

95/V01



Producer Research Support

South-west lamb producers hone their assessment skills
LAMBWEST



The project

Members of the south-west Prime Lamb Group Inc. (Victoria) felt they did not have the skills to determine whether their lambs met premium market specifications, nor did they know how to produce lambs to meet these specifications.

To overcome these shortfalls they embarked on a project to develop the skills and confidence to produce lambs for specific markets, and market them efficiently.

A secondary aim was to develop and demonstrate production systems that incorporate quality assurance procedures to improve consistency of supply with emphasis on late season production.

Underpinning these aims was the intention by some group members to develop a group marketing scheme.

Objectives

1. Give prime lamb producers the skills and confidence to produce lambs for specific markets, and market them efficiently.
2. Develop and demonstrate production systems which incorporate quality assurance procedures to improve consistency of supply with emphasis on late season production.
3. Assess flock health, pastures and pasture management, lambs for particular market specifications and the use of fodder crops.

What was done

Thirteen members undertook a study tour to obtain information relative to the formation of a marketing group. As a result of this exercise the group decided it was not yet ready to form a marketing group.

During the period in which the Producer Research Support project ran the group undertook a range of activities, most of which were aimed at improving their lamb production and marketing skills.

The group is run by a committee which meets every six weeks. All group members are welcome to attend committee meetings. The committee is responsible for deciding what activities should be conducted.

What happened?

The attendance at or participation in group activities by the group members has been at a consistently high level.

Several of the group's activities have been reported in the local press, boosting non-member awareness of the activities. Two major reports were produced during the project.

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Key points

- Practice changes have occurred in several areas. These include the management of flock health, pasture assessment and management, the use of fodder crops and the assessment of lambs for particular market specifications.

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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

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The first of these was the report on the Future Directions workshop which was distributed in September 1996. This report summarised the group's present situation and relevant background, and identified possible directions the group may take in future.

The other major report was that produced on group benchmarking.

While only 15 members of the group participated in the exercise, the data generated was made available for others to use as a comparison with their own operations.

Discussion

Given the range of activities undertaken by the group and the number of group members attending those activities, many have increased their knowledge and skills in several areas relevant to the production and marketing of prime lamb.

"Practice changes have occurred in several areas," said project co-ordinator Kate Joseph.

"These include the management of flock health, pasture assessment and management, the use of fodder crops and the assessment of lambs for particular market specifications."

The benchmarking exercise is offered annually to members. The carcass competition which was run by the group for two years was discontinued and was unlikely to be run in future years.

Group members felt there was little to be gained from conducting or participating in this type of activity, however Paddock-to-Plate exercises were very worthwhile.

There are 55 financial members of the group. It is planned to raise the membership fee to \$100 a year with the aim of the group becoming self-funding.

Next steps

This group received further Producer Research Support funding and in its second project the group is becoming more focused on establishing a group marketing scheme. About 20 members are participating in this scheme.

These members are in the process of becoming accredited under Flockcare and are identifying and gathering information on possible markets.

The other main activity of the group is a lamb discussion group. Thirty members participate in the discussion group which meets on a regular basis.