

96/N05



## Producer Research Support

Riverina prime lamb producers boost marketing skills

MIA Prime Lamb Group



### The project

The development of producer and agent live lamb assessment skills and a sustainable year round market for heavy, lean (20 kg+, 3 score) prime lamb, resulted from a Producer Research Support project conducted by the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) Prime Lamb Alliance.

### Objectives

Develop long term, profitable markets for heavy, lean (20 kg+, 3 score) prime lamb produced within the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) and surrounding districts.

### What was done

Co-ordinated by Ms Diana Dissegna, Secretary, and Geoff Duddy of NSW Agriculture, the MIA Prime Lamb Alliance effectively operated for two years. Meetings, workshops, field days and industry tours were the main activities which were backed by a newsletter distributed to 183 people.

A three-month 'over the hooks' marketing trial with AJ Bush-Pastoral Prime was conducted.

Among the many lessons learned was that a set of scales is crucial in meeting market specifications and maximising price. Prime lamb producers who guessed the weight of their lambs were missing out on the best daily market price, CALM services manager Ross Jelbart, Wagga, told members of the MIA PLA.

He told the group the only way to accurately know a lamb's weight was on a set of scales. Mr Jelbart also told the group they had to know about the fat score of the lambs they were producing.

He said to get the fat score right lambs had to be handled gently, feeling the tail, short loin and long ribs.

"With thumb on the backbone it should feel like the knuckle of a human hand for top lambs of three score," Mr Jelbart said.

He said weight assessment was the most critical factor but this was also the hardest to get right.

"Even farmers who know their stock find it hard to guess weights correctly," Mr Jelbart said.

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### Key points

- Riverina prime lamb producers came together to improve their live animal assessment skills and gain a better understanding of market options.

### Contact details

Penny Wall  
Eagles Nest  
Raywood Vic 3570  
Tel (03) 5436 1262

## Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to \$15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

These activities include:

- Producer Initiated Research and Development
- More Beef from Pastures demonstration trials
- Prime Time Wean More Lambs demonstration trials
- Sustainable and productive grazing grants.

Contact Stephen Feighan - MLA Project Manager, Producer Delivery and Adoption.

Tel (02) 9463 9245 or  
sfeighan@mla.com.au

## Discussion

Mr Duddy said during the two years a strong bond was formed between Ms Dissegna, MIA PLA members and co-operating livestock agents situated in Griffith, Leeton and Coleambally.

He said results from the survey, conducted by NSW Agriculture and including MIA PLA members, underscored the efforts of all concerned. In particular, those of Ms Dissegna, had been instrumental in increasing producer-agent industry knowledge, practical skills and a change in prime lamb marketing practices within the MIA.

He said producer members of the MIA PLA were now more aware of marketing options, competition among local agents and reduced stock numbers within the MIA because of drought in 1994–95 to better cope with depressed wool returns and increased irrigation charges. Comparative gross margins were now being conducted on most cropping enterprises. There had been a significant change in the numbers and percentages of lambs sold through alternative means.

He said those who have been actively involved with MIA PLA and NSW Agriculture had benefited in terms of production and marketing of prime lamb from within the MIA.

Mr Duddy said this was backed by the results of a survey of Murrumbidgee prime lamb producers designed to quantify lamb producer practices and future areas of work for the NSW Agriculture Lamb Development Team. The summarised below were for the Murrumbidgee Region, with 'contacts' being those receiving the MIA Prime Lamb Alliance newsletter. The survey found:

- Those active in the MIA PLA, or who had strong contact with NSW Agriculture, generally marketed their lambs using a combination of weight and fat score whereas non-contacts tended to select visually.
- The same producers generally sold more lambs over the hooks and fewer via the saleyards.
- There had been a significant change in the style/grading of lambs marketed, particularly among 'contacts', although most were producing lambs averaging 2 kg heavier carcase weight.
- Producers active in improvement were generally marketing leaner lambs.
- More 'contact' producers (87%) were aware of LAMBPLAN compared with non-contacts (71%) and there was an appreciable difference in those who used LAMBPLAN in their selections - 57% compared with 23%.



## MLA also recommends

### Sheep Genetics Australia

Sheep Genetics Australia (SGA) is the national genetic evaluation service for the Australian sheep industry. It is built around the world's most comprehensive sheep genetics database, and will deliver genetic information on a fee-for-service basis.

Tel (02) 6773 2493 or  
[www.sheepgenetics.org.au](http://www.sheepgenetics.org.au)

### EDGEnetwork

EDGEnetwork offers practical field-based workshops to improve productivity and profitability for the long-term.

Workshops cover breeding, nutrition, grazing management, marketing and selling.

Call MLA on 1800 993 343 or  
[www.edgenetwork.com.au](http://www.edgenetwork.com.au)

### Meat and Livestock Australia

Level 1, 165 Walker Street  
 North Sydney NSW 2060  
 Tel (02) 9463 9333  
 Fax (02) 9463 9393  
 Free Phone 1800 023 100 (Australia only)  
[www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au)

- About 90% of both groups considered LAMBPLAN to be important or very important with respect to buying rams to better meet market specifications.
- Most producers lamb in the autumn although more 'contacts' lamb in spring.
- 'Contacts' have a higher lambing percentage — an average of 110% compared with 97% - and had increased their percentage over the previous five years.
- Most use some form of finishing system, generally grain or lucerne. Silage and feedlots were not commonly used.
- Both groups believed that it was important or very important to reduce pre-slaughter stress of lambs in terms of meat quality.
- Most agreed the NSW Agriculture activities they had attended over the previous five years had helped them modify the way they produce lamb.