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THE GRASSLAND SOCIETY OF NSW INC.



final report

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Abstract

The pasture updates organised by The Grassland Society of NSW, were an opportunity to bring together the private sector, agencies and farmers to deliver the latest developments in research and to show how these technologies were being adopted on farm.

The Grassland Society of NSW Inc was contracted to deliver 4 pasture updates across NSW to 200 producers and advisors. Pasture updates were delivered to 307 producers and advisors across 5 locations. The updates were at Goolma, Tocal, Glen Innes, Gundagai and Nyngan

Producers represented the largest group attending the updates comprising 76%. Advisors and agency staff represented 15%. Cattle producers were the largest group represented 49%, with sheep and sheep and cattle producers representing 27%.

Participants are often reluctant to fill in evaluation forms and having all questions answered is again a challenge. From the 307 participants 172 evaluations were collected. This group of respondents managed 187,000 ha, so it is likely the updates reached land managers across 400,000 ha of land.

The information delivered at the pasture updates was rated as appropriate and relevant to the businesses represented. A range of speakers was used across the updates from producers, private consultants, and industry research and extension agronomists. Overall 80% of respondents said the information they received at the updates justified changes to their business.

The updates also tried to solicit ideas on research needs and issues that participants wanted addressed. Unfortunately the question was too open ended and, if they are to be a conduit to directing research dollars, a better methodology would be required at future updates.

The Grassland society partnered with the NSW Department of Primary Industries to deliver the updates and this partnership and the funding provided by MLA, Pastures Australia, Woolworths and Landcare Australia was instrumental in the success of the pasture updates in NSW.

Executive summary

A total of 307 farmers and advisors attended the NSW pasture updates which were coordinated by The Grassland Society of NSW Inc. The majority of those attending were farmers and those who responded to the evaluations were managing 187,000 ha. Given the number who did not respond to the evaluations it is estimated this area would be closer to 400,000ha.

The Grassland Society of NSW Inc successfully bid to MLA to conduct four pasture updates across NSW. The society conducted 5 highly successful pasture updates at Goolma, Tocal, Glen Innes, Gundagai and Nyngan with a ground swell of appreciation from farmers for this initiative and many positive responses and suggestion for future updates also were received.

The updates were effective in getting pasture information out to the target audience and to a lesser extent soliciting information on research and industry issues. As with all initiatives improvements can be made particularly in the coordination and evaluation of the updates.

The Grassland Society was also able to capture presentations at Tocal and Glen Innes on video which will become available on the Grassland website when editing and transcription has been completed.

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Background

1.1 Delivery of pasture based technical information

Delivery of pasture based technical information, and engagement of industry in pasture related issues is adhoc and fragmented both locally and nationally. The NSW pasture update series were complimentary to the GSSA.

The project is targeting information seeking producers, advisors and pasture retailers. Overall, the updates provided science based evidence for pasture management to the target audience, as well as soliciting feedback on research and industry issues.

2 Project objectives

Establish a Pasture Updates program in NSW for the red meat industries.

1. Coordinate the development and implementation of 4 pasture technical updates across New South Wales.
2. Target 200 producers and advisors to have participated at the Pasture Updates and evaluate each update on; content, presentation, and solicit issues / needs from R&D.
3. Partner with regional producer networks to support the development and delivery of the updates

3 Methodology

Our society in consultation with key stakeholders identified four locations for the pasture update program in 2011. The locations selected were Northern Tablelands (Glen Innes), Upper Hunter (Tocal), Central West (Goolma) and Southern Slopes (Gundagai). A fifth update was then requested for the Central West (Nyngan). Selection of locations was based on where our society thought it would have the greatest impact for our members and distribution was partially related to time since previous state and or branch activity on a similar topic.

Potential convenors for these updates were then approached and they each formed a small working committee to develop programs. To ensure our pasture update program fitted with MLA objectives each program was approved by Cameron Allen.

The programs developed had localised formats and ranged from farm walks, seminars and combinations of seminars and farm walks.

Evaluation questions were developed for each location, they all had common evaluation questions and an example is given for one location is given in Appendix 1. Speakers topics were rated on content and relevance to the farm enterprise (rated 1-5 with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent and then averaged) content of the pasture update was rated overall including venue, catering and trade displays; these were also rated 1-5 (same scale as above) and then averaged. The evaluation also asked "would the information presented today justify changes to your business operation" and then requested likely changes to be listed.

We then asked “when thinking about investing in pastures research what are the priorities for where the research dollars should be spent”. This was followed by “do you think regional pasture updates are a good way to provide you with the latest pasture information”. The format of pasture updates was gauged as well as comments and suggestions for future update topics.

A range of media was engaged to promote the events; Landcare networks, email lists, MLA’s fax out service. Fliers, radio, newspaper advertisement were also

4 The Pasture Update results in NSW for 2011

The Grassland Society of NSW Inc ran in partnership with NSW DPI and funding partners MLA, Pastures Australia, Woolworths and Landcare Australia a series of five pasture updates.

Five pasture updates were organised and delivered into NSW the first was at Goolma in the Central West 13 September, Tocal in the Upper Hunter 22 September, Glen Innes Northern Tablelands 11 October, Gundagai South West Slopes 12 October and Nyngan on the edge of the Central West Slopes and Plains 13 October.

A total of 307 attended the pasture updates and 172 evaluations were collected. Not all questions were answered in the evaluations collected.

4.1 The Participants

Of the participants who responded to the evaluations, 28% were members of the society, 71% were non members and 1% became new members. A total of 5 new members are attributed to joining as a result of the pasture updates.

4.2 Enterprise and role

The majority of the respondents at the pasture updates were primary producers 76%. Private advisors and agency staff made up 15% of respondents, while 9% fell into the other category. Grain producers were the majority in this category. Table 1 provides a break down of the categories.

In terms of the area managed, the primary producers who responded were managing in excess of 187,000 ha. Given many surveys were not returned and some respondents did not answer all the question it is possible primary producers attending the updates were managing in excess of 400,000 ha. Property sizes across all updates ranged from 23 to 26,000 ha.

Table1: Break down of respondents by enterprise or profession

Enterprise	% of respondents
Cattle producer	49
Sheep producer	17
Sheep & cattle producer	10
Government advisor	8
Private advisor	7
Other	9

4.3 How was the pasture update communicated to you

A range of communication strategies was used; word of mouth, media, fax lists, networks and email contact lists. The greatest response 41%, across all updates was gained using email contact lists. The next highest category was word of mouth 17%.

Glen Innes was the only pasture update where email and the Landcare network were rated equally at 22%, however word of mouth was 16%. Table 2 summarises the results of the communication strategy across all pasture updates.

Table 2: Results of the communication strategy across all pasture updates.

Communication strategy	% of respondents
Word of mouth	17
Brochure	12
Email	41
Newspaper	6
MLA fax out service	4
Grassland newsletter	5
CMA/Landcare network	9
Radio	1
Other	6

4.4 Overall update, topics and content of presentations and relevance to the respondents business rated.

Participants were asked to rate the content of the topics of each of the speakers as well as the relevance of the information to their business. Content and relevance were both rated on 1 to 5, 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

Content of speakers presentations across all updates achieve an average ranking of 4.2. The range of content ranking was 3.5-4.6; this was a satisfying outcome to the local organising committees.

In putting an agenda together for the updates, organising committees trust they have gauged the needs of the audience and made it relevant to participants. The average ranking across all updates was 4.1, with the range 3.0-4.7, a satisfactory outcome.

Table 3: Average ranking and the range, of presentation content and relevance to the business for all pasture updates.

Pasture update location	Content (1-5)		Relevance (1-5)	
	Average	Range	Average	Range
Goolma	4.2	3.9-4.6	4.2	3.8-4.5
Tocal	4.1	3.5-4.6	3.9	3.3-4.7
Glen Innes	4.3	4.2-4.4	4.2	3.9-4.6
Gundagai	4.0	3.6-4.3	3.9	3.6-4.2
Nyngan	4.4	3.9-4.6	4.2	3.0-4.6
All updates	4.2	3.5-4.6	4.1	3.0-4.7

Using the same criteria participants were then asked to rate the overall pasture update, venue, catering and at some updates the display was also rated. It was difficult to gather the exact results across all updates as this section was again poorly reported by respondents. However, the 5 updates were favourably received as indicated across all updates by the rating for content 4.2 and relevance of 4.1.

Table 4: Overall ratings for the day on update venue, catering and trade displays.

Rated	Goolma	Tocal	Glen Innes	Gundagai	Nyngan	Average
Day overall	4.3	4.1	4.5	na	4.7	
Venue	4.3	4.7	4.4	3.5	4.4	
Catering	4.1	4.7	4.4	3.3	4.5	
Display	4.1	4.3	3.9	na	4.8	

Interestingly Nyngan rated highly for displays (4.8), however the pasture update was a bus tour to local farms, but a lot of appropriate printed material was made available, to support presentations and this is probably why the display was rated highly.

4.5 Will information provided today justify changes to your business and what are the likely changes?

Participants were asked if the information presented at the regional pasture update justified changes to their business operation. Overall 80% of respondents, thought the information they had received at the update justified changes to their business operation. Goolma, Tocal, Glen Innes and Nyngan updates reflected this strong trend; however, the respondents at Gundagai were spread across the 3 categories.

Table 5 Does the information justify changes to your business operation

Update location	Yes %	No%	Unsure %
Goolma	88	13	0
Tocal	96	4	0
Glen Innes	88	22	0
Gundagai	44	24	32
Nyngan	94	6	0
Overall	80	12	8

Those who responded positively in Table 5, were then asked what are the likely changes they would make. The likely changes have been grouped by subject.

The broad categories (Table 6.) are Feed base (including pasture and grazing management, improving pasture, animal production, pasture quantity and quality and matching pasture growth curves), New varieties (grouped but divided where the legumes or grass were indicated), Fertility (including; soil testing, superphosphate, alternative fertilisers), Native pastures (improving or improving utilisation) and Supplementation (including; protein supplements or silages).

It should be noted, likely changes strongly reflected the content of the particular regional update, and so anticipated changes were not the same across each update.

Table 6: Likely changes by regional update and the number of respondents at each update that indicated a likely change.

Likely change	Goolma	Total	Glen Innes	Gundagai	Nyngan	Total
Feed base	7	11	17	2	3	40
New varieties		4	5	1		10
Tropical grasses	9		4		8	21
Hard seeded legumes	6	8	2		2	18
Fertility			2	2	1	5
Native pastures				2	4	6
Supplementation		1			5	6

4.6 What are the priorities for investment in pastures research to address your business needs?

Unfortunately the responses to this question were quite broad and again largely reflected the topics at the particular regional update.

To assist the correlation of these responses a number of categories were developed and listed in Table 7. Grazing captures suggestions on grazing management, seasonal management matching grazing to feed curve. Pasture nutrition, refers to all aspects of fertiliser use and includes alternative fertilisers. Soil biota has been separated into its own category. Pasture varieties, as a response, often did not differentiate between species. Where respondents did differentiate they have been captured as legumes or perennial grasses.

Table 7: Priorities for investment in pasture research as indicated by number of responses collected across five regional pasture updates.

Priority	Goolma	Total	Glen Innes	Gundagai	Nyngan	Total
Grazing	10	9	9	9	3	40
Pasture nutrition	21	9	8	6	2	46
Pasture varieties		3	3	4	2	12
Legumes		1	2	2	1	6
Perennial grasses		1	1	2	1	5
Hay/silage	3	2		1		6
Ease of establishment	1					1

Feed, Pasture quality		1	2	1	1	5
Supplementation (proteins & silage)					1	1
Management	1		1			2
Native pastures		1	1	1		3
Native pastures legumes			2			2
Soil fertility/sustainability			2			2
Climate change		1	2	2		5
Methane	1		1			2
Carbon		1	1			2
Soil biota				1		1

Future evaluations would need to change the way this question is asked with a better choice of categories. There is great potential at future updates to use the Turning Point technology as tool to more accurately gauge responses to this type of question.

4.7 Do you think regional pasture updates are an effective way to provide you with the latest pasture information?

Participants were asked to provide a response against the four categories of; strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. 100% of the respondents strongly agreed (46%) or agreed (54%) that this was an effective forum to deliver the latest pasture information.

4.8 Participants were asked in what format they preferred the updates to be delivered

The pasture updates were delivered as; a seminar, combination of seminar and farm visit, bus tours to farms.

The preferred format across all updates was divided but, 30% preferred seminars, 15% preferred farm visits, 5% bus tours and 44% preferred a combination of seminar and farm visits.

Bus tours did not rate highly, but in our case the bus tour was part of a farm visit, so it is believed we should combine farm visits and bus tours for the sake of this evaluation giving a rating of 20%.

4.9 Participants were asked for comments suggestions and topics for future pasture updates.

The positive comments, by participants, on how well the updates were run by the organisers were over whelming.

A range of suggestions and topics for future updates were recorded and will be used by the organisers for future pasture updates.

The Grassland Society of NSW has always felt that scientific talks delivered in combination with farmers detailing their experience is an effective way to get pasture information across and this technique was again highlighted in farmer feed back.

5.0 Appendix 1 Pasture update evaluations were customised for each location**Pasture Update Evaluation****Goolma 13/09/2011****Name:***(optional)* _____**Postcode:****1. Are you a** ☐ Society Member ☐ New Member ☐ Non Member**Are you a** *(please tick more than one if necessary)*☐ Cattle producer ☐ Sheep producer ☐ Government advisor ☐ Private advisor ☐ other.....Area managed: _____ (☐ ha ☐ acres)**2. How did you hear about the pasture update?** ☐ word-of-mouth ☐ brochure ☐ email☐ Local newspaper ☐ MLA Fax out ☐ Grasslands newsletter ☐ Landcare / CMA☐ Radio ☐ TV ☐ "Agriculture Today" ☐ Other**3. Please rate the following topics and speakers on content and relevance to your business:**
(1 – poor, 5 – excellent)

Session 1: Topic & speaker	Content	Relevance
Matching temperate pastures and livestock production targets on "Westwood" – <i>Matt Mason</i>		
Producing lamb on "Westwood" pastures some facts and figures – <i>Ed Joshua</i>		
Potential beef production on "Westwood" pastures – <i>Brett Littler</i>		
Session 2: Topic & speaker		
Pasture trial "Pine View" – <i>Neil Doherty and Jenene Kidston</i>		
Issues of feed quality and quantity in temperate grass and legume pastures – <i>Lester McCormick</i>		
Hard seeded temperate legumes – <i>Belinda Hackney</i>		
Session 3: Topic & speaker		
Using tropical grass pastures on light soils "Pine Lee" Mebul – <i>Alan Haley</i>		
Tropical perennial grass options and agronomy – <i>Suzanne Boschma</i>		
Water use efficiency of tropical perennial grasses – <i>Sean Murphy</i>		

☐☐ Venue

- Trade displays

☐ Yes ☐ No

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Seminar Farm visit Bus tour Seminar & Farm visit

Name: _____

Address: _____

[illegible]

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Nick and Matt Mason "Westwood" Goolma. Phalaris, sub and white clover pasture. The stand was taller than they usually like for feed quality.



Michael and Leonie Kennedy "Killarney" Nyngan- Using silage to finish lambs.