

2002/Q07



Producer Research Support

Organic Livestock Production Improvements

Biological Farmers of Australia Livestock Committee



The project

The Biological Farmers of Australia Livestock Committee aimed to increase the efficiency of organic livestock production through the application of best practice methodologies.

Objectives

1. Increase organic livestock production by 30 percent over two years;
2. Assist existing organic producers to gain efficiencies and develop best practice;
3. Facilitate new organic producers to adopt industry best practice; and
4. Provide Allowed Inputers direction for the development of new products, and opportunity to conduct trials - shortening the time to market for new products.

What was done?

A questionnaire was developed and sent to all livestock producers to allow problems specific to each area to be identified and rated. A list of problems was then defined for each region.

A series of workshops addressing specific problems, and run by Allowed Inputers, was planned. Workshops were proposed for Roma and Longreach in Queensland; Tamworth, Dubbo and Wagga in New South Wales; and Bendigo in Victoria. Workshops were promoted by regional representatives and a direct mail campaign.

Biological Farmers Australia (BFA) and Allowed Inputers worked together to develop workshop content, but workshops were intended to provide a forum to encourage producers to discuss and develop their own solutions to industry issues.

Workshop outcomes were communicated to all livestock producers in each region, not only those who attended workshops. Participant contact details were also made available to workshop attendees. Prioritised issues as identified in the workshops were provided to Allowed Inputers, so that they would understand the areas of producer focus and seek to provide products to solve these issues.

The final step in this process was to develop a strategy for those issues that remained unresolved.

The Biological Farmers of Australia Livestock Committee developed a questionnaire and sent it to all livestock producers to allow problems specific to each region to be identified and rated.

A series of workshops for producers interested in organic livestock production was held, with more planned to help producers develop best practice methodologies.

Producers who attended the workshop identified internal and external parasites, and mineral licks and tonics as priorities for further field research and development.

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Key points

- A series of workshops for producers interested in organic livestock production was held, with more planned to help producers develop best practice methodologies.
- Priorities for further research in organic livestock production were identified as internal and external parasites, mineral licks and tonics.

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.

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What happened?

The problems identified from questionnaire responses are listed in Table 1. Organic Farming Issues by Region. Workshops were conducted in Longreach, Boulia, Canowindra and Roma in Queensland; and Dubbo, Tamworth and Coolah in New South Wales. The proposed workshop in Bendigo, Victoria did not proceed due to drought conditions.

Table 1. Organic Farming Issues by Region

Region	Issues Identified
Western Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supplementary feeding (drought)• Tick Control• Woody weed control
Central Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supplementary Feeding• Integration of EU/Organic program• Buffalo Fly/tick control
Northern NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lice• Supplementary feeding (both finishing and drought)• Traceability/product integrity
Central NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pasture Management (balancing mineral content)• Traceability/product integrity• Lice
Southern NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lice• Internal parasite control• Supplementary feeding
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal parasite control• Supplementary feeding• Lice control

Supplementary Feeding

Supplementary feeding was consistently identified as a major issue. Preliminary trials on responses to the organic alternatives to urea within a supplementary feeding system were conducted.

Breeders were individually weighed at the start and end of each trial. Groups trialed on copra and lupins were grazed on adjoining creek/forest pastures and the urea group was grazed on adjoining creek/cleared pastures. The results of the trial are as summarised in Table 2. Supplementary Feeding Trial of Organic Alternatives to Urea.

Table 2. Supplementary Feeding Trial of Organic Alternatives to Urea

Feed supplement	Avg daily live weight gain (kg LW gain/head/day)	Ave daily cost of supplement fed (\$/head/day)	Ave cost per kg of live weight gain (\$/kg of LW gain)
Molasses & copra	0.2592	0.2096	0.8088
Molasses & lupins	0.2086	0.2207	1.0577
Molasses & urea	0.0818	0.2153	2.6314

The average live weight gain for breeders on copra meal and lupins was similar and significantly greater than those on the urea supplement. The cost of copra meal is lower than either lupins or urea and therefore demonstrated the lowest average cost per kilogram of live weight gain.

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MLA also recommends BeefPlan

BeefPlan is a non-traditional approach to learning. Groups of like-minded beef producers, work together as a management team to focus on property management. Importantly the learning agenda is set and controlled by the group.

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EDGEnetwork

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Pasture Management

Pasture management was also identified as a significant issue, particularly in New South Wales. A field day was held at Old Turee in Coolah to benchmark against the practices of this leading organic producer. The field day was attended by over 80 people and attracted wide press coverage.

Discussion

It was originally anticipated that a Neem Oil trial would be conducted, with Organic Crop Protectants supplying product. Changes to the organic status of Neem Oil by the National Registration Authority prevented this from proceeding.

A buffalo fly trial was also planned, but drought reduced the incidence of this pest. Drought heightened the interest in supplementary feeding, which lead to the supplementary feeding trial.

Next steps

Best practice organic livestock production is of importance to those managing an organic enterprise. While general trends for information requirement have been identified and workshop outcomes communicated to producers, best practice methodologies need to be documented and an ongoing protocol for their communication developed.