



# final report

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## Gippsland Beefcheque Review

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BeefCheque is a new project for beef producers which enjoys diverse industry support. It has been operating in Gippsland in Victoria for the last two years and has received overwhelmingly positive reactions from participants.

This review aimed to quantify and qualify the project so far and identify any areas where further development may be necessary.

Participants have identified diverse benefits of BeefCheque as:

- personal development and confidence
- improvement of farm functioning and management
- opportunities for on-going learning within a supportive network

A major element of BeefCheque is the producer groups formed around a focus farm where different practices can be demonstrated, explained and assessed.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment has surveyed the members of these groups to identify their usefulness.

Results so far indicate that the project has been successful in:

- encouraging members to try new farm management practices for the first time
- developing confidence amongst BeefCheque participants (however there is still no measure of producers' capacity to successfully implement new practices)

The major disadvantages identified to implementing new practices are time and money.

Another key element of the project is the Farm Financial Monitoring which aims to identify the financial benefits of the BeefCheque Project.

Early results from the financial monitoring based on returns to date indicate that:

- those that used the farm monitoring book found the information relevant and easy to understand (with the exception of the environmental data)
- the operating costs of the top producers isn't much different to the costs of the average producers

It is still unclear why many did not complete the financial monitoring, but the data gathered will provide useful information for further group discussions. Although the project is unable to provide detailed individual interpretation and analysis, the results provide a useful benchmark for producers.

A review of the overall project performance identified that the focus farms, farm walks, consultancy support, BeefCheque groups and DNRE support are operating well. However, the operation of the following elements of the project were seen as needing some further development:

- the Board (in relation to more strategic decision-making rather than operational)
- management team (particularly workloads)
- farm financial monitoring (participation and perceived usefulness).

The Review has identified that the Board further consider how to:

- build self direction in the groups
- improve the information flow between and within components of the BeefCheque Project
- better manage the workload of the management team
- encourage more producers to take part in the farm financial monitoring
- maximise learning

In terms of the future development and expansion of the BeefCheque Project, it is suggested that the Board explore options for:

- on-going group support after the existing project facilitator/consultant support ceases
- ensuring that the project can demonstrate/quantify the meeting of existing and any new objectives
- project life beyond the current contract date of June 2000

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report is the product of a mid-term review process of the BeefCheque Project. The information is drawn mainly from a two day workshop held at Clearview Farm, Ferndale on 24 - 25 February 1998, and from written reports supplied by Bill Fuller and Steve Walsh of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Ellinbank.

Integra Pty Ltd consulted with a number of people involved in BeefCheque during December 1997 and January 1998 to design the review workshop.

A review was considered necessary to quantify and qualify the overwhelming positive experiences and comments expressed by participants in the project.

## Participants at the Workshop

Producers:	Alan Clyne, Jenny O'Sullivan, Ross Pearson, Malcolm Cock, George Glasscock, Adrian Harris
DNRE:	Bill Fuller, Steve Walsh, Geoff Kroker
Focus Farmers:	Judy McKinnon, Col Stothers, Norman Witt, Lindsay Marriot
BIAA:	Mike Stephens
MRC:	Gabrielle Kay, Len Stephens
Project Manager:	Ken Lamb
Facilitators:	Kevin Balm and Viv McWaters

# 2. BENEFITS OF THE BEEFCHEQUE PROJECT

Presentations by Steve Walsh regarding the group feedback data sheets, Bill Fuller on farm financial monitoring, focus farmers Judy McKinnon, Col Stothers, Norman Witt and Lindsay Marriot, and Ken Lamb, Project Manager, set the scene for the participants to discuss the benefits of the project.

## 2.1 Anecdotal Evidence of Benefits

The following is a summary of the benefits identified by the participants drawn from their own experience of BeefCheque.

- **Personal**

Those involved in the project reported that they felt more in control and had greater confidence in their own ability and to try new ideas. This was linked to the development of skills and the opportunity to discuss management options with other producers and the consultant.

As a result, producers had a more positive attitude to change, suffered less stress and enjoyed the stimulus provided by being involved in BeefCheque.

- **Farm**

BeefCheque resulted in improved farm management practices, specifically better stock handling and stock temperament, and opportunities to increase stocking rate and production as a result of understanding better how grass grows and how to manage pastures.

Other on-farm benefits included skills in budgeting dollars and feed leading to less supplementary feeding and relative profitability (despite poor seasons in Gippsland over the first

two years of the project) and the use of measuring and monitoring to inform decision making. In other words, improved farm business skills.

- ***Learning***

In terms of on-going learning, BeefCheque has provided opportunities for producers to be exposed to a really good, enthusiastic consultant (which is catching); to share ideas and develop a supportive network.

The focus farms and farm walks have provided a way of demonstrating practices and testing the principles of the BeefCheque Project.

## **2.2 General Benefits of BeefCheque from Group Questionnaires**

### **Introduction**

The NRE BeefCheque team initiated a survey as a means of determining the needs of individual BeefCheque groups. The results of the survey would also provide a useful measure of changed behaviour mid term of the project.

The survey sought to find how many practices BeefCheque participants have tried, how confident they are in using it and whether they need more practice to better tailor the delivery of future group activities to meet group needs.

This summary and conclusions are based on 102 questionnaires analysed so far. More questionnaires are being returned and are yet to be analysed. Questions were asked on 24 practices covering 15 grazing activities relating to those demonstrated on BeefCheque focus farms.

Since starting BeefCheque over 50% of participants have tried up to 9 grazing activities for the first time. These are the main activities demonstrated on focus farms. These include estimating pasture quantity, calculating average cover, building and managing a feed wedge and feed budgeting. Many of the other activities also had a high use but were tried before BeefCheque.

Participants indicated that they wanted more practice for the grazing activities they had tried the most since starting BeefCheque, even though they had expressed quite high confidence in using some of them. The activities most frequently nominated for more practice include estimating pasture quality, and quantity, understanding soil tests, managing a feed wedge and feed budgeting.

## Interim Results and Discussion

- ***Grazing management activities tried.***

Grazing management activities tried are shown in **table 1** below in rank order of trying them for the first time since joining BeefCheque. The table also shows the total use of the activity, the percentage confident in using and the percentage wanting more practice.

The table shows that a large percentage of participants have tried important activities such as calculating pasture cover and managing a feed wedge. However there is a range in confidence in using some of them. The desire for more practice tended to be related to lower confidence in using the activity.

Most activities listed on the questionnaire have now been tried. The highest ranking activities requiring **more practice** were estimating pasture quality, understanding soil tests, estimating pasture quality, managing feed wedge, and calculating a long term budget.

**Table 1 Grazing management activities tried since starting BeefCheque**  
(102 respondents / 13 groups in rank order of change since BeefCheque)

Rank	Practice	Tried before BeefCheque %	Tried since BeefCheque %	Total Tried %	Confident Using %	More Practice %
1	Estimating pasture quantity	17.6	76.5	94	70.5	70
2	Calculating average pasture cover	13	75	88	64	62
3	Building a feed wedge	17	73	90	73	60
4	Calculating pasture growth	12.5	71.5	84	58	64
5	Estimating pasture quality	15	67	82	33	80
6	Calculating a short term feed budget	16	62	78	59	59
7	Managing a winter feed wedge	26	58	84	69	69
8	Calculating a long term feed budget	18	55	73	43	69
9	Managing a spring wedge	29	54	83	62	63
10	Back fencing	18	49	67	71	39
11	Using nitrogen - winter	30	43	73	55	53
12	Strip grazing	48	38	86	78	31
13	Using nitrogen - spring	7	37	44	72	56
14	Rotational grazing	60	30	90	79	34
= 15	Electric fence layout	55.5	23.5	79	75	33
= 15	Estimating fat score	65.5	23.5	89	57	58
17	Use electric fence	77	17	94	91	27
18	Use FeedTest	17	16	33	24	46
19	Understanding soil test	78	15	93	52	71
20	Identify pasture	81	13	94	62	62

	species					
= 21	Fertiliser required from soil test	73	11	84	48	68
= 21	Spray graze weeds	51	11	62	54	43
= 23	Oversow	48	6	54	46	53
= 23	Take soil test	87	6	93	76	42

• **Practices not tried:**

About 60% of respondents replied to the question seeking reasons for not trying a practice. The practices not tried are shown in **table 2**. These were practices such as oversowing, use of FeedTest and spray grazing.

The main reasons for not trying these practices were cost, time, not needed or other means used to get the effect (eg hard grazing of weeds rather than spray grazing).

**Table 2 Practices not tried**  
(58 respondents)

Rank	Activity	Number of Mentions	Reasons not tried
1	Oversow	18 (31% resp)	\$, time, dry conditions, not needed, knowledge and confidence.
2	Spray graze	14 (24% resp)	Time, \$, use other means, lack of equipment.
3	Use of FeedTest	16 (28% resp)	\$, don't buy fodder, use feeds of known value.

• **Practices, Advantages and Disadvantages**

The advantages and disadvantages of up to three nominated practices they had tried are shown in **table 3**. 81% of respondents answered this question.

Main practices mentioned were strip grazing, using nitrogen fertiliser and building a feed wedge. Main advantages of these practices were seen as control, cheaper winter feed and ability to budget.

**Table 3 Advantages & Disadvantages of nominated practices**  
(83 respondents - Number of mentions in brackets)

Rank	Activity	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Strip grazing (33)	Control, improved pasture species, stock performance.	Time
2	Using winter N (22)	Cheaper winter feed.	Cost, labour, strip grazing.
3	Building feed wedge (20)	Utilisation, control.	Time, extra fencing.
4	Est. pasture quantity (20)	Ability to budget and make decisions.	Nil

When asked whether they had noticed any changes in grazing management practices in the district, 58% of respondents mentioned that they had.

When asked to nominate their average farm pasture cover, 64% gave a figure (range 1200 - 2390 kg/ha), 22% were not sure and 14 gave no response.

• **Comments about BeefCheque**

40% of respondents gave a sentence about BeefCheque. (Not all participants got a chance to comment as the first forms did not have this question)

Comments on BeefCheque were favourable. The comments could be broken up into the following categories:-

Sharing ideas	32%
Maximising pasture growth and using it	26%
Knowledge/confidence/control/support	21%
Management skills	9%
Others	12%

One quote was:

"An excellent program - it has led to a marked increase in pasture production and consumption, and more efficient farm management. It has also been good meeting with other farmers and discussing options with them, seeing other properties and the social contact."

There was only one comment not entirely positive: "(BeefCheque is ) more work, we hope in future more income.

**Discussion /Conclusions**

A large percentage of the group had tried many of the activities for the first time, particularly those which are important in BeefCheque such as estimating pasture quantity and calculating average cover. This suggests the project has been successful in encouraging producers to try these practices for the first time. For the activities which have been tried the most there was a big range in the confidence in using them.

Confidence appeared to be highest for the 'practical' activities such as building and managing a feed wedge, use of nitrogen fertiliser, strip grazing, electric fence use and layout. There was less confidence in using practices which involved calculations or involved some unaccustomed judgement such as calculating average pasture cover, estimating pasture quality, calculating pasture growth, and short and long term budgeting. This suggests that further practice is needed to perfect these skills.

It is important to note that the 'confident in using' question is a reflection of people's confidence only, and does not give a picture of how well participants have learnt to do the activity. It also does not necessarily indicate how strongly they want to be involved in the activity. In hindsight this question has been of limited value

A large percentage of the group (around 80%+) have tried or are trying all activities except FeedTest, oversowing and spray grazing. There appeared to be valid reasons for the low use of these latter practices such as use other cheaper means to achieve the same result (such as intensive grazing out of weeds ).

The main sense coming out of the Practices- advantages/disadvantages section was that the major practices tried are strip grazing and using N fertiliser, and the main benefit of practices tried has been control, and cheaper winter feed. Major disadvantages are seen as time and cost.

Increased profitability has not been mentioned many times. Given the past two seasons of low beef prices and drought this is not surprising. The challenge will be to show the relevance of developing the budgeting skills to increased productivity and profitability on individual farms.

## 2.3 Financial Benefits of Beefcheque from Farm Financial Monitoring

*- If we don't measure it, we can't improve it!*

### Introduction

Early in the BeefCheque project, most participants agreed that the grazing farm business was one of converting grass to meat to make income for living and hopefully asset creation. BeefCheque farm monitoring aims to measure the essential components of this business.

The challenge for the BeefCheque participants and the project has been to identify what to measure and how to measure it. Implicit in this challenge is that what was measured has to be useful, relevant and easily obtained.

This BeefCheque project review has provided an opportunity to document the development and current situation for the BeefCheque monitoring and to develop strategic plans for the future.

The BeefCheque farm monitoring was developed to meet three objectives:

- **Project assessment.** Provide quantifiable measurements of the projects progression towards meeting project objective number two. ie - grow more grass, use more grass, produce more beef, make more money.
- **Individual participant information.** Provide information on the physical and financial performance of individual participants upon which strategic decisions can be made.
- **Group information.** Provide information on a group by group basis and project basis as a stimulus for discussion and debate on best practice for beef production.

Requirements of the monitoring were that it be:

- **Simple.** An overriding requirement was for the information gathering process to be simple and easily completed by participants.
- **Meet objectives.** Information sought has to provide enough information to accurately and objectively measure participants and the projects progression towards meeting project objectives of growing more grass, consuming more grass, producing more beef and making more money.
- **Provide a learning experience by doing.** It was considered important that participants were given the opportunity and guidance in calculating many of the parameters such as pasture consumption and fertiliser use. This was considered important because
  - i) the information and ratios reported are seen as relevant
  - ii) participants become self reliant in generating their own information ie. historically this form of monitoring has been conducted with a lot of assistance and when this assistance is withdrawn the level of participation drops considerably partly because producers don't fully understand how the information is collected and calculated.
- **Provide a permanent record system.** Many participants expressed the desire to have a farm record book that permanently recorded farm productivity information such as stock numbers.
- **Confidential.** Some participants have expressed a reluctance to participate in farm monitoring activities because they do not want any of their personal details known to others. For this reason the package had to be offered in a way that assured the confidentiality of the information provided.

- **Farm Monitoring discussion with groups.** It was considered essential that for maximum benefit, the groups had to devote time to discussing the results of the farm monitoring reports.

## History

- Farm Monitoring and analysis programs that were already in existence were considered to be either
  - i) too complicated or
  - ii) too expensive
 to be utilised by this project.
- The National Australia Bank was approached to provide assistance in developing a package that met the above requirements. Simon Hutchins of the National Australia Bank at Sale assisted in developing a package on an unpaid basis. The return for National Australia Bank was that they would get access to group and project averages (not individual participant information) that would assist them in their daily activities of being a loan provider to beef producers.

## Implementation

A recording book to fill the requirements was developed and by necessity was large and on first impressions daunting for many participants.

The program for storing participant information and calculating and reporting financial and physical ratios was very comprehensive and provided that facility for extensive interpretation by allowing comparison between participants, groups and project based on parameters such as year to year, location, rainfall and production type.

To streamline the process and to assure confidentiality an independent book keeper was employed by the project to input participant information and generate reports.

## Interim Results and Discussion.

### • *Participation*

The farm monitoring was implemented later than originally proposed with a poorer response rate than anticipated. At the date of the review there were 32 returns for the 95-96 financial year and 84 for the 96-97 financial year out of a potential of over 250 active participants.

An initial response of 33% seems to be about normal when compared with other programs implemented. For example the Target 10 program (Dairy extension project) achieved a 27% response rate when a similar monitoring response program was introduced. This was built up to over 50% in three years. The Beef Manager program which was a beef extension program with financial monitoring as a core theme achieved a 60% response rate in 1991-92 when it was first introduced. However this fell to below 50% by the end of the project with a very poor participation after the funded part of the program was finished.

The lag time in implementing the farm monitoring was justified as the initial focus of the project was on increasing pasture utilisation and additional components such as farm monitoring or livestock breeding may have weakened this focus.

### • *Respondent Assessment Survey*

Respondents to the farm record book were asked to complete a simple survey answering four questions on each of the five farm monitoring sections. These questions and average responses are detailed in tables 4 and 5 below.

**Table 4: Questions asked of respondents to the BeefCheque farm monitoring for each section.**

Question	Not at all						Very
1 Did you find the questions relevant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2 Did you find this questions easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3 Was the information for this section easy to obtain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4 Did you find the calculations easy ( <i>If Applicable</i> )	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Table 5: Average response of participants to each farm monitoring section for the four questions asked from table 4 above.**

Farm Monitoring Section	Average Response to Question Number			
	1	2	3	4
General	6	6	6	6
Financial	6	6	5	5
Livestock	6	5	4	5
Nutrients	6	5	5	5
Environment	4	6	4	5

Tables 4 and 5 above indicate that generally participants who completed the farm monitoring book found most of the information for all sections to be relevant, easy to understand with the information required easily obtained and calculated if necessary. The exception may be the ease with which information relating to livestock and the environment sections was obtained and the relevance of the environmental section.

- ***Non-Respondent Survey.***

Each participant who had not returned a farm monitoring input sheet by the 30 September 1997 was personally contacted by NRE *BeefCheque* officers to encourage and offer assistance to participants to complete the monitoring input sheets. From this contact an unofficial reason why the monitoring input sheets were not completed was gained. These are categorised below in table 6. It should be noted that participants were not asked directly why they hadn't completed the farm monitoring.

**Table 6: Reasons why BeefCheque participants did not complete BeefCheque farm monitoring as gained from personal contact with BeefCheque participants who did not fill out the farm monitoring.**

Reason for not completing	% of participants surveyed
Will have a go/another look if time	55
Not relevant/too personal	20
Not enough time/too busy	15
Too hard/confusing	6
Other	4

It could be assumed that a large number of respondents who said they will have a go/another look if they have time are not going to do it and are merely masking a reason.

### Results

- Each participant who completed the farm monitoring received a detailed report that included;
- details of individual performance and how it was calculated
  - graphical presentation of individual performance including breakdown of costs and pasture composition etc.
  - a group comparison section that detailed the individual performance against group and project average and top 25%. An example of this print out is detailed below in tables 7 and 8.

**Table 7: Financial indicators for individual groups and project.**

Group comparison		Group Average	Top 25% Group	Project Average	Top 25% Project
<b>Financial</b>					
Total Income	\$	70381	87348	185869	124153
Farm Income (\$/Ha)		414	410	654	452
Farm Operating Costs (FOC) \$		58370	71632	15444.5	84273
Farm Operating Surplus (FOS)\$		12011	15715	31424	39880
Net Cashflow	\$	-42461	-42195	-3111	-22769
FOC/Ha	\$/Ha	343	340	556	384
FOS/Ha	\$/Ha	71	70	98	68
Return on Costs (%)		20.58	26.23	21.71	37.49
FOC as % of farm income	%	82.93	84.05	82.99	92.12
Return on Assets (%)		0	-3.25	-0.75	-6.09
Return on Equity (%)		0	-5.11	-0.83	-7.43
FOS/Ha/100 mm rainfall		17.5	17.2	19.8	18.96

0 Value = No Entry.

**Table 8: Physical indicators for individual groups and project.**

Group Comparison			Group Average	Top 25% Group	Project Average	Top 25% Project
<b>Physical</b>						
Effective grazing area	Ha	170	202	300	279	481
Eff Ha - Cattle	Ha	170	195	300	242	396
Eff Ha - Sheep	Ha	0	7	0	35	85
Rainfall (mm)	mm	403	501	486	736	712
DSE/Eff Ha	DSE	27.9	20.1	18.2	19.7	20.6
% DSE Cattle	%	100.0	96.6	100	92	87.2
% DSE Sheep	%	0.0	3.4	0.0	8	12.8
Total LW prod./Ha	kg	490	483	352	436	659
Cattle LW prod./Ha	kg	490	469	352	450	660
Sheep LW prod./Ha	kg	0	0	0	0	0
Wool production (kg/Ha)	kg	0	0	0	0	0
MJ utilised on Farm/Ha	MJ	79307	54184	52600	42369	55901
Cattle LW/Ha/100mm rain	kg	121	0	77	0	117
Sheep LW/Ha/100mm rain	kg	0	0	0	0	0
Past. consumption (T/Ha)	T	7.6	5.2	5.0	4.0	5.3
kg N applied/Ha	kg	8	7	10	7	8
kg P applied/Ha	kg	19	14	17	17	25
kg K applied/Ha	kg	26	23	32	26	32
kg S applied/Ha	kg	21	14	19	18	28

An earlier program designed by Simon Hutchins, National Australia Bank, while very comprehensive, was replaced by another program to analyse the data from the 95-96 and 96-97 input sheets. An initial interpretation of the results of the top 25% of the project (based on return on assets) indicates that the operating costs of the top producers isn't a lot different from that of the average of the project. However they have a much higher operating surplus achieved by producing more liveweight/Ha. The top 25% of producers also have a higher pasture consumption and generally higher fertiliser applications.

Anecdotal evidence suggest that many of these 25% have steer fattening as a significant proportion of their enterprise and further investigation is required.

Many of the key indicators used in the BeefCheque farm monitoring are directly comparable with indicators from other sources which will be of great benefit in generating discussion about best practice amongst BeefCheque groups. A demonstration of this type of comparison is detailed in table 9.

**Table 9: Comparison of selected indicators for BeefCheque participants and other established monitoring sources (this is for demonstration purposes only as they involve different financial years).**

Indicator	Survey Source <sup>1</sup>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Liveweight produced kg/ha/100mm	59	117	29	37	40
Stocking Rate DSE/ha	20	21	-	17	15
Cost production c/kglw	85	52	71	66	-
Phosphorous Application kg P/ha	17	25	-	14	10
Gross Margin \$/ha	68	302	-	370	196
Return on asset %	-6.1	3.6	-	-	6.1

<sup>1</sup> Survey source

1. *BeefCheque* Average (Gippsland)
2. *BeefCheque* top 25% (Gippsland)
3. Holmes and Sackett (SE Australia)
4. Beef-Farm (SW/WA)
5. Monitor Farms (SW Vic)

The employment of the data entry operator has proven very successful as the bookkeeper selected has a good working knowledge of, and a strong interest in, farm recording and as such has provided very useful recommendations. The cost of using non Departmental equipment appears to be high and ways of reducing this need to be explored.

Each of the groups will have a meeting devoted to discussing the results of the farm monitoring as a stimulus to generate group discussion. The project is unable to provide detailed individual interpretation and analysis but has provided a good frame work upon which other providers can offer this service.

#### **Recommendations for improvement.**

The participants who have completed the farm monitoring have probably done so because they have a real interest in farm monitoring and record keeping or they felt obliged to complete the monitoring process for the sake of the project or the people involved. The mid-term review developed strategic plans to get more participants involved in the monitoring. The project has an aim of getting all participants to complete some sort of monitoring. It was considered this could be achieved by taking the following strategic actions.

i) *Style*. The farm record book made simpler where possible and to have a two tiered/multi tiered format where participants can supply a level of detail appropriate to their resources and interest. The current participants have a provided high level of detail and accuracy and this information can be used to monitor the progress towards meeting project objectives. This can be backed up by less accurate and detailed information obtained from future participants.

ii) *Benefits*. Further highlighting the benefits to individual participants can be used as a means of getting more participants to complete the farm record book. This requires participants to set their own personal, family and farm goals. Once set the measurement of these goals form the initial and integral part of the farm monitoring.

iii) *Target the record keeper.* The *BeefCheque* farm monitoring was initially aimed at those participants from the enterprise who generally attend the *BeefCheque* activities. In many cases it is believed that these people do not act as the record keepers for the farming enterprise. It is more appropriate to direct the completion of the farm record book to the farm record keeper who maybe the spouse, siblings or family accountant. It was also considered appropriate to develop and encourage the skills of people in these rural communities who have an interest in record keeping. These people can be utilised by participants for assistance and the project will be leaving skills in the community. ie this is creating interdependence rather than dependence.

iv) *The fear factor.* There is a strong belief that many people do not complete this type of analysis for fear that the results will reveal a lack of viability that they know or suspect exists. This fear factor can be partially addressed by *ii)* above and using the farm monitoring to assist families address the viability issue.

### **3. ANALYSIS OF PROJECT PERFORMANCE**

Workshop participants were asked to identify the purpose, strengths and weaknesses of eight key elements of the *BeefCheque* Project. They were also asked to rank performance from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). Table 10 is a summary of their analysis.

**Table 10: Analysis of the performance of elements of the BeefCheque Project**

	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Score (1 - 5)</b>
<b>Board</b>	To give strategic direction to deliverers to achieve project and group objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• producer driven/strong ownership</li> <li>• commercially orientated</li> <li>• ‘feet on ground’</li> <li>• mix of credible industry people</li> <li>• diversity of skills</li> <li>• commitment and enthusiasm</li> <li>• work well together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• financial management</li> <li>• deliver FA on time</li> <li>• focus on operational deliverers, groups</li> <li>• time priorities</li> <li>• no non-executive directors</li> <li>• put off hard decisions</li> </ul>	3 - 4
<b>Management Team</b>	Implement Board directions; bring relevant issues to Board; project management, coordination and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication and technical skills</li> <li>• vision and overall project</li> <li>• enthusiastic, dedicated and committed</li> <li>• innovative</li> <li>• small size</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overworked and overcommitted</li> <li>• unclear tasks</li> <li>• lack of time</li> <li>• disparate personnel</li> </ul>	Yr 1: 5+  Yr 2: 3 - 4
<b>Focus Farms</b>	Demonstrate putting principles into practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• willingness to try new ideas/take risks</li> <li>• practical, visual, demonstrated change</li> <li>• focus; continuity</li> <li>• commercially based/credible</li> <li>• enthusiastic</li> <li>• local/real learning experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• same every time</li> <li>• not learning about other enterprises</li> <li>• pressure on one person/enterprise to perform</li> <li>• size of operation</li> <li>• preparedness to accept change</li> <li>• can't meet all needs</li> </ul>	4 - 5
<b>Farm Walks</b>	Share information with a focus on farm performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• share information</li> <li>• focus on farm performance</li> <li>• reinforce skills and knowledge/learning by doing</li> <li>• develop network and people skills</li> <li>• ‘real farm’ situation and whole farm situation</li> <li>• producer friendly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can become repetitious</li> <li>• suitable time frame</li> <li>• can take up discussion time</li> <li>• facilitator dependent</li> </ul>	4 - 5

	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Score (1 – 5)</b>
<b>Farm Monitoring</b>	To benchmark and quantify physical and financial situation to be able to monitor costs/benefits (success) of changes and program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• basis for decision making</li> <li>• control and ability to plan and improve business management</li> <li>• support from DNRE</li> <li>• set of records</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• takes more time/ work (another job to do)</li> <li>• late start with big analysis</li> <li>• uneven uptake</li> <li>• looks daunting</li> <li>• lack of motivation to complete</li> </ul>	. Layout: 4.5 Execut'n 2 - 3+
<b>Consultancy Support</b>	Provide technical information and teach skills while motivating farmers to put into practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motivational and communication skills</li> <li>• achieve purpose</li> <li>• knowledge, dedication and enthusiasm</li> <li>• repetition</li> <li>• project built around Jeff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time/over committed</li> <li>• no comfort zone</li> <li>• aggressive</li> <li>• cost</li> <li>• not more of them</li> <li>• repetition</li> <li>• project built around Jeff</li> </ul>	4 - 5
<b>15 x Groups</b>	Implement objectives of BeefCheque at local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversity of experience</li> <li>• local ownership</li> <li>• sharing ideas and mutual support</li> <li>• geographic locations</li> <li>• non-threatening environment</li> <li>• good is good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversity of enterprise</li> <li>• communication between groups/group dynamics</li> <li>• too many producers involved</li> <li>• bad is bad</li> </ul>	4 - 5
<b>DNRE Support</b>	Implementation, liaison and facilitation of groups; technical and organisational support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achieved purpose</li> <li>• hard working, dedicated, competent</li> <li>• resources</li> <li>• organised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loss of experienced workers/lack of continuity</li> <li>• lost their 'balls'</li> <li>• over-committed</li> </ul>	4 - 5

#### **4. FUTURE OPERATION OF BEEFCHEQUE**

In terms of the future of the BeefCheque Project the following areas were identified as potential leverage points to improve the performance of the Project. Those marked with an asterisk were further developed by workshop participants. However, it is acknowledged that in the time allowed the work serves as only a cursory beginning to more detailed action planning.

## 4.1 Leverage Points for Improving BeefCheque

- \*Building self-direction in groups
- \*Information flow between/within Project components (Board, Mtg Team, Gps, deliverers)
- \*Management team workload
- \*Farm financial monitoring
- \*Maximising learning
  
- Project life beyond contract date
- New entrants to BC groups
- Board functioning
- Accessing DNRE resources

## 4.2 Preliminary suggestions for the Board to consider

### • *Building Self Direction in Groups*

#### **What needs to be done**

- Conduct a skills and experiences audit of each group
- Assist groups to remain focused on principles of BeefCheque (growing and utilising grass)
- Assist groups to access expertise in group leadership and facilitation when needed

#### **How**

- Use BeefCheque principles on farm walks on member's farms
- Have a pool of funded, trained facilitators
- Harnessing the skills within the group

#### **Obvious Strategies**

- Get more full-time farmers coming to the monthly meetings
- Follow-up people not coming
- Get ownership by charging a fee

### • *Information Flows*

BeefCheque Brief (produced and delivered by one member of the Project Management Team and one DNRE officer)

- produced regularly (monthly? bimonthly?)
- regular format
- brief and to the point
- cover issues such as group news; operational BC issues; Board news; basic BC principles; revisit objectives and issues
- delivered to the Board by the management team member and delivered to groups by DNRE members

Newsletter (quarterly)

- more detail (complement brief)
- create newsletter committee to see it done (not necessarily Board)
- content to challenge and motivate us

Radio

- ABC (regular times)
- BeefCheque News: Items - pasture growth rates; group activities; seasonal issues

Workshop

- exchange of ideas between all participants in the Project (annually?)

### • *Management Team Workload*

Defined role of management Team to be a Board priority. As a guide, role of the Board = strategic perspective; role of management team = operational management

Develop a Crisis Action Plan that includes access to tools and knowledge

Outsourcing

- personnel
- \$

Establish performance criteria

Continually review process

- ***Farm Financial Monitoring***

**What needs to be done?**

Get more people to do something towards achieving original monitoring objectives.

**Strategic Direction**

Style

- simple
- two tiered/multi tiered

Benefits

- hook relating to personal goals

Record Keeper

- target
- develop community interdependence vs dependence

- ***Maximising Learning***

Appoint volunteer in group

- facilitation and train

Get individual members to talk on specific subjects

Best thing/worst thing

Trivia quiz

- work related with prize (bottle of wine)

Warm up

- eg athlete for the brain

Point out \$ benefits

Develop 'real' goal setting

### **4.3 Future Development/Expansion of the Project**

- **Group support after project facilitator/consultant support ceases**
  - groups hire own facilitator/consultant services on needs basis
  - ensure groups continue to operate under BeefCheque banner
  - outline conditions to operate under BeefCheque banner
  - communication between groups and from Board is imperative
- **Extending project beyond present participants/geography**
  - responsibility of MRC/DNRE
  - can bring on extra individuals, not more groups
  - need a more cost effective model to replicate BeefCheque
- **How to demonstrate achievement of project objectives?**
  - quantify/demonstrate meeting of objectives