has been updated to include the outcomes of the Beef CRC and other research. It is available free online in an interactive format.

Delivering results

A recent evaluation of More Beef from Pastures and its sister program, Making More from Sheep, revealed that 85% of producers indicated they had made a change as a result of attending a workshop. Over half (59%) said their intended change had immediate benefits including:

- increased production (73%)
- feeling more in control or less stress (61%)
- increased income (51%)

"Delivery is important when customising and explaining the information available through the producers' manual to match the varying needs across different states and agro-climatic regions," Peter said.

"The MBfP state coordinators work with local deliverers to ensure a strategic approach to meet the needs of participants in each region.

"We have a new team of state coordinators and are keen to work with anyone who wants to work with us, either as program deliverers or producers taking part in the program."



Median property size of MBfP participants:

401ha

Median mob size of MBfP participants:

300head

Interested in joining the MBfP program?



MBfP National Coordinator
Peter Schuster

Contact the coordinator in your state for more information:



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E: mrae@macfrank.com.au



Peter Schuster
E: peters@schusterconsulting.com.au



Read the *MBfP producers' manual* at
www.mla.com.au/mbfp

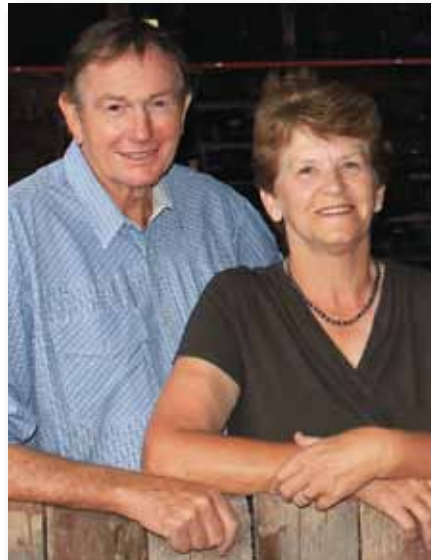


The proof is in the production. *Feedback* talks to previous participants at More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) events to hear how their cattle enterprises have benefited from the program.

Scone,
New South
Wales



Ross and Dianne Deery run 300 breeders on 1,000ha. A small Hereford herd is joined to Angus bulls to produce black baldy cows. These are joined to Charolais and Limousin bulls with the progeny sold at 350–360kg liveweight (curfew weight of 340kg) through the saleyards.



Millicent,
South
Australia



Andrew Bell and his family run between 1,500–2,000 Hereford cows on 4,000ha. The enterprise includes 1,400ha of crops.



What motivated you to get involved with MBfP?

We wanted to take the blinkers off and have a look at what other people within the region were doing, and make a comparison with what we were doing. We wanted to know how we were going relative to others and then to improve what we were doing.

We were looking to be as productive as we could and any edge you can gain is good. Basically, we were looking to improve pasture utilisation and match numbers to feed.

In which area of your operation has MBfP delivered the greatest benefit and how?

Number one would be cross breeding and introducing European bulls and joining them to black baldies and Hereford cows. We had started down that track and it consolidated my ideas.

Feed utilisation was the greatest benefit. Going back 15 or 20 years, we were pretty much using set stocking rates, and now we have gone more to rotational grazing – running larger mobs and moving them more often.

Tell us one change you have made to your enterprise as a result?

We used to set stock but have changed to a rotational grazing system. It is a considerable advantage because you are giving that country a spell and we've learnt to look at the property more critically.

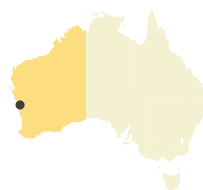
The big change is containment feeding in the autumn with small sacrificial paddocks. We feed a lot of silage and hay and let the feed get away after the autumn break. It takes a fair bit of work feeding the hay and silage, but once they have that feed in front of them, it makes it easier through the winter.

**Broadford,
Victoria**



Henry Marszalek runs 250 Angus breeders on 280ha. He is involved in the BetterBeef program, which is closely aligned with MBfP.

**Irwin,
Western
Australia**



Sally O'Brien and her brother Andrew Gillam run 380 Santa Gertrudis/Charolais cross breeders on their mixed farming property. They have hosted two MBfP workshops on their property.

**Ringarooma
Tasmania**



Cattle finisher Peter Berwick runs 250-300 British breed steers and heifers on 120ha on two properties.



I don't have a background in farming, although I have been on the farm for 25 years. With my BetterBeef Group, most of us have backgrounds off-farm and, if anything, that has helped us question a lot of stuff.

Pasture utilisation and looking at the cost of production. When comparing my property to some of the better-run farms, I found I don't have a high enough stocking rate. We are still limited by inadequate pastures, so that is what I am continuing to work on.

Rotational grazing has allowed me to control the condition of the cattle and manage pasture growth. I have nearly 80 paddocks in the 280ha and I constantly rotate the mobs. The infrastructure cost is high, with fencing and water in each paddock to make it work, but this has to be factored in.



We have a desire for self improvement and, by hosting the events, we felt we could gain the maximum benefit from them.

We gained a better understanding of how to fat and muscle score our cattle and the relationship this has to female selection and fertility. We felt our mature cow size was getting too large for the seasons we have. The course's biggest impact was to assist our decision to introduce Shorthorn blood into the breeding herd through an artificial insemination program to reduce mature cow size.

As a result of the very first course we hosted, we started doing semen morphology testing of our bulls. We immediately had a result, finding one of the two bulls we had just bought was infertile.



I just wanted to improve myself and learn a bit more. I am big on making my pastures better, although I haven't been able to do that for the past couple of years as they have been going along all right.

Probably rotational grazing and better pastures is the biggest thing. I move the stock about every second day with a 16-20 day rotation. I think on-off grazing is very good for your pastures.

You have to buy the right cattle to be successful. Originally, I was running cows and calves but I got out of them. It is more profitable to buy stock in. You can buy good cattle for \$500-\$600/head and, after keeping them 10-12 months, I have been selling them for about \$1,200.

Genetics



Tending the flock

The future of the MLA Resource Flock has been secured until 2020, providing the basis for industry adoption and further development of genomic selection technology.

Information Nucleus Flock (now Resource Flock) program leader Professor Julius van der Werf and his team tested about 20,000 sheep for more than 150 traits over five years.

MLA Genetics R&D Project Manager Sam Gill said MLA supported funding of the flock for a further six years to protect the accuracy and integrity of genomic testing for hard-to-measure traits, such as lean meat yield (LMY) and eating quality.

“Genomic selection allows the selection of young animals for both simple and hard-to-measure traits, but it requires about 400 new animals/year/breed to be measured and genotyped for all traits,” Sam said.

“If the Resource Flock was not maintained, the accuracy and integrity of those genomic tests would reduce over time.

“While selection for these hard-to-measure traits could continue, it would be difficult to

manage any unfavourable relationships between traits, so continued selection for improved LMY would result in reduced eating quality for lamb.”

As part of its funding decision, MLA requested a biennial review of the Flock’s progress, design and structure, and a greater engagement with industry.

“We’re moving to an open co-investment model that will eventually see both research stations and ram breeder flocks supplying the reference data needed for genomic selection,” Sam said.

Safeguarding the genetic gains







The CRC for Sheep Industry Innovation (Sheep CRC) has estimated that, with the

genomic information now available, it is possible to increase the rate of genetic improvement of the current selection indices by more than 7% in meat breeds and around 20% for Merinos. There are additional benefits from the potential to select now on new traits that are not yet in the index, such as meat quality.

“Genetic improvement is one of the most cost effective methods for lifting on-farm productivity,” Sam said.

“The current rate of genetic improvement in the Australian sheep industry is high for traits that are cheap or easy to record, such as growth rate and muscularity, but generally poor for hard-to-measure traits

Information Nucleus Flock (INF)/Resource Flock timeline

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 - 2013
Flock’s first mating	First traits for eating quality measured	First reproductive traits measured	First genomic breeding values to industry produced	INF transitioned to industry-funded Resource Flock. Number of research station sites reduced from eight to two.	Joinings at Katanning and Armidale funded by MLA and the Australian Meat Processor Corporation.
					

20,000

animals tested through INF for

150 traits

Flock in a nutshell

The Information Nucleus Flock (INF) started in 2007 with up to 6,000 ewes managed in eight locations across four states. It was run to allow researchers to test progeny of key young industry sires for an extensive range of traits in differing environments. This information has been added to the Sheep Genetics database to enhance the accuracy of Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) used by industry.

Research has analysed and used genotypic information on progeny and industry sires to estimate and test SNP panels as predictors of breeding values. Genetic information has been generated about new and novel traits and traits that were difficult or expensive to measure on-farm that may be related to wool and meat quality, disease resistance and reproductive fitness. The INF was also the focus of management, wool and meat research being undertaken in the other CRC research programs.

It has now evolved to become the Resource Flock located in Western Australia and NSW.

that are either too expensive to measure, have no clear market signals or can only be measured late in life.

"The Resource Flock's contribution to genomic selection technology means the sheep industry is now moving into an area where DNA technology is commercially available to sheep breeders for a wide range of traits.

"The other benefit of the Resource Flock is that we can use it to overlay other research projects, over and above genetics, looking at things like production, health, welfare and lifetime reproduction.

"There is about \$6 million in additional projects using that sheep population as a resource."

Delivering for producers

The current MLA Resource Flock began as the Sheep CRC's Information Nucleus Flock (INF) in 2007.

Over five years, the INF gathered a massive database of biological and genetic information by joining 5,000 ewes each year to about 100 industry sires chosen for their genetic diversity.

The sheep were run as five sub-flocks, spread over eight research stations around Australia.

INF Program Leader Professor Julius van der Werf said the flock was carefully created to reflect Australia's entire sheep genetic resource.

"In the five years, we tested about 20,000 animals for more than 150 traits," Julius said.

"We're now picking out the most important hard-to-measure traits to measure in the long term, such as intramuscular fat, meat quality, tenderness and fatty acid profile.

"We're also using the data collected over that time to investigate new traits, such as nutritional content, disease resistance and methane yield."

As well as supplying data for new genomic selection, the INF has improved the current sheep industry genetic analysis by refining the genetic connections between Australian sheep flocks and generating new data.

As soon as new data is collected, it is included in the routine MERINOSELECT and LAMBPLAN genetic analyses, providing new and improved Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) for traits such as fertility, parasite and breech strike resistance.

Want to improve the genetic gain in your flock? Here are some resources to help:

www.sheepgenetics.org.au

www.sheepcrc.org.au/management/genetic-selection/sheep-genetics-merinoselect-and-lambplan.php

www.mla.com.au/sheepgenetics

Download Module 9 - *Gain from Genetics from Making More from Sheep* at

www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au/gain-from-genetics/index.htm

Download various publications including:

→ *An introduction to MERINOSELECT*

→ *Tips and Tools: An introduction to LAMBPLAN*

→ *A pocket guide to ASBVs*

at www.mla.com.au/publications



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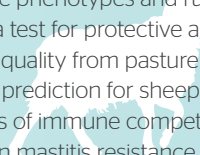
2014

Announcement of MLA funding for Resource Flock to continue to 2020.

Future

Additional projects using the Resource Flock as a research resource include:

- Collection of methane phenotypes and rumen microbial genotypes
- Sheep CARLA™ saliva test for protective antibodies against gastro-intestinal nematodes
- Comparison of meat quality from pasture and grain-finished lambs
- Generating genomic prediction for sheep traits, with an emphasis on carcass and meat quality traits
- Developing measures of immune competency
- Measuring variation in mastitis resistance



Northern feedbase

Forage for thought

High-output forages (HOF) play an integral role in cattle backgrounding and finishing operations in Central Queensland's Fitzroy Basin. On-farm research currently underway aims to improve cattle business profitability in the Fitzroy River catchment by using sown forages to increase productivity.



The High-Output Forages project is comparing:

Annual forage crops:

- Oats
- Sorghum
- Lablab

Perennial legume-grass forages:

- Butterfly pea-grass
- Leucaena-grass

Perennial grass pasture as a baseline.

The High-Output Forages project has been running on sites across the Fitzroy Basin since 2011. It is run by the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF) and co-funded by MLA.



High-Output Forages Project Leader Maree Bowen (pictured) said the second phase of the project was providing more definitive information on the profitable use of high-output forage options (see some preliminary findings on pages 22-23.)

"Detailed data has been collected from 24 forage sites on 13 co-operator properties across the Fitzroy River catchment. In addition, five economic case studies have been run with producers to examine the effect of high-output forages on whole farm profitability," she said.

The research found there was a range in profitability of annual and perennial forage crops, as management, seasonal and market factors all affected gross margins.

"While the forage gross margin calculator can determine gross margins for paddocks or properties, forage gross margins are only the first step in determining the effect of sown forages on whole-farm profitability," Maree said.

"The true economic value of high-output forages can only be fully assessed by considering the farm operation with and without forages, and looking at the net profit generated by alternative operating systems.

"It is also necessary to adjust for the likely changes in unpaid labour and capital when the overall production system is changed."

Project conclusions and products will be available in late 2014 with a final report, a forage best-practice management guide, a spreadsheet gross margin calculator and a forage decision support tool.



Maree Bowen // T: 07 4936 0291
E: Maree.Bowen@daff.qld.gov.au

Pushing production with pasture

Developing a pasture-based production system that can consistently carry 5,000 steers has not been straightforward on 'Gordon Downs'.

While permanent pastures were being developed, forage crops were used to fill the feed gap, playing an important role in moving to 'peak production', according to manager David Thornberry.

David lives on Gordon Downs with his wife Wendy and their children. The 17,000ha property is owned by Rio Tinto and has been leased by the North Australian Pastoral Company (NAPCO) since 2003. Two permanent staff members work with David and seasonal contractors are used for activities such as sowing.

"To hit our production peak, we need to finish developing the old cultivated country. We're not sure what that peak is yet," he said.

"Because we're a backgrounding operation receiving predominantly steers from NAPCO's western properties, the plan is to discontinue all cropping.

"Our cattle numbers fluctuate due to the nature of our operation and the seasons, but ideally we'd like to sustain 4,000 to 5,000 head annually."

Dominated by rich arable basalt soil, self-mulching downs country and loamy scrub soil, Gordon Downs has significant areas of native, buffel and improved grass pastures, as well as leucaena. With the ongoing planting of improved pastures and legumes, the area under forage crops is decreasing.

NAPCO aims to turn cattle off as feeders at 480-540kg before they go to the company feedlot near Dalby.

"Cattle are rotationally grazed to utilise the pastures to their full potential and receive supplements through the cooler months when protein levels in the grass are at their lowest."

Gordon Downs has been involved with the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF) High-Output Forages project for more than two years (see page 20).

"We are starting to see the results now, with some interesting figures emerging. It will be valuable information and we look forward to applying any relevant results to enhance our operation," David said.

Good gains

Leucaena was first planted on Gordon Downs in 2005, with the latest crop planted last year.

"We now have 1,100ha of leucaena and we're achieving weight gains during the summer and autumn peaks of around one kilogram or more a day, with the year-round average of 0.75kg/per day," David said.

"We've planted a lot of cultivation country back to pasture and legumes, with a good mix of grass, butterfly pea and legumes rather than just all buffel grass. The legumes are a nitrogen fixer and are beneficial to both the soil and the cattle."

The average cost of planting leucaena on Gordon Downs was a one-off \$245/ha.

"That's the advantage of leucaena, compared to planting forage at an average of \$120/ha every year (using contractors)," David said.

He said leucaena grew well in the central Queensland highlands, but production was increased by good management.

"Every couple of years we chop the plant to control the height, to stop it becoming unmanageable and to avoid waste. We manage the paddock as a whole with leucaena and grass because, without grass competition, weeds like parthenium can take hold," David said.

"As we are unable to leave cattle on leucaena to 'crash' graze, we use a contractor to chop it at a cost of \$40-\$60/ha every few years and aim to extend that to every three years."



David Thornberry

E: gordondowns@napco.com.au



Snapshot

Owner:
Rio Tinto

Manager,
Gordon Downs:
David Thornberry,
Emerald, Qld.



Property:
17,000ha

Enterprise:
Beef cattle
backgrounding
operation

Livestock:
5,800 head

Pasture:
Mix of native and
improved pastures
(legumes and
buffel grass)

Soil:
Self-mulching
downs country
and a mix of loam,
scrub soils, alluvial
flats and clay
basalt soils

Rainfall:
607mm

Northern feedbase

A high-output field day

Feedback sent writer and cattle producer Paula Heelan to learn about the findings to date from the High-Output Forages project at its first field day on host property 'Gordon Downs'.

Two more field days followed at 'Rolleston' and 'Wandoan'. Each event included paddock visits, the opportunity to hear from producers and presentations from the project team. Here's Paula's report on what unfolded at Gordon Downs.

09:00am Introduction to forage systems

David Thornberry

Gordon Downs Manager David Thornberry presented an overview of the property's beef cattle backgrounding operation and how pastures fit in that system (see case study on page 21).



David Thornberry -
Manager, Gordon Downs

09:15am Maree Bowen Project background: high-output forage systems for meeting beef markets (Phase 2)



Maree Bowen, HOF
Project Leader

Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF) Ruminant Nutritionist and Project Leader Maree Bowen said the project would develop a best-practice management guide, a new gross margin calculator and a forage decision support tool to help producers profitably use forages in the Fitzroy River catchment area. Final conclusions and support tools will be available in late 2014.

Tips before growing a high-output forage crop:

- Understand what you want to achieve with the crop and choose the variety accordingly.
- Use best practice agronomy and grazing management practices.
- Where grain crops are not an alternative and grass pasture is the alternative under consideration, perennial forages may add value.
- Carefully assess the need for annual forages, as the risk is high and the profit margin can be low.

09:40am Getting off on the right foot

Stuart Buck

QDAFF Senior Agronomist Stuart Buck said data was collected from the most commonly grown forages, including annuals (oats, forage sorghum and lablab) and perennials (butterfly pea and leucaena). A perennial grass-only site was monitored at three locations as a comparison.



Stuart Buck, QDAFF
Senior Agronomist

"Getting the agronomy right (when establishing sown pastures or forage crops) is the first step in maximising potential profit from sown forages. Following important agronomic management practices ensures the forage gets off to the best possible start," Stuart said.

10:00am What was measured?

Kylie Hopkins

QDAFF Technical Officer Kylie Hopkins presented the information that has been collected and analysed for each project site:

- land and soil type
- climatic data
- forage biomass
- pasture composition
- forage quality (crude protein and dry matter digestibility)
- grass species distribution
- diet quality
- weight gain and stocking rate
- gross margins.



Kylie Hopkins, QDAFF
Technical Officer

11:00am Maree Bowen, Stuart Buck, Kylie Hopkins: Project results

Maree Bowen, Stuart Buck and Kylie Hopkins presented data for eight sites, including forage sorghum, lablab, oats, leucaena and buffel grass, and discussed the major factors affecting site gross margins.

A preliminary results summary for 12 annual forage sites gave insight into the range of production figures and gross margins that can be expected from annual forages in Central Queensland under present economic conditions.

97 producers in total attended the three field days

More than 50% indicated they would make changes to their practices as a result of what they learnt





1:45pm

Jason Brider, Decision Support Tool demonstration



Jason Brider, QDAFF Senior Programmer

QDAFF Senior Programmer Jason Brider outlined the new forage decision support tool that is under development. This tool will allow a forage and animal performance comparison for annual forages and perennial grass pasture, and is based on 100 years of climate data and soil characteristics for land types. It will allow users to examine potential effects of management decisions on forage yield and animal production by assessing 'what if' scenarios.

2:30pm

Maree Bowen What have we learnt so far?

Maree Bowen discussed how using technical information to help grow and manage forages according to best-practice principles could result in maximum beef output.

"The project field sites have shown that sown annual and perennial legume forages can significantly increase beef output per hectare compared to existing perennial grass pastures," Maree said.

However, the economic performance of forages is not always well correlated with forage and animal performance.

1:00pm The economics of high-output forages

Fred Chudleigh

QDAFF Economist Fred Chudleigh discussed how the economics of high-output forages could only be established by looking at the entire farm business and considering the impact on farm operations and profit of alternative enterprises that do not incorporate high-output forages. With this in mind, the following conclusions could be made:

- High-output perennial forages can add significant value to a beef-only enterprise where the growing of grain crops was not a realistic option.
- High-output annual forages were more costly and risky than perennial forages, and may not add value to the overall enterprise under current market conditions.
- Where high-output annual forages are currently successfully grown and grain crops are a realistic option, it is most likely grain crops will significantly outperform the alternative annual forage crop.



Fred Chudleigh, QDAFF Economist



Findings from the research will be published in a future issue of *Feedback*.



The 2010 report on earlier research titled *Using high quality forages to meet beef markets in the Fitzroy River catchment* can be downloaded at www.futurebeef.com.au/wp-content/uploads/HOF-book-LowRes.pdf

Tips and tools to use when planning forage crops:
www.futurebeef.com.au/topics/pastures-and-forage-crops
www.mla.com.au/foragecrops

MLA's stocking rate and feed demand calculators:
www.mla.com.au/stockingrate
www.mla.com.au/feeddemand

The EverGraze pasture improvement calculator
www.mla.com.au/pastureimprovementcalculator

Brendan Kemp 'Carramah', Capella

"It was good to hear about and compare the economics of forages. It gives you a good idea and options to consider."



Helen Sullivan (left) 'Talagai', Capella

"It was interesting to hear about the different ways of managing - which you can then bring back to your own property. Today has been very informative and the sharing of information really helpful. It's great that MLA is doing something in this region - something applicable to our area."

Denise Studt (right) 'Coolabah Park', Capella

"A really interesting day. I enjoyed hearing about the establishment and management of the perennials. We are converting farming country back to pasture and considering leucaena. It's clear you need to be careful where you place it."

Grazing efficiency

Dual-purpose crops pass first test

Above: Lambs grazing *bisserrula* as part of the lamb finishing experiment at Wagga Wagga.

In NSW alone it is estimated the value of grazing grain and cereal crops over winter can offer an additional \$150 million a year to sheep and cattle production, according to the CSIRO. A new MLA funded research project aims to maximise this value by providing guidelines on the most effective growing and grazing regimes for dual-purpose wheat and canola crops. After a challenging first year, the preliminary results are in.

Led by CSIRO's Dr Andrew Moore, the project features inter-linked grazing experiments at three locations: Tablelands (Canberra), NSW Riverina (Wagga Wagga) and south-west Victoria (Hamilton).



CSIRO's Dr Andrew Moore is leading the four-year project.

Tablelands

The Tablelands experiment is looking at increasing the per-hectare productivity of a Merino-based system by converting a portion of grazing land to wheat and canola crops that can be grazed during the winter feed gap.

The experiment includes three treatments:

1. Pasture only (control)
2. Ewes grazing on crops
3. Weaners grazing on crops

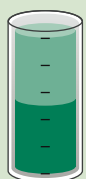
The trial kicked off with sowing in early March 2013, before heading into a challenging growing season.

"We had a poor autumn and winter, a short-term drought that required extensive hand feeding, heavy frost damage to the canola in late October and poor weather at lambing, resulting in substantial lamb mortality," Andrew said.

"By having a diverse feedbase, we made our way through the challenges better than if we'd had just a grass-based pasture feedbase or even just a grass and one crop feedbase."

Project dashboard: Step changes in meat production systems from dual-purpose crops in the feed-base

Financial contributions to the project:
\$1,594,514



MLA levies: 50%
Government: 50%

Length of project: 5 years

Commenced: March 2013
Completed: May 2017



The project is part of MLA's objective to:

Improve pasture and forage crop productivity, quality and persistence.

The preliminary findings included:

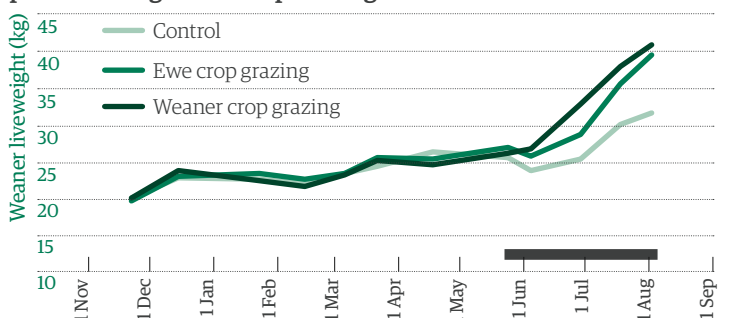
Supplementary feed cost savings - ewes and weaners required supplementary feeding in all experimental treatments. Ewes in the control treatment required 90kg of grain each, but ewes in the crop-grazing treatment only required 29kg each while weaners grazing crops required 54kg each.

Live weight gains on crop - the weaners were fed to ensure they met their 30kg-plus target market. Those in the crop-grazing treatment achieved 25% more liveweight than the control group (figure 1).

Efficient rain utilisation - the trial site received rain in December 2012 and February 2013. It wasn't enough to encourage much pasture growth, but it provided a sowing opportunity for the dual-purpose crops. "When autumn turned out very dry, we had a large mass of wheat and canola available for the animals," Andrew said.

Diversifying dual-purpose crops spreads frost risk - heavy frost in late October produced substantial yield penalties in canola, but not wheat. Despite the frost losses, the canola crops paid for themselves from the grain alone.

Figure 1 Average weaner live weights in each of the three Tablelands experimental treatments. The dark bar shows the period during which crops were grazed.



Source: CSIRO

Good agronomy is just as important for grazing as for grain yield

- good weed control allows more flexibility in grazing strategies. "We had to use a post-emergent herbicide on the canola and the withholding period meant we couldn't graze at a time when we really needed to," Andrew said.

NSW Riverina

The Wagga Wagga site is considering whether dual-purpose wheat and lucerne crops fit better with Merino- or Dorper-based production systems.

The genotypes being studied are: White Dorper ewes x White Dorper rams (DxD), White Dorper ewes x White Suffolk rams (WSxD) and Merino ewes x White Suffolk rams (WSxM).

Research associate Shawn McGrath from the Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation (NSW Department of Primary Industries and Charles Sturt University) said there were some preliminary findings:

Lower biomass - it may be possible for ewes to graze dual-purpose wheat crops with a lower biomass than is generally recommended for pasture.

"Our ewes lambed down on dual-purpose wheat in July," Shawn said. "They only had 300-400kg DM/ha at a stocking rate of 9.5 ewes/ha. The normal pasture recommendation for twin-bearing ewes is 1,200kg DM/ha during late pregnancy.

"Most of the ewes were twin-bearing and we were able to maintain them on the crop up until lamb marking."

Hybrid vigour effect - after lamb marking, the ewes and lambs were moved onto lucerne until weaning in late September.

The weaning weights of twin-born WSxD lambs were heavier than the WSxM or DxD twin-born lambs.

Lamb finishing experiment - groups of five DxD lambs and five WSxM lambs grazed four different pasture treatments for two months in the spring. The pasture treatments were: biserrula, biserrula/sub-clover, sub-clover and lucerne.

Lambs on biserrula had slower growth compared to the other treatments, with possible photosensitisation in the first week. There was no significant difference in liveweight gains between Dorper and crossbred lambs grazing biserrula.

On the other legume pastures, the first-cross lambs had faster liveweight gains than the Dorpers; however, post-slaughter measurements showed the Dorpers had heavier carcasses and higher 12th rib GR fat.

South-west Victoria

In Victoria, researchers are assessing whether canola crops can be sown in spring, grazed by young ewes in autumn, then grown on for grain. As the Victorian node is still in the early stages, results aren't available.

A feed on offer snapshot of four paddocks at the Canberra site on 5 April 2013. Which would your sheep prefer?

Wheat



Canola



Ley pastures



Permanent pastures



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Want to learn more about integrating dual-purpose crops in the high rainfall zone? Go to: www.csiro.au/Organisation-Structure/Divisions/Plant-Industry/HRZ-dp-crops.aspx

Northern beef situation

Increased production = increased profit

High levels of debt are plaguing the northern beef industry, but there is light at the end of the tunnel for producers who focus on

MLA's *Northern Beef Situation Analysis* has delivered a clear roadmap for economic sustainability for northern beef businesses.

The analysis found most northern beef businesses were struggling due to increased debt with no increase in prices or profit in the past 12 years.

But, as report co-author Phil Holmes from Holmes & Co pointed out, there were successful business models for producing beef in the north.

"The differences between the top 25% of producers and the rest are they have a lower cost of production, they're productivity driven, they generally have better operating scale and better control on their expenses, and they have good financial skills," Phil said.

"But, really, that's just the effect. The 'cause' is the fact they have a different mental attitude. They see the station as a business, not a lifestyle."

The analysis found the profitable enterprises achieved higher income through better herd productivity and lower operating expenses, largely through labour efficiencies.

There was no evidence that superior performance was due to a higher average price received, more rainfall or better quality land.

"We found 82% of herd income could be explained by productivity and 10% by price," Phil said.

"So price received is largely a distraction.

"Producers need to focus on productivity and there are three main drivers: the reproductive rate of the herd, the mortality rate, and the age and weight at turn-off.

"Improving any one of those will produce a dramatic result."

Report co-author Ian McLean from Bush AgriBusiness said another impediment to profitability was operating scale.

"The report found businesses with less than 3,000 AE* had higher costs due to economies of scale," Ian said.

"Herds with less than 3,000 AE can still be profitable, but they must have very high productivity and a very effective cost base.

"We found those with less than 800 AE, even the top 25% in that cohort, were not profitable.

"However, we also found the benefits of additional scale decreased as herds became very large (above 5,400 head), so there appears to be an optimal scale range."

While the top 25% of performers had profitable businesses, the report found they were experiencing declining profits due to falling beef prices in the past decade.

"They already have tight control on their expenses and their labour efficiency is pretty good, so they're getting squeezed," Phil said.

Bang for buck

The report identified three productivity drivers:

1. Higher reproductive rates
2. Lower mortality rates
3. Heavier sale rates



in the north

financial management and herd productivity.

“However, the issue of herd productivity means there is still enormous scope for them to lift profitability.

“We know through benchmarking and modelling that very small changes, such as increasing reproductive rate by 2-4%, dropping the mortality rate by 1%, or putting another 30kg on for turn-off weight, go straight to the bottom line and make a huge difference.

“So the top 25%, as good as they are, still have plenty of room to move.”

* 1 x AE (animal equivalent) =
1 x 450kg *bos taurus* steer



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Ian McLean
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Where should you focus?

The report provided six focus areas for northern producers:

- Improve financial skills and debt management
- Understand profit drivers and focus on them - understand what are not profit drivers and don't focus on them
- Focus on increasing income by producing more kilograms of beef
- Improve climate risk management
- Manage expenses through improved labour efficiency, budgeting and planning
- Match stocking rates to long-term carrying capacity

Practical steps for business success

The report authors have developed some 'first steps' producers can take to improve the profitability of their businesses.

Co-author Phil Holmes said “the first is to become financially aware and start running the place as a business, rather than a station that provides a job and a place to live.”

“A good start would be to do MLA's BusinessEdge course.

“Producers need to understand the key performance indicators (KPIs) of the herd and the business, and put sensible plans in place to make sure those KPIs are hit.

Ian McLean said producers must have a good understanding of their individual herd performance.

“They need a good understanding of their herd numbers, what animals they have by age group and herd performance year to year, so they can identify areas for improvement,” he said.

The report identified three productivity drivers (see box on page 26):

“Start with mortality rate - that will give you the biggest bang for your buck in the short term,” Phil said.

“Number two is get your turn-off weights up - don't be seduced by the higher price per kilogram of younger animals. Kilos going out the gate beats price every time.

“Then you should focus on reproductive rate, because that takes longer for the benefits to flow through.”

Read how Queensland producers Bruce and Sam Cobb are tackling it on pages 28-29. →

Resources

Cost of production and financial management

- **BusinessEDGE** is a two-day financial and business management training workshop for northern beef producers. Go to www.futurebeef.com.au for event details.
- *Tips & Tools: Calculating cost of production for your beef enterprise* www.mla.com.au/calculating-CoP-beef
- The beef cost of production calculator is a tool kit to help beef producers determine their production costs and compare their performance annually. www.mla.com.au/beefCoP
- The Breedcow and Dynama software package is designed to plan, evaluate and improve the profitability and financial management of extensive beef cattle enterprises. www.daff.qld.gov.au/business-trade/business-and-trade-services/breedcow-and-dynama-software

Reproductive efficiency

- The Breeding EDGE course is designed to assist northern producers to develop a breeding program or improve the existing one. It uses reproductive and genetic knowledge and technologies to achieve desired production targets. Go to www.futurebeef.com.au for event details.
- *Heifer management in northern beef herds* manual www.mla.com.au/heifermanual
- *Weaner management in northern beef herds* manual www.mla.com.au/weanermanual
- *Managing the breeder herd - Practical steps to breeding livestock in northern Australia* www.mla.com.au/breederherd
- *Tips & Tools - The accuracy and success of EBVs* www.mla.com.au/EBVaccuracy

Lower mortality

- The breeder mortality calculator assists cattle producers in using their own property records to determine levels of breeder mortality in their herds. www.mla.com.au/breeder mortality

Northern beef situation

Manage your grass, know your herd's reproductive rate and sell non-performers. Bruce and Sam Cobb's cattle breeding philosophy sounds simple enough, but it wasn't developed overnight and has taken plenty of time and effort to perfect - and they admit they're still learning.

With the release of the Northern Beef Situation Analysis, *Feedback* asked the Clermont producers to share some of the factors that contribute to their profitability.



Aiming for efficiency all round

The Cobbs run 1,200 Brahman-cross breeders on 'Mellaluka', on the Belyando River north-west of Clermont. Each year they turn off about 550 two to three-year-old bullocks for the EU market, selling predominantly to Teys Rockhampton.

The couple managed the property from 1998, before purchasing it from Sam's parents in 2006.

"As a largely breeding enterprise, the key factor to our profitability is reproduction rates," Sam said.

"We manage reproduction by focusing on: controlled mating and pregnancy testing; vaccination; bull selection; rotational grazing and wet season spelling; and yearling mating."

Reproductive efficiency

As managers, the Cobbs introduced controlled mating and pregnancy testing in 2001.

"Bulls go in with the cows in the first week of December, for 90 days," Sam said.

"We pregnancy test when we wean in June/July and anything not pregnant is sold. In December, when we do the first round of branding, anything that hasn't raised a calf goes as well.

"We don't cull our cows for age - if they're pregnant every year, they stay. A heifer calf out of a cow that has raised a calf every year is very valuable to us.

"Body score is most important for re-breeding and we control this with grazing techniques, lick and weaning early if need be."

The latest weapon in their reproductive arsenal is yearling mating, now in its third year.

"We pick up another 100 calves and recognise our most fertile heifers early on," Sam said.

All weaner heifers are mated from mid-January to March, giving them the best chance of calving after the wet season has started. Preg testing happens in June and the pregnant ones are moved to the best paddocks and supplemented with lick if needed. Their calves are weaned early.

"The heifers that aren't in calf are visually assessed and culled based on type and temperament. We require all our heifers to have had two calves by the time they're four," Sam said.

Next on the list is vaccination, with cows vaccinated for botulism and leptospirosis and bulls for vibriosis and three-day sickness.

"We have always vaccinated for botulism but we started vaccinating for lepto about eight years ago," Sam said.

"Our preg-testing rate picked up by about 15% in our first-calf heifers straight away."

The Cobbs' reproduction focus also influences their bull selection.

"Knowing the history of the bull's mother is vitally important to our bull selection," Sam said.

"We prefer to purchase a bull bred from a cow that has raised a calf every year."



Snapshot

Sam and Bruce Cobb,
Clermont, Qld.



Property:
28,300ha

Enterprise:
EU-accredited
beef breeding and
fattening enterprise

Livestock:
1,200 Brahman-
cross breeders,
with predominantly
Brahman and Red
Brangus bulls

Pasture:
Predominantly
buffel grass, with
spear grass in the
Desert Uplands
country and
Mitchell grass on
the floodplain
country

Soil:
Mostly sandy loam

Rainfall:
559mm

Grazing efficiency

The final elements in lifting reproduction rates also underpin the Cobbs' entire land and business management philosophy: rotational grazing, wet season spelling and conservative stocking.

"This sums up Bruce's whole philosophy: manage your grass first and everything else will follow," Sam said.

"Good groundcover is essential in upholding body condition score, which is imperative for reproduction. We maintain groundcover by rotational grazing, allowing most paddocks a minimum 60-day rest during the wet season."

"Maintaining groundcover also opens up other opportunities, as we've just seen with the below average wet season we've had up here.

"You can make use of any amount of rain, because it goes straight into grass production, not recovery."

The Cobbs were able to maintain groundcover throughout the drought, which meant when it started to rain they

grew feed quickly and were then able to buy cheap cattle to trade.

"In addition, feeding lick is a huge expense in our area and by rotational grazing we have been able to significantly reduce this cost, as well as overheads related with having cattle in every paddock on the place," Sam said.

Management efficiency

Four years ago the Cobbs attended a Grazing For Profit management course with Terry McCosker from Resource Consulting Services.

They then spent three years working closely with like-minded producers in an Executive Link planning and benchmarking group.

"It was instrumental in teaching us how to analyse our business - the old adage of 'working on your business, rather than in it,'" Sam said.

"As part of our business analysis we went back through all our records and found there were years with a 60% preg-testing rate, but the next year it would be in the 80s.

"That told us there were a lot of cows calving every 18 months instead of every year. By focusing on reproductive efficiency we're now achieving an 86-92% preg-testing rate every year."

Sam and Bruce believe their herd's reproductive rate is near optimal levels, so they're now turning their attention to other profit drivers, such as turn-off weights.

"We've been using Red Brangus and Droughtmaster bulls for the past three years, though still retaining the nucleus Brahman herd, and we're starting to see the effect in our cattle now," Sam said.

"Selling the non-performers is vital to create a profitable enterprise and we implement this in our breeders as well as with our steers.

"Those steers that take too long to get to a finished target weight cost the business a lot of money."

Financial efficiency

When Sam and Bruce bought Mellaluka in 2006, they were "definitely driven by debt" to look for ways to improve their business.

As well as attending the Grazing For Profit course, they have also attended a KLR Marketing workshop.

"We both see the need to educate ourselves on the business side of the enterprise and to be proactive - it's no good doing post mortems on the business after it fails," she said.

"We've picked and chosen bits and pieces from each course and they've all become tools we use to improve our business."

Lessons learned

- Manage your grass and maintain groundcover
- Know your herd's reproductive rate
- Sell non-performers
- Educate yourself to boost your financial understanding
- Seek advice from successful people in your industry



Sam and Bruce Cobb
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Building capability

Taking in the view from Dubai

Organic lamb producers and retailers Andrew and Maree King came home from the world's largest annual food fair, Gulfood, in Dubai, earlier this year with some new ideas.

Snapshot

Andrew and Maree King, Longreach, Qld.



Property:
17,000ha

Enterprise:
Self replacing certified organic commercial Dorper lambs

Livestock:
6,000-7,000 Dorpers ewes

Pasture:
Open Mitchell grass downs

Soil:
Black soil

Rainfall:
320mm



1



2



3



4



5

1. MLA's Regional Manager Middle East and North Africa Jamie Fergusson with Maree King at Gulfoods.
2. Andrew King checks out lamb displays at Gulfoods.
3. The Gulfood trade show in Dubai.
4. Some of the thousands of people who attend Gulfoods.
5. Andrew King at the entrance to the event.

The couple, based near Longreach, have operated their family business, Silverwood Organics, for 12 years and pride themselves on their front gate to front door service, via their own delivery van, to customers throughout Queensland.

Andrew and Maree took out the 2013 AgForce Queensland award for Sheepmeat Producers of the Year, and their prize included an MLA-funded trip to Gulfood.

What was Gulfood like?

Enormous. In the United Arab Emirates they can't grow anything; all the food is imported so it's an important market to every food exporting nation and they were all there. China had a huge section, it was like Chinatown and there were extensive red meat displays from Europe, New Zealand, the US and Brazil. We were particularly impressed with Victoria's (Australia) large display of cheese, wine and meat.

At Gulfood, the MLA display showcased a broad range of Australian red meat product. MLA has good relationships with importers and were constantly facilitating introductions and talks with potential Australian exporters.

Did you identify opportunities for your business?

The food trends in Dubai are about seven to 10 years behind Australia. At the moment consumers are very much about

convenience foods, small portions, pre-prepared meals and embracing more western-style cuisine. Organic food is very much in its infancy and for us, the price premium we can achieve in our domestic market just isn't there yet (in Dubai). That said, it's made us think outside the square and we will investigate export opportunities in more mature markets such as China and Korea. Dubai is definitely a market to keep our eye on.

Are there any immediate changes you will make to your business as a result of this trip?

Yes. It was really interesting for us to see how other countries cut up a carcass and we learnt some new ideas. As a result we'll be including some new cuts in our lamb packs that make better use of the carcass and focus on convenience cooking. The days of the three-hour lamb leg roast are gone; most mums don't have the time. They want something simple that takes less than an hour to prepare and that's what we're increasingly mindful of and catering for.



Andrew and Maree King

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Hospitable trends in the Middle East

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) encompasses 42 countries and 450 million people with a growing appetite for beef and lamb. Australian beef exports to the region in 2013 were up 89% (totalling 61,793 tonnes) on 2012 while sheepmeat exports were up by 3% (105,666 tonnes - 58% lamb and 42% mutton), worth an estimated \$1.1 billion (including the livestock export trade).

The region imports approximately 1.5 million tonnes of beef and sheepmeat from countries including India, Brazil, New Zealand, East Africa and Australia.

MLA's Middle East North Africa Regional Manager Jamie Ferguson said opportunities to increase volumes of Australian beef and lamb in the region have been identified.

"The hotel and restaurant sector has emerged as a major long term investment opportunity, particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)," he said.

"With global hotel chains on the rise, centralised purchasing and rationalised supply chains emerging, Australian beef and lamb is well positioned to make

early inroads to banquet and à la carte menus.

"These are the most reliably supplied and solid performing low risk options for outlets during their establishment phase."

Jet setting

The MENA region has become a major international stopover destination. Dubai airport already handles 60 million visitors a year and the city receives 11 million tourists. By 2020, 100 million people are expected to pass through the UAE's airports and attract 20 million tourists into Dubai.

The region has more than 65,000 hotel rooms either planned or under construction, with 12,000 in Dubai alone. All of these hotels feature world

class restaurants employing hundreds of professional chefs.

"With the overall improvement in the economy and continuing stability in Arab countries coupled with the emergence of the region as a transport hub through national airlines like Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airlines, it is expected that growth in hotel demand and tourist numbers will keep advancing," Jamie said.

"With well-educated, westernised travellers passing through and rising ex-pat communities, this provides MLA with an opportunity to target the tourist sector with high quality Australian product."

Selling the story

Attending industry-related trade shows is a major part of

exposing Australian beef and lamb to global customers, particularly in the foodservice and restaurant sector.

Trade shows are an opportunity to meet with importers, key accounts and consumers to facilitate new business for the Australian industry and tell the stories of Australia's clean and green production systems.

Dubai is a gateway to the growing food and beverage industry, making the Gulfood trade show a valuable platform to promote Australian red meat (see the King's case study on the opposite page).

Outside of the UAE, HORECA in Beirut, Lebanon, is one of the leading food and hospitality sector trade events in the region.

This year's HORECA trade show attracted 16,000 visitors from 30 countries, and MLA was one of 350 exhibitors. The show also played host to the Hospitality Salon Culinaire chefs competition which MLA played a major role in (see 'Around the Globe' on page 35).

Left: Retail sampling in Carrefour.



Jamie Ferguson, MLA
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\$93 billion

the amount the Saudi Arabian hospitality market is expected to grow by (or 4%) in the next five years. (Source: Ernst & Young)

24%

growth of hotel construction by 2017

(Source: TopHotel Projects Euromonitor International assigned by Saudi Hotel Show14)

66,438

hotel rooms under construction in the Middle East and North Africa region

Nutrition

Meat and movement for muscle

You don't have to be a bodybuilder to benefit from combining red meat with strength training, according to a recent Deakin University study funded by MLA.



25%

of Australia's population will be over 65 in 2042

13%

of Australia's population was over 65 in 2004

The study found a protein rich diet incorporating lean red meat, combined with strength training, improved the size and strength of muscles in women aged over 65.

Such studies play a vital step in supporting the role of red meat in the diet and on health, and help to grow consumer demand.

The results were published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition in February.

"Older women consuming beef or lamb twice a day (110g cooked beef or lamb six days a week) and doing progressive resistance training improved their muscle health better than those who consumed less meat. Good muscle health is important for healthy ageing and with Australians over 65 set to make up a quarter of the population by 2042 this is an important point to make" said Veronique Droulez, MLA's Senior Nutrition Manager.

"This is particularly important given increasing competition from alternative proteins."

About the study

Deakin's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research ran a four month trial with 100 women aged 60-90 years to

assess the effects of progressive resistance training (a form of strength training) combined with a protein-rich, lean red meat diet on muscle size, strength and function.

"It is no secret that we are living longer and that this is placing an increased burden on society in many ways, including the healthcare system," said Professor Robin Daly, Deakin's Chair of Exercise and Ageing.

"With the current scrutiny on our healthcare system's ability to cope with increasing

demand, it is more important than ever that we look at ways to maintain our physical and mental health for as long as possible."

The research results show that the combination of red meat and strength training could be the key to reducing the impact age-related muscle loss has on the risk of falls and the ability of elderly people to undertake day-to-day activities such as getting out of a chair.

Figure 1 Comparison between women on the lean red meat diet with exercise and women in the exercise only group.



18%

greater increase in muscle strength

0.5kg

greater gain in muscle mass

10%

greater increase in hormone central to muscle growth

16%

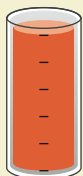
reduction in pro-inflammatory marker linked to muscle loss and other chronic diseases

Red meat and nutrition

- **14 research projects** currently funded by MLA on the role of red meat in diets particularly targeting the elderly, young women, infants and toddlers and the environmental impact of food choices.
- **\$5.8 million** invested by MLA in 2013-14 in the nutrition portfolio covering research, converting nutritional information into practical advice, healthcare professional and general practitioner communication and consumer nutrition campaigns.

Project dashboard: Benefits of red meat in elderly muscle health

Financial contributions to the project:
\$370,086



MLA: 100%

Length of project:
July 2008 - February 2014 (6 years)



Completed

The project is part of MLA's objective to:
Enhance the nutritional reputation of beef and lamb.

A follow up study will look at whether similar benefits can be achieved by following the Australian Dietary Guidelines (consuming red meat three to four times a week).

Meat for mental health?

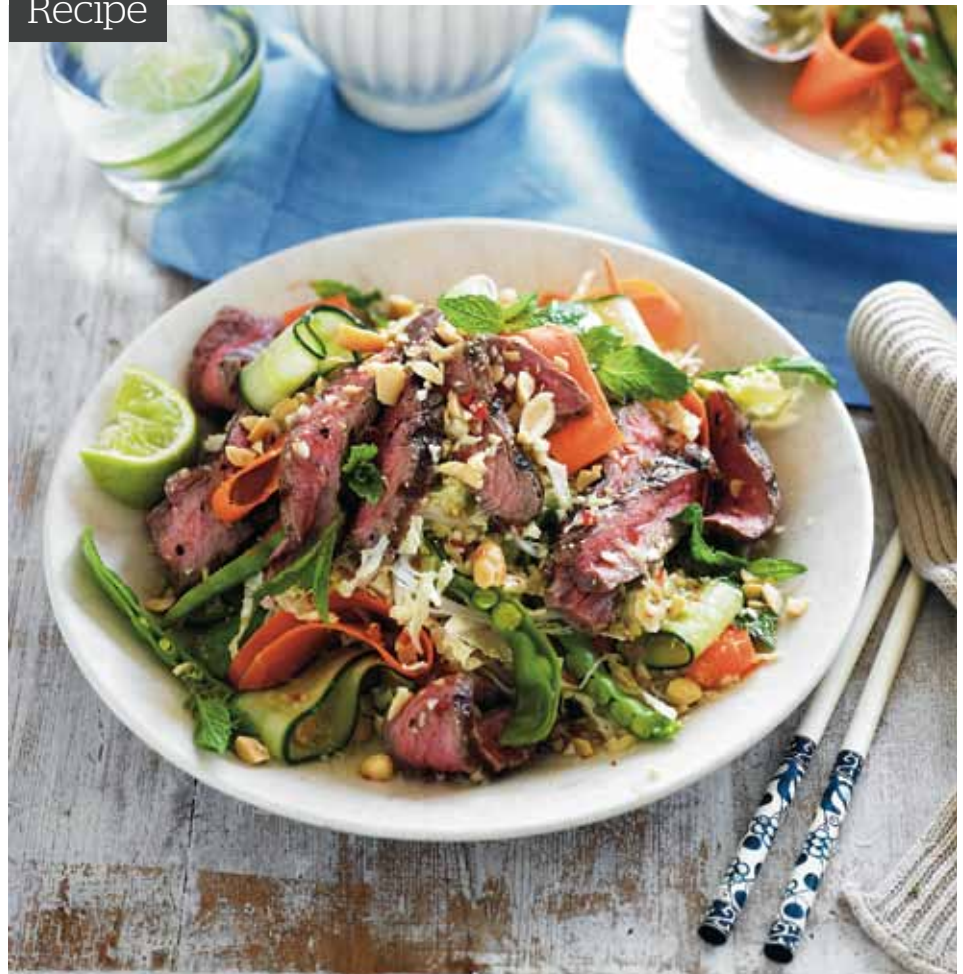
MLA is funding an extension to the study looking at the impact that increased dietary protein combined with strength training also has on the mental health and wellbeing of older people.

"If the results of our new study are as positive as we hope, this protein/exercise combination could provide the greatest benefits in terms of ensuring that older adults can live independently and relatively disease and disability free into old age," Robin said.



Veronique Droulez, MLA
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Recipe



Vietnamese grilled beef salad

Here's a way to enjoy beef in a nutritionally balanced meal. These tangy Vietnamese flavours and juicy steak make for a more-ish warm salad.

Serves: 4-6

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Ingredients

- 4 x 200g sirloin steaks, trimmed of fat
- 2 carrots, sliced into ribbons using a peeler
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 125g vermicelli noodles
- ¼ wombok (Chinese cabbage), finely shredded
- 1 cucumber, sliced into ribbons using a peeler
- 150g snow peas, sliced diagonally
- ½ cup mint leaves
- ½ cup peanuts (plain, unsalted), chopped, to serve

Dressing

- 1 small red chilli, finely chopped
- 3 tbsps lime juice
- 3 tbsps sugar
- 1 tbsps fish sauce
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon finely grated ginger

Method

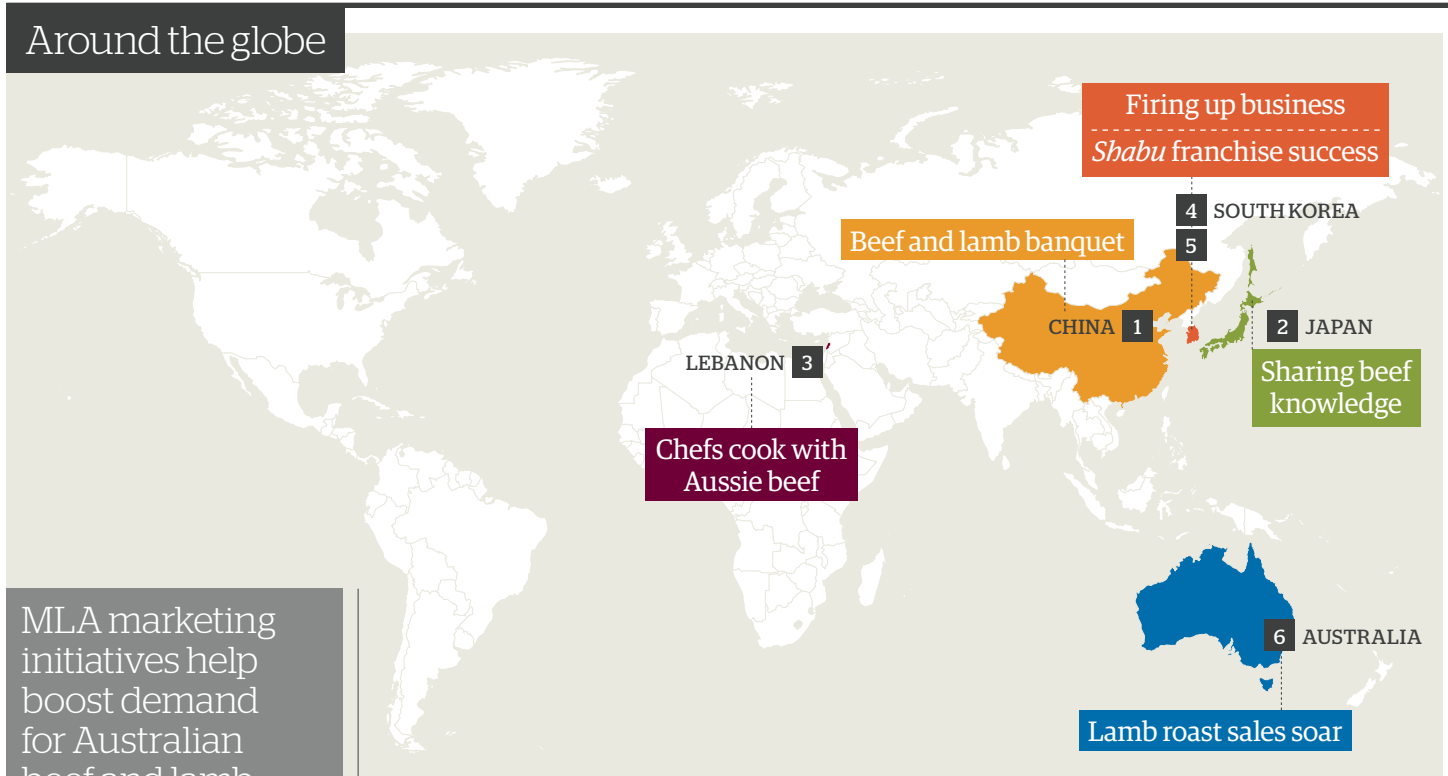
1. Brush steaks with oil and season with pepper. Place a pan over high heat and cook steaks for three minutes each side for medium rare or until cooked to your liking. Rest.
2. Peel carrot into ribbons with a vegetable peeler and toss with the rice vinegar. Leave to pickle for 10 minutes.

3. Cover vermicelli in boiling water for five minutes or until tender, drain and rinse with cold water, drain again. Combine the dressing ingredients.
4. Combine cabbage, carrot plus pickling liquid, vermicelli, cucumber, snow peas and mint leaves and toss with dressing. Top salad with sliced beef and peanuts.

Tip

Taste the seasoning of the dressing after you've added it to the rest of the salad and adjust depending on your preference.

Around the globe



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

1 CHINA

A banquet approach

Banquets are a large money earner for hotels and convention centres in Asia, which is why MLA has developed a Banquet Workshop program. Thirty-three professional chefs from China, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan participated in MLA's fourth workshop, held in Macau. The workshop provided an opportunity for chefs to work

with Australian beef and lamb in cost-effective ways for banqueting. Participants worked with non-loin cuts like rump and bolar blade to learn correct cutting, cooking, value-adding and presentation techniques from two executive chefs considered banquet experts. Ideas were given on how different beef cooking techniques could help manage food costs for different cuisines, while enhancing value and presentation. A fifth workshop is being planned in the Philippines.

167 professional Asian chefs have attended banqueting workshops so far



2 JAPAN

Meisters visit Australia



A new 'Meister (Master) Program' to train young industry representatives about the attributes of Australian beef was launched in Japan. Thirty-eight participants from 12 companies entered the first program, and the top five were chosen for a six-day Meister study tour of Australia this month. The tour will include visits to a feedlot, processing plant, farm and a steakhouse restaurant in Sydney. All Meisters work in marketing, customs clearance and sales at meat importer or wholesaler companies in Japan. The program exposes them to the Australian beef supply chain, with the aim of channeling information on Australia's primal and retail cuts, grading systems, meat science, safety and nutrition back into the Japanese beef sector. Following

the tour, the group will set out to educate and promote the safe, healthy and tasty attributes of Aussie beef to younger generations and the Japanese beef sector.

3 LEBANON

Culinaire draws crowds

Australian beef and lamb were dished up by more than 250 aspiring Lebanese chefs competing in the Salon Culinaire chefs competition at the HORECA trade show in Beirut. Twenty-five international chefs, including MLA's executive chef Tarek Ibrahim, judged the competition. In its 15th year, the competition proved a drawcard for HORECA, one of the leading food and hospitality trade events in the region. MLA was one of 350 exhibitors at the event, attended by around 20,000 buyers and trade professionals.

250

Lebanese chefs cook with Australian beef and lamb at the Salon Culinaire chefs competition

4 SOUTH KOREA

Down under tour generates leads



An Australian barbecue was served up by MLA to a delegation of six Korean journalists, when it partnered with the Walkley Foundation of Australia to host the event. The tour aimed to generate cultural understanding between Australia and South Korea. MLA chef Sam Burke demonstrated barbecue cooking, explaining differences between Korean and Australian styles and emphasised the importance of Australia's traceability, quality and safety standards. The tour group also visited an Angus cattle producer and exporter in the Hunter Valley, and met with the Chair of the Australia Korea

Foundation to learn more about Australia-Korea livestock business and trade.

5 SOUTH KOREA

Franchise favours Aussie beef

MLA sponsored television advertisements featuring Australian beef for three months for a popular Korean *shabu shabu* franchise. *Shabu shabu* is a traditional dish featuring thinly sliced cuts of chuck roll or brisket boiled in water. The franchise is one of the leading *shabu shabu* outlets in Korea and switched from using US and Mexican beef to Australian beef in 2013. Since then it has experienced high demand, with 24 tonnes of Australian beef consumed each month, on average, last year.

24

tonnes of Australian beef sold per month through Korean restaurant franchise in 2013

6 AUSTRALIA

Easy lamb roast sales boost



Participating butchers enjoyed a boost in sales of lamb roasts during promotions to coincide with MLA's Easy Lamb Roast autumn campaign in April. Australian Butchers Guild members took part in a national retail promotion to increase sales of easy roasting cuts. More than 2,600 shoppers entered the draw to win a travel gift voucher after purchasing a lamb roast. DBC Bunbury Forum Butchery in Western Australia received 201 entries (the highest nationally) and recorded a 145% increase in lamb sales. MLA supplied point-of-sale material packs to participating butchers with posters, entry pads and promotional packaging.

On the ground

Indonesia



John Ackerman
MLA Regional Manager
Indonesia
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After an eventful few years in Indonesia there is plenty of good news for Australian beef in this market.

MLA's marketing activities, which have focused on working with consumer groups, retail, foodservice and trade, have helped drive gains in market share. Australia now supplies 80% of the imported beef to Indonesia, up from 50% three years ago. Australian beef exports to Indonesia this year are already double what they were for the same period last year.

Rising meat prices created a catalyst for regulatory change late last year, essentially removing quotas on beef imports and providing improved trade prospects for Australia.

Despite these gains, we've had to deal with reduced animal quotas, the live cattle ban, and ongoing regulatory change and recent diplomatic tensions.

In light of these challenges, marketing programs have focused on increasing the awareness of 'brand Australia' in Indonesia, using the nutritional story of beef and the ease of cooking it.

Food security and food prices are important elements of the campaigns leading up to next month's Presidential (9 July) elections.

One of the front runners, current Governor of Jakarta, Joko Widodo, has recently signed a memorandum of understanding with several Provincial Governments to form a cooperative cattle farming program to meet rising beef consumption - reaffirming the opportunities for both Indonesia and Australia, especially through a new partnership called the Indonesia Australia Partnership on Food Security in the Red Meat and Cattle Sector. This is an industry developed initiative and provides further opportunities for both countries to work together on trade, capacity building, investment and relationships.

The MLA and LiveCorp Livestock Export Program continues to support cattle exporters and importers through activities such as risk assessments, training programs and providing technical advice. So far this year our programs have provided training to around 700 Indonesian feedlot and abattoir employees. This has been important as we move into the month of Ramadan, which begins at the end of this month.

Market observations

BPIPI follows CPI

Input costs for Australian cattle producers have doubled in the last 25 years - in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), according to the new Beef Producer Input Price Index (BPIPI) developed by ABARES, on behalf of MLA.

Tim McRae
MLA Economist



The BPIPI was created using 15 major input costs, with the prices weighted accordingly and aggregated to form a northern and southern index.

Between September 1988 and December 2013, northern Australia input prices increased 93%, at an annual average rate of 2.61%, which was slightly less than southern Australia - where input prices increased 105%, at an annual average rate of 2.86%. In both instances, the increase was less than the CPI over the same period, which increased 109% for the period, at an annual rate of 2.93%.

However, if interest is excluded from the calculation of the BPIPI, which is the case for the CPI, the northern rise was 112%, while southern increased 118% for the 25 year period - regardless; however, the rises have been close to that of the CPI.

While trending in line with the CPI, there has been huge variation between each input cost, with northern land rent (393%), insurance (360%), electricity (250%) and rates (216%) all increasing significantly from the 1988-89 base. However, while there

have been significant increases among the mentioned inputs, their collective weighting towards the northern index were 6.7%.

The input costs accounting for the greatest weighting in northern Australia were the capital cost of the cattle herd (17% weighting), interest paid (13.9% weighting) and repairs and maintenance (8.9% weighting). Interestingly, these inputs have increased much less than those above, with the opportunity cost of cattle rising 38% since 1988-89, repairs and maintenance increasing 137%, while interest paid declined 49% over the period.

For the southern index, depreciation accounted for the greatest weighting (11.9%), followed by the capital cost of the herd (10.2%), interest paid (8.9%), repairs and maintenance (8.8%) and fertiliser (6.6%).

Other inputs which have increased substantially since the 1988-89 base were fuel, oil and lubricants (197%), wages and hired labour (149%), contracts paid (149%), fertiliser (145%) and freight (101%), while crops and pasture chemicals rose just 7%.

The BPIPI will be updated quarterly, with the results and analysis available on the MLA website.



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International benchmarking

Sheepmeat future looks bright

Despite the lamb price correction since 2011, the global sheepmeat outlook promises rising demand, constrained supply, record prices and higher farm profits - at least for producers capable of containing costs and raising productivity.

The 2013 *agri benchmark* global farm network analysis reported a global sheep industry buoyed by rising demand in China and the Middle East and tight growth in supply - due to limited land and feed, and environmental concerns.

Sheepmeat prices have risen more than any other meat since 2000, but have also been the most volatile.

While sheepmeat remains a niche meat, averaging only 2% of meat consumed globally, it is a favourite in much of the developing world - most notably amongst the quickly growing Muslim and Hispanic populations. The economic growth centres of China, India and the Middle East are increasingly looking to import sheepmeat, as local supplies fail to meet their needs.

agri benchmark network countries (covering 55% of global sheepmeat supply) reported that sheep farming was generally profitable in 2012. The majority of *agri benchmark*'s 'typical farms' made profits sufficient for short to medium-term viability (covering cash costs and depreciation) and some even made a long-term profit (covering opportunity costs as well) - notably in Uruguay, New Zealand and China. Most European farms were not viable, until government payments were included.

All but one of Australia's seven *agri benchmark* 'typical farms' made short-term profits (covered cash costs), five of them achieving positive medium-term profits (also covered depreciation) in 2012, but only one made a long-term profit (covering opportunity costs), with two other farms close (figure 1).

However, despite generally good global sheep farm profitability, the *agri benchmark* network of agricultural economists, advisors, producers and specialists reported few of the world's major producers and exporters were in a position to quickly raise supply, due to climatic, land, feed and environmental constraints.

Even China's production growth has halted, leading to high prices, and future internal supply growth appears to require significant changes in policy or industry approach.

However, environmental constraints on sheep production were tightening, limiting production growth potential and leading to a general acceptance of the need for further substantial growth in sheepmeat imports.

Australia's ability to respond to the growing demand for sheepmeat was also eroded by drought and competition for land from cropping. However, *agri benchmark* 'typical' sheep farm results for 2012 confirmed Australian sheepmeat enterprises remained amongst the lowest cost operations

Figure 1 Short, medium and long-term sheep farm profit margins [profit as a % of farm returns (revenue)].

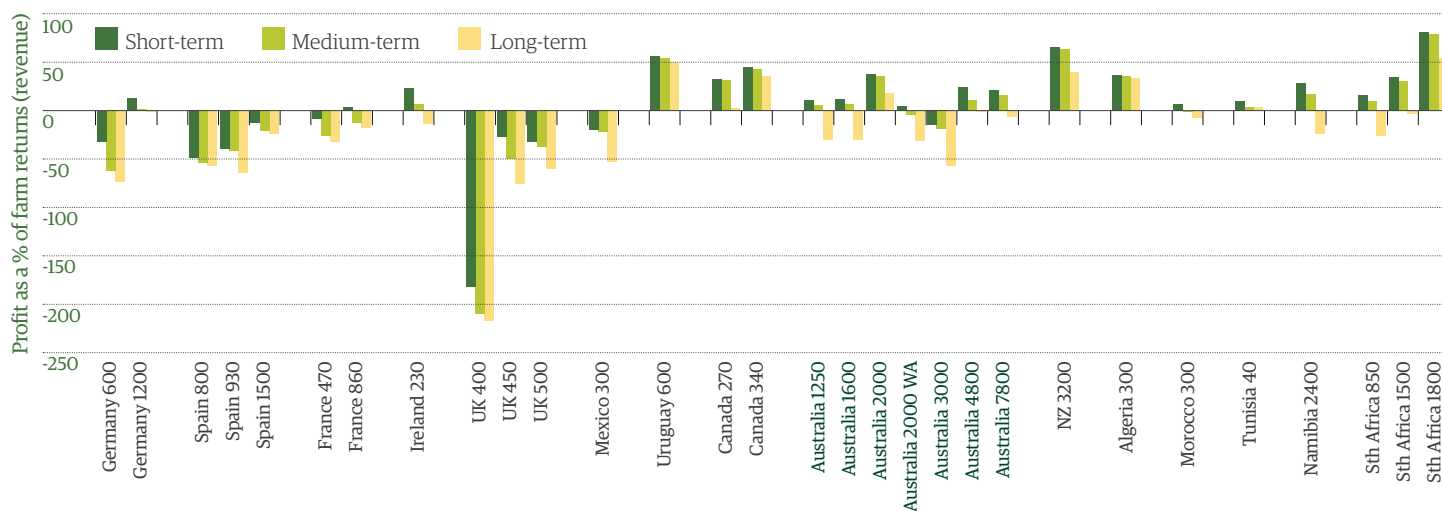
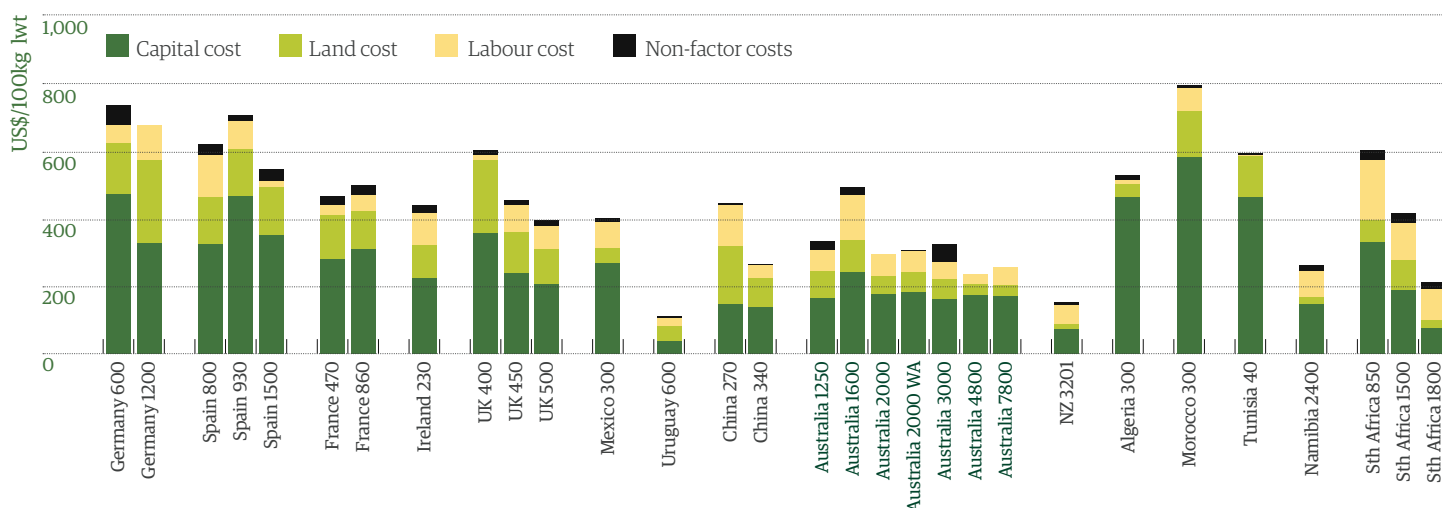


Figure 2 Total costs of sheepmeat production (US\$/100kg lwt)



Source: *agribenchmark* Farm numbers indicate the number of ewes // WA indicates Western Australia

globally, despite the recent erosion caused by the high A\$ - only bettered by farms in Uruguay, New Zealand and South Africa (figure 2).

agri benchmark expected prices to rise further across global markets in coming years, leading to further increases in sheep farm profitability - driven by rising global demand, slow supply growth (including, importantly, in China, Australia and New Zealand) and rising costs.

With growing land, climate and feed constraints, the key to lifting sheepmeat production and achieving long-term profitability lies in raising on-farm productivity. *agri benchmark* contended that narrowing the enormous gap between the performance of the top and bottom sheep producers should be a priority in all major producing and exporting countries, including Australia.

When compared to similar systems in competitor countries, Australian sheep farms were more diversified (mainly with wool and crops), had low losses, mortalities and wastage in the system, as well as above average growth rates and moderate to high meat production efficiency. However, there appears room for further improvement in Australia's moderate reproductive rates - through nutritional management and genetics.

In comparison...Australian sheep systems have:

- Low losses, mortalities and wastage in the system
- Moderate to high meat production efficiency
- Moderate reproductive efficiency - with potential for further improvement through nutritional management and genetics - if economic to do so
- Above average growth rates
- High labour costs, but maintain excellent labour productivity
- Comparably low sheep returns, although maintaining low total costs of production
- Good whole farm profitability due to diversification (in 2012)



Tim McRae, MLA

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Read MLA's Red Meat Market Report entitled *How are global and Australian beef and sheepmeat producers performing?* at www.mla.com.au/marketinfo

Regional Managers go regional

More than 150 producers rubbed shoulders with MLA's regional managers at forums in Queensland and NSW last month. Forums were held at Dalby, Armidale and Wagga Wagga, where producers heard MLA's eight regional managers discuss market outlooks and opportunities in Australia's main export markets.

Dalby's 'feedlot forum', hosted by the Australian Lot Feeders Association, covered topics including Meat Standards Australia and eating quality. The forum in **Armidale**, hosted by the Ebor Beef Group, heard about market access in Asia, current market sentiments in the EU and Russian regions and marketing initiatives in the United Arab Emirates' foodservice and hotel sector. The **Wagga Wagga** forum focused on grassfed beef opportunities in the US, as well as sheepmeat and beef market conditions in Japan and Korea.

MLA's General Manager Global Marketing, Michael Edmonds, also talked about MLA's global marketing initiatives, and the new Brand Australia global campaign - True Aussie - commenting there were more opportunities emerging than ever to capitalise on.

"There is good reason to be positive about the opportunity in global markets, with progress being made in market access in key markets in Korea and Japan, and strong demand for Australia's clean and safe product underpinned by our reputable industry systems," he said.

"It is the role of MLA to ensure our overseas customers understand the benefits of Australian beef and lamb, so we can command strong prices for our product."

More information: info@mla.com.au



Producers at the Armidale forum held on 29 April by Ebor Beef Group.



Andrew Herbert, Michael Edmonds and Jim McClintock at Wagga Wagga.

Upcoming events

Primex

Take part in one of MLA's daily innovation workshops for new ideas and skills to help build a better beef business.

When and where:

19-21 June, Casino NSW

Bookings and for more information:

www.mla.com.au/pacificbeefworkshops
or 1800 675 717 (option 4)

Predator control field day

Find out about the different methods available to control predators and discuss them with experts.

When and where:

20 June, Mitchell Qld

Bookings and for more information:

T: 07 4625 6129
E: heatherstation@bigpond.com
www.futurebeef.com.au/events

BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB annual conference

The conference will highlight the latest in industry research and development that can be applied on-farm. The challenges facing producers every day will be explored together with new and exciting opportunities.

When and where:

25 June, Bendigo Vic

Bookings and for more information:

T: 03 5258 0229 // E: cathy.mulligan@epi.vic.gov.au
www.bestwoolbestlamb.eventbrite.com.au

The Challengers:

Matthew and Angela Pearce, NSW



The Challengers:

Marcus and Shannon Souness, WA



MENTORS UP TO THE CHALLENGE

When the MLA Challenge kicked off in July last year, each participant partnered up with an industry mentor. The mentor's role was to: act as an experienced sounding board for their Challenger's ideas; help define decision points and key performance indicators; support implementation of the Challenger's improvement plan; and help quantify the measurements used in the quarterly assessments. This month we talk to two of the Challengers and their mentors and find out what both sides have gained during the process. To learn more about the Challengers go to: www.mla.com.au/challenge

What have you learned from your mentor?

Terrey's role has been a challenging, strategic one. He's challenged our thinking and got us to focus on why we're in farming and what we want to get out of it. We've also drawn on his financial experience.

Will the relationship continue after the challenge?

I believe so. Being in the Challenge has been very motivating and we want to continue the momentum.

The mentor: Terrey Johnson

Terrey is the manager/director of his family's agricultural interests which include two adjacent farms, totalling 512ha at Blayney on NSW's Central Tablelands. The enterprise comprises beef cattle and 12ha of wine grapes. Terrey has an intense interest in improving profitability through the use of practices that improve both on-farm productivity and sustainability.

How did you prioritise what areas needed to be worked on first?

Matt was virtually starting a business as the Challenge began. We prioritised what areas to look at based on: a) it was a new business with no economic history, so we'd take small steps rather than big ones, and b) we needed to recognise the constraints on his time, due to his off-farm business.

What were these areas?

Putting reproductive policies in place to get as many calves on the ground as possible, which included introducing early weaning. We got stuck into the MLA tools, particularly the Cost of Production Calculator and the Feed Demand Calculator. Because he was starting a business, he was in a great position to set himself up to maximise use of feed and therefore optimise productivity.

What have you learnt from being a mentor?

As a producer advocate, I helped draft MLA's More Beef from Pastures manual and it was pleasing to see how relevant and useful the manual was to the establishment of Matt's business. I always thought mentoring would be rewarding and it met every expectation. They're a great young family.

What's your long-term advice to your Challenger?

To put in place a reasonably well-documented business plan and not lose focus from it. He needs better economic information and he is moving quickly to get that. He has a good relationship with his accountant and I don't have any concerns about where he's heading. He just needs to pin his ears back and go for it.

What have you learned from your mentor?

You can be a mixed farmer and have a fully integrated farming system – you just need to think outside the square. We've also learned a lot about how to attract and retain good labour. Rob's also given us technical advice, such as how to successfully manage our lighter weaners and how to manage chaff piles when using our new chaff cart (at harvest).

Will the relationship continue after the challenge?

We're very lucky to have spent time with him and we've learned heaps. He said he's keen to see how we get on and is happy to keep talking to us.

The mentor: Rob Warburton

Rob is a farmer from Kojonup, Western Australia. He and his wife, Jennifer, run a business that produces wheat, canola, barley, wool and sheepmeat, and is diversified with innovations including the production of commercial wildflower seeds for retail markets. All of these products are used both locally and internationally, and the business is highly regarded for its clean and green production.

How did you prioritise what areas needed to be worked on first?

I'm a firm believer the farm has to work for you, not the other way around, so at first I wanted to see whether they had thought about why they were farming and what they wanted to achieve.

What were these areas?

After talking about structuring the business to meet their goals, we looked at efficiencies. Labour was an issue so we discussed establishing laneways and improving yards to make it simpler for one person to handle stock, or for casual staff to be trained. We also discussed employing full-time staff and how to look after them. Lately we've been talking about sheep management coming in to the break of the season – how to set up your system so you're spending one or two hours a day on livestock and the rest on the crop.

What have you learnt from being a mentor?

Marcus is a really good farmer so I always learn something when I go there, and whenever I give him advice about improving efficiency or managing stock, it reminds me to do it too!

What's your long-term advice to your Challenger?

Think about what you want to achieve out of your farm, structure the farm around that and don't be concerned by what other people think.

Want to beef up your business?

Take part in one of MLA's daily Innovation workshops at Primex for new ideas and skills to help build a better beef business.

Innovation workshops

Focusing on the key profit drivers in your beef business, MLA's Innovation workshops at Primex will deliver practical information and tools that can make a difference to your bottom line.

Register by Monday 16 June to receive **FREE ENTRY** into the Primex Field Days

10am-10.45am Managing your cost of production

Bill Hoffman, Hoffman Beef Consulting
Join Bill Hoffman and a panel of industry experts to discuss business and on-farm tools to help manage your cost of production and maximise the productivity of your beef business.

11.15am-12pm Using the MSA Index to optimise eating quality

Terry Farrell, Field Operations Manager - Northern Region, MSA
Demi Lollback, Trade Development Officer, MSA

Learn how the new MSA Index will help you understand the direct impact of genetic traits, breed composition and management on eating quality. If you're involved in MSA this is an important change that you need to know about!

When:
Thursday 19, Friday 20 and Saturday 21 June 2014

Where:
Pavilion 1, Primex Field Days, Bruxner Highway, Casino NSW,

Cost:
FREE

Beyond the gate red meat supply chain tour

Wednesday 18 June, Casino NSW

Run in conjunction with MLA's Innovation workshops at Primex, MLA members are invited to take part in a half day bus tour that gives you a behind the scenes look into the local supply chain, visiting innovative processors, butchers and chefs.

The tour will be subsidised by MLA but there will be a charge of \$50 per person.

Bookings and for more information:

1800 675 717 (option 4) or www.mla.com.au/BTG-Casino

Register:
www.mla.com.au/pacificbeefworkshops
or 1800 675 717 (option 4)



LambEx 2014

JULY 9-11



A compelling two-day conference for lamb and sheep producers, featuring outstanding speakers, a trade exhibition and an opportunity to network.

www.lambex.com.au

- For all breeds and businesses -



Wednesday, July 9

8.00am-4.00pm	Adelaide and Mt Lofty NRM Board single day field tours, departing and returning from the National Wine Centre car park
4.00pm	Conference registration desk opens
6.30pm-8.00pm	The PIRSA LambEx welcome function - celebrating South Australia's most respected food producers and wine makers

Thursday, July 10

7.00-8.30am	Breakfast seminars: Hosted by Sheep Genetics and Grassland Society of Southern Australia
7.45am	LambEx trade show opens
8.45am-5.00pm	LambEx Conference Day 1
6.30pm-7.30pm	The Future Farmers Network pre-dinner drinks
7.30pm-11.00pm	The AWI Grandstamb dinner

Friday, July 11

7.30am-8.00am	The Gallagher Recovery breakfast
8.45am-3.45pm	LambEx Conference Day 2

Beyond the gate red meat supply chain tour Tuesday 8 July, Adelaide SA

MLA invites its members to attend an educational one-day red meat supply chain tour in the Adelaide district, providing exclusive insights into the processing, wholesale and foodservice industries.

The tour will be subsidised by MLA but there will be a charge of \$95 per person.

Bookings and for more information: 1800 675 717 (option 4) or www.mla.com.au/BTG-Adelaide

