

final report

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South Australian More Beef From Pastures Forums – Raising the Steaks

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Abstract

The MBfP “Raising the Steaks” forums were successfully delivered to South Australian beef producers in July 2011. The forums were held in Hahndorf on Wednesday 27th of July and Naracoorte on Thursday 28th July. Total engagement in the forums totalled 125 beef producers and participants. Based only on those participants that completed evaluation forms, we reached producers managing more than 25,000 breeding females and more than 50,000 head of cattle within South Australia.

Phil Chalmer and Craig Forsyth, the MBfP Producer Advocates from Western Australia, were both well received when providing their presentations on how they have used the principles of the MBfP program to build viable and innovative beef businesses. Wayne Pitchford, Beef CRC program leader for Feed Efficiency and Maternal Productivity was also well received with his presentation on the influence of genetics and nutrition on maternal productivity. The market update provided by Tim McRae, together with the overview of Phase II of the MBfP program and the benchmarking exercise presented by myself were also valued by the audience.

We were fortunate to attract participants from most zones of South Australia, including some from the pastoral areas which was excellent. Unfortunately participation rates were down on our expectations despite our significant coverage and promotion of the events which was strongly supported by our event partners. Market research via telephone calls to producers a week prior to the events indicated a strong knowledge and awareness that the events were taking place. However this didn't convert to the high participation rates that we would have liked to achieve, particularly for Naracoorte.

The participants that we did attract however were of a high standard and mostly managed medium to large scale beef enterprises. The participants that the forums attracted engaged well with the speakers and asked lots of well-considered questions.

Project objectives

The primary objective of the “Raising the Steaks” forums in South Australia was to create a high level of industry awareness about the More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) program. The forums also provided an opportunity for South Australian beef producers to be introduced to the next phase of the MBfP program and the individuals actually involved with coordinating the second phase of the program.

Creating industry awareness informs beef producers of the opportunities that exist to improve the profitability, productivity and sustainability of their beef enterprises and also links this to the opportunities to engage with the MBfP program across a range of KASA and practice change activities.

A further objective was to capture the future training needs of South Australian beef producers and identify their requirements in a detailed manner. This information can then be used to refine the curriculum of MBfP activities to be delivered within South Australia.

Additionally, the events were to incorporate an introductory benchmarking activity to focus producers on understanding their beef enterprise productivity in terms of kilograms of beef produced per hectare per 100 millimetres of annual rainfall.

Success in achieving milestones

1. Creating Industry Awareness

The “Raising the Steaks” forums were very successful in creating industry awareness for the More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) program in South Australia and provided a great platform to launch Phase II of the program.

The forums provided an excellent opportunity to engage producers, consultants, and industry with Phase II of the MBfP program, including providing an excellent opportunity for participants to meet the South Australian producer advocates, the State Coordinator and the National Coordinator for the program.

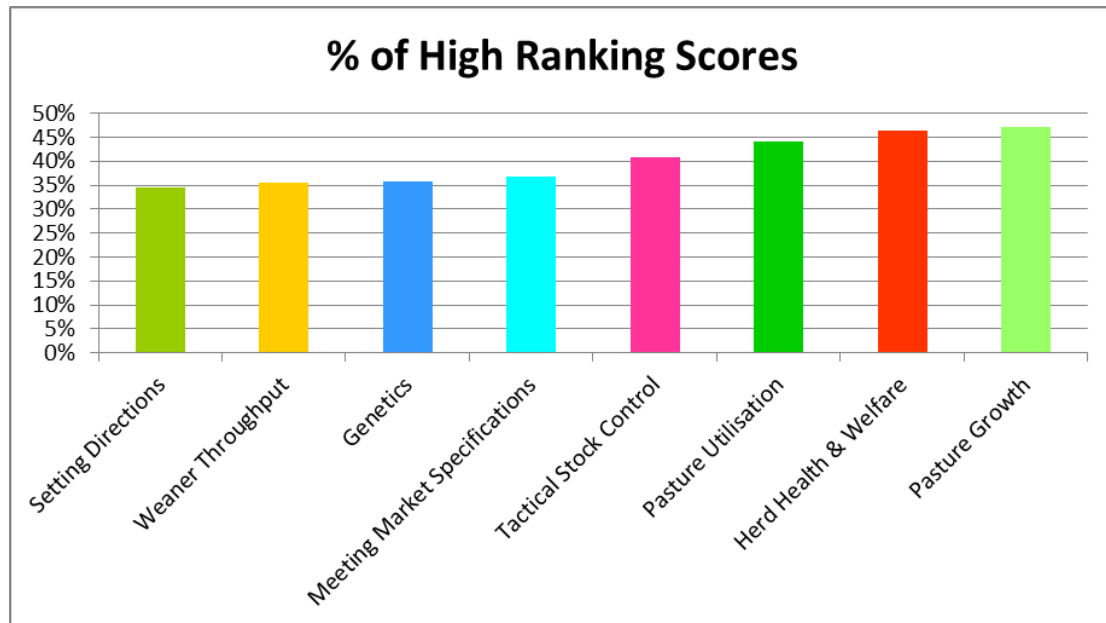
The following channels were utilised to promote the MBfP “Raising the Steaks” forums.

1. Including a full colour, double sided, A4 insert into the Stock Journal (15,500 copies).
2. Elders, Landmark, and the Beef CRC were approached and appointed as event partners. Each of these partner organisations promoted the forums strongly through their client and industry networks.
3. The delivery network in South Australia were also provided with the forum flyer and encouraged to extend the opportunity to their client networks which they did.
4. The flyer was also sent in a personal email to each of the participant's that took part in MBfP activities (that also advised that they were willing to be contacted regarding future events) during the first six months of Phase II of the program in South Australia.
5. A fax-out was sent to all MLA members within a 200km radius of both the Hahndorf and Naracoorte venues as a follow-up to the Stock Journal insert.
6. The flyer was set-up as an accessible link and PDF on the MLA website and promoted as an upcoming event.
7. The events were promoted in the July 2011 MBfP E-News.
8. ABC Radio were contacted and provided with short event briefs as reminders for the events which they advised me would run. I also offered to undertake a short on-air interview if they were willing.
9. A reminder was also included in the “On the Rails” section of the Stock Journal the week before the events.
10. The Naracoorte event was also promoted through the South-East Sustainable Ag E-News, a publication distributed by Tarnya Dalla, the Regional Landcare Facilitator for the SE NRM Board.
11. The Naracoorte event was also promoted through the MacKillop Farm Management Group's network of producers.
12. Both events were also promoted through the July 2011 Agronomy Matters newsletter that is distributed through the Mallee regions of South Australia.

2. Capturing Future Training Needs & Interests of SA Beef Producers

An extensive “Training Needs and Interests” survey was developed for the forums which detailed 43 different workshops or activities which could potentially be undertaken by beef producers. The participants were then asked to rank each of these workshops on a 1-5 scale.

Most of the 43 activities could be directly linked to a single MBfP module, however some combined aspects from more than one module. The following graph demonstrates the level of interest around each module, based on a percentage of high scores basis. Interestingly, all of the pasture based modules ranked highly and recorded the biggest percentage of high scores. High scores were considered to be either a 4 or a 5 score (on a 1-5 scale).



The top 20 activities, workshops, or tools that producers were most interested in were as follows:

1. Understanding Mineral Deficiencies
2. Identifying the most Profitable Pasture Species for your property
3. EverGraze Pasture Improvement Calculator
4. Increasing Pasture Utilisation
5. Pasture Picker Tool
6. Stocking Rate Calculator
7. Growing More Feed (exploring pasture options and identifying limiting factors)
8. Rainfall to Pasture Growth Outlook Tool
9. Confident Livestock Marketing Course
10. Phosphorus Tool – Five Easy Steps
11. EverGraze Feed Budget & Rotation Planner
12. Advanced Rotational Grazing systems (EverGraze, TechnoGraze)
13. Cattle Reproduction Workshop (critical factors affecting reproduction rates)
14. Feed Budgeting & Planning
15. MLA Feed Demand Calculator
16. Herd Health & Welfare (managing herd health)
17. Pasture Principles Workshop
18. Health Cost:Benefit Calculator
19. Whole of Farm Benchmarking
20. Beef Cattle Nutrition (developing a cost effective ration)

Interestingly 8 out of the top 20 most popular activities involved understanding how to use and apply tools which are available to producers via the MLA website. Consistent with the modules which recorded the highest level of interest, 13 out of the top 20 most popular activities were related to pasture growth, management, and utilisation.

3. Benchmarking Activity

The average beef productivity in terms of kilograms of beef produced per hectare per 100mm of annual rainfall from the participants which completed the benchmarking exercise was 31.03 kg of beef/Ha/100mm. This number would be fairly consistent with the historical national average, however, it is also important to recognise that this was achieved in the 2010 production year, which was un-seasonally wet late in the year.

The range in productivity varied from 6.68 kg of beef/Ha/100mm to 52.10 kg of beef/Ha/100mm. 75% of producers were in the 20 - 40 kg of beef/Ha/100mm of annual rainfall range. Given that leading producers that are implementing advanced rotational grazing strategies are targeting a goal to achieve 100kg of beef/Ha/100mm of annual rainfall - there is plenty of long term scope for productivity improvement.

4. Participant Feedback

Please note the following summary in regard to participant feedback and satisfaction.

- The average score for event satisfaction was 7.63 / 10
- The average score for the value of the event to their business was 7.5 / 10
- 98% of participants would recommend the event to others
- 100% of producers indicated that they intended to make a practice change as a result of attending the event
- Phil Chalmer & Craig Forsyth were very well received
- Wayne Pitchford was very well received by most
- The benchmarking exercise and market update by Tim McRae were generally well received. The benchmarking exercise drew mixed opinion as expected - some producers absolutely loved it while others were challenged by it.
- Participants appreciated learning about the suite of tools which are available on the MLA website. Many producers were unaware that such a large range of tools were available
- There was some feedback that too much time was spent talking about the MBfP program and program structure as opposed to the delivery of producer focused technical content. In hindsight we could have sharpened up and shortened two of the presentations that related to the MBfP program and included an additional technical speaker. This approach however would have required some additional resourcing as the event budget was fully allocated in securing the very good interstate speakers that we did bring to SA.
- We utilised the services of Ian Ware to provide the audio visual equipment. This resulted in a very professional image and excellent visibility and ease of listening.
- The Carlton Club in Hahndorf was an excellent venue for this type of event and would be highly recommended to MLA for any future events in the Adelaide Hills region.

Recommendations

As a result of feedback provided and the experience gained from running these two events in South Australia we would make the following recommendations.

1. Focus the delivery of MBfP activities in South Australia around the activities which recorded the strongest level of interest. These were generally around the pasture based activities and herd health.
2. The two Western Australian producer advocates for the MBfP program (Phil Chalmer & Craig Forsyth) are both very skilled and capable presenters. They are also very technically competent in the principles and procedures that apply to the MBfP program. There may be some up-skilling required to fast track the development of the more recently appointed producer advocates that are new to the MBfP program.
3. There will be an on-going need to ensure that MLA funded MBfP activities are very producer focused and deliver an appropriate level of technical material that is of high value to producers. While there is always a need to deliver some MBfP program material, particularly at awareness style events such as the “Raising the Steaks” forums, this needs to be carefully balanced against the thirst for producer focused technical content.
4. As a business, Rural Directions Pty Ltd invested a significant amount of time in coordinating the delivery of the “Raising the Steaks” events in South Australia. As a result the hourly rate that we actually achieved as a result of coordinating these activities was substantially below commercial rates. This needs to be carefully considered if other states were looking to run similar events or if similar style events were to be planned in the future within South Australia. As a private consultancy business we would require a greater fee for the professional services provided that is more consistent with commercial hourly rates if we were to coordinate such events in the future. An analysis of the project income and expenditure can be found in Appendix 1.
5. When appointing event partners it is very important that potential event partners are advised of the involvement of other event partners at the outset of the agreement, so that they understand that they don't have exclusive rights as the sole event partner for such activities. When appointing event partners, it would be very valuable to have an event partner agreement detailing the terms of the arrangement which could be provided to potential partners before they actually commit to the role. MLA well may have some national event partner agreements which could be used as an excellent starting point however it would be useful for event coordinators to be made aware that these documents exist during the early event planning stage.