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Western Australia 2010-2013 More Beef from Pastures Program State Coordination

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Abstract

The More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) Phase II project is an initiative of Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) for southern beef. More Beef from Pastures is an all-inclusive information package and resource for southern beef producers covering all aspects of beef production. The information is available in a stepwise fashion through modules 1 to 7 that covers topics from setting direction to meeting market specifications. It provides an avenue for beef producers to improve the profitability and productivity of their beef enterprise. The Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia delivered the MBfP program on behalf of MLA throughout the State through administration and management by the State Coordinator.

During the period between February 2011 and November 2013 a total of 2,036 Western Australian beef producers have been involved in the program. These producers have been engaged with MBfP through a number of field days, workshops/seminars and small beef group activities. These activities have occurred across a broad section of the agricultural region in Western Australia including Carnarvon, Dongara, Manjimup, Mt Barker, Kojonup and Esperance. The primary objective has been to achieve high levels of adoption of positive change to management practices by producers from the program and for this period has been specifically focused on increasing pasture utilisation through better grazing management.

Executive Summary

This final report details the achievements for the delivery of the More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) Phase II program for the period of February 2011 to November 2013 within Western Australia (WA).

For the period February 2011 to November 2013 MLA's More Beef from Pastures program in Western Australia engaged 2,049 beef producers across 53 events, well above the target of 1,043 producers.

The evaluation return rate was below the target required; and was the result of a number of factors such as lack of emphasis during the beginning period of the program.

The major events during this period in Western Australia consisted of a number of workshops, seminars, field walks and small group sessions. At each of these events one (or more) of the modules/tools from the More Beef from Pastures producer manual was addressed, with the aim of providing beef producers with the knowledge and skills required in order to improve profitability, sustainability and the capability to handle risk. Not only has the program worked as a vehicle for beef producer education but for the state coordinator as well. MBfP has proven to be a useful network, resource and educational experience for State Coordinators. The WA State Coordinators have found the information and idea during the bi-annual face to face meetings invaluable for obtaining new ideas, reinforcing old ones and accessing resources otherwise unknown to them.

Through its flexible and adaptable resource package, MBfP Phase II has assisted DAFWA in achieving project objectives including working towards a 'world class competitive supply chain for WA Beef'. The broad topics and variety of information offered allowed DAFWA to tailor events to the needs of beef producers in each region of Western Australia, in addition to supporting key initiatives of the Department. One of the major focuses of DAFWA over the three years of the MBfP program has been on capacity building, improving business resilience and profitability. Continued practice change has been implemented through the Beef Profit Partnerships program and the My Beef My Business (Red Sky) project, identifying key business profit drivers and areas within the business that could be manipulated for maximum effect. As well as this, key workshops on breeder efficiency featuring Beef CRC research outcomes and live animal assessment have helped DAFWA to achieve the key performance indicators for Category B and C events which aim to improve knowledge, skills, attitude and confidence along with achieving practice change.

Private industry deliverers were engaged throughout the three year period with involvement from private consultants to farming groups such as the Evergreen Farming group. Through these relationships there have been a number of successful events held by Evergreen and supported by WA MBfP. The Category A event key performance indicators were achieved in partnership with producer groups such as Evergreen Farming Group, Mingenew Irwin Group and West Midlands Group.

The delivery of MBfP events has engaged a significant number of beef producers across the agricultural region of Western Australia, above the target number detailed in the objectives. The MBfP program objectives and administration have been delivered by the Western Australian State Coordinator and extension team.

"The More Beef from Pastures program has helped me to lift my beef production from 180 to 400kg/ha. It has provided me with the motivation, techniques and confidence to make positive changes". Phil Chalmer, MBfP producer advocate, Esperance WA.

Table of contents

1	Background	5
2	Project Objectives	5
3	Methodology	7
4	Results	9
5	Discussion	14
6	Conclusion	16
7	Appendices	18
7.1	An example of an article supplied for the MBfP e-newsletter.....	18
7.2	MBfP e-newsletter article, March 2013	20
7.3	WA Farm Weekly article: My Beef My Business 2013	22
7.4	List of MBfP activities in Western Australia for Phase II 2011-2013	23

1 Background

The MLA More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) Phase II program (2011-2013) was the main extension and communication program for the southern beef industry. The West Australian Department of Agriculture and Food was engaged by MLA as the key deliverer for the program during Phase II, following on from a successful tenure as State coordinator for the program during Phase I (2007-2010).

During Phase I (2007-2010) strong relationships were established between MLA, State agencies, private deliverers and southern beef producers. Phase I resulted in the successful engagement of over 21,000 southern beef producers with an benefit:cost ratio of 4:1:1. During Phase I, MLA created a robust extension and communication model that state agencies and private deliverers could utilise to assist in meeting internal project objectives and addressing local industry issues to the benefit of the southern beef industry.

Despite the refinement of some tools, the MBfP Phase II has not fundamentally changed from Phase I. The underlying principles of MBfP remain largely the same, providing a framework that assists producers to build their confidence to improve profitability, sustainability and adopt practice change. Phase II is the result of a rigorous internal and external review process with a renewed focus placed on building on existing brand recognition, awareness and engagement that was achieved in Phase I.

The flexibility of the MBfP program allows each State Coordinator to adapt the program to suit the individual state in order to provide producers with knowledge and skills that will enable greater profitability, sustainability and build capacity to better manage risk. These changes lead to a more targeted approach to organising activities which used a range of tools including the MBfP producer manual, workshop training, producer seminars and various communication channels.

In addition to producer education the program provides access to a national network of State Coordinators managed by the MLA employed national coordinator Peter Schuster from Schuster Consulting Group Pty Ltd. The MBfP State Coordinators met twice yearly and remained in contact throughout the duration of Phase II. This allowed for excellent idea sharing and networking opportunities.

2 Project Objectives

More Beef from Pastures Phase II key performance indicators (KPI's) for Western Australia are outlined in table 2.1. In addition to these KPI's there were other key objectives that were addressed throughout the duration of the MBfP program.

- *Attend regular phone meetings to report on completed activities, engagement of producers and achievements towards the operational plan targets and a list of planned activities, including dates and location of events to be posted on the MLA website and respective MLA publications.*

During the course of the DAFWA's roll out of MBfP Phase II, the State Coordinator has always made themselves available for regular phone meetings and project updates. The State Coordinator has reported on all event activities, outcomes, learnings and provided feedback during phone meetings. All relevant activity dates were provided to MLA for display on their website and promotion through publications throughout the duration of the MBfP program.

- *Attend up to two State Coordinator face to face meetings per year to present an update of key achievements and milestones and assist in continuous improvement of program delivery, activities and tools.*

The WA State Coordinator has attended all planned face to face meetings every year throughout the duration of the MBfP Phase II program. During 2013, Rebecca Butcher attended a face to face meeting in Sydney during July as the acting state coordinator for Fiona Jones and Sue-Ellen Shaw. The WA Beef project manager attended a similar meeting in November 2013. The WA State Coordinators found the information and idea sharing that the bi-annual face to face meetings invaluable for obtaining new ideas, reinforcing old ones and accessing resources otherwise unknown to them.

- *Coordinate and source articles for MLA publications and the e-newsletter from delivery team members.*

Articles for the MLA e-newsletter were not supplied during the early years of MBfP Phase II in Western Australia. This was rectified during 2012 with contributions made during the latter half of 2012 and in 2013. Additionally a number of articles were submitted to alternative publications such as State rural newspapers (Appendix 6.3), WA Angus newsletter, external DAFWA newsletters (Ag Memo), as well as local regional newspapers. Articles supplied for the MBfP e-newsletter are provided in Appendices 6.1 and 6.2.

- *Coordinate and integrate activities with other existing state based networks.*

The WA State Coordinator has been successful in linking MBfP with other activities held within the State via alternative networks. The MBfP program has been linked to Beef Profit Partnerships, Beef CRC (involvement with both was prior to the Beef CRC ending) and the My Beef My Business (benchmarking) program in order to assist producers in achieving practice change. An example of this was two young enthusiastic farmers presenting during a My Beef My Business workshop series held from Dandaragan to Mount Barker, on the benefits of benchmarking to their business and what changes they had implemented. Additionally MBfP activities have been linked with external organisations such as the Evergreen farming group through initiatives such as the 'WA Pasture Updates' and other pasture field walks organised by the group.

- *Key performance indicators, MBfP Phase II 2010-2013*

The key performance indicators (KPI's) for the delivery of MBfP in WA are listed below in Table 2.1. These KPI's indicate the minimum number of participants in each category of event that must be achieved by DAFWA. These KPI's are discussed at more length in the results section.

Category	Imperative	KPI's for Phase II (2010-2013)
Awareness (A)	Maintaining broad industry awareness (50% of southern beef producers)	713

KASA (B)	Building knowledge, skills and confidence (30% producers engaged in A)	215
Practice Change (C)	Supporting adoption and practice change (50% of producers engaged in B)	115

Table 2.1 Key performance indicators for Western Australia during the MBfP Phase II

• *Monitoring and evaluation: event satisfaction scores*

A requirement of MBfP was to provide feedback to MLA on the participants who attended events run by DAFWA or external delivery provider as co-ordinated by DAFWA. On each feedback form for event categories from A to C, is a section where participants can indicate their level of satisfaction with the event they attended. These are listed and discussed further in the results and discussion/conclusion sections.

3 Methodology

DAFWA has overseen the delivery of the MBfP activities throughout Phase II of the program. Key activities were organised and co-ordinated through the WA State Coordinators Sue-Ellen Shaw (2010- June 2012) and Fiona Jones (June 2012 – October 2013). The delivery team included Matt Ryan, Allison Watson, Victoria Surridge, Ron Master and Rebecca Butcher. Harvey Jones (economist Esperance) provided support until his departure from DAFWA. DAFWA employees have been key deliverers at many MBfP activities in addition to a variety of external speakers sourced from organisations ranging from the University of Adelaide to the Department of Industry and Innovation NSW, not to mention other private consultants.

A number of activities involved producer advocates Craig Forsyth (Dongara) and Phil Chalmers (Esperance). Craig especially, has been used to ground truth ideas for workshops and in assisting to get numbers to workshops. Craig's involvement has been integral to the success of workshops in his local area (Dongara). Craig feels that the "More Beef from Pastures program is integral to the beef industry and through it farmers have had access to quality people".

Activities delivered during the MBfP Phase II varied throughout the program and included small group sessions, workshops, seminars and phone seminars. Most Category A events were run in key areas that were experiencing issues covered by the MBfP modules. For example in Dandaragan during 2010 there were some low conception rates experienced, so the "Healthy cow's healthy calves" seminar was run in two key regional locations utilising the MBfP modules weaner throughput and management of cattle health and welfare, run by MBfP deliverers and local veterinarians.

During 2012-13 there was an increase in externally organised and run events, mainly through DAFWA's association with the Evergreen Farming Group. Key relationships have been established between Evergreen Farming CEO Erin Gorter and WA MBfP State Coordinator Fiona Jones. Through this relationship there have been a number of successful events held by Evergreen and supported by WA MBfP. These events were centred on the Pasture growth modules and have varied between pasture field walks and Pasture Updates. Evergreen intends to make these Pasture

Updates a yearly event which is a great opportunity for MBfP key messages and tools to be utilised. Evergreen has assisted DAFWA in meeting their KPI's for Category A events.

In addition to the alliance with Evergreen, Phase II MBfP saw the implementation of Red Sky (now known as My Beef My Business). The Red Sky program was an initiative instigated by the WA Beef Council and DAFWA to help beef producers understand their profitability and key profit drivers behind their business through undertaking an annual business analysis. Once the key profit drivers were identified, producers were then able to make improvements in these key areas to lift profitability and increase the sustainability of their business. My Beef My Business was run as a three year program and also met with the requirements set out by DAFWA's new strategic direction as an economic development agency. Through this program, a small number of private consultants had the opportunity to become skilled in the Red Sky software package, allowing them to run the analysis for their own clients. Unfortunately due to the small number of livestock consultants, interest was rather subdued and this aspect of the project failed to result in a number of consultants who are able to offer this service to WA producers. The My Beef My Business program helped DAFWA to achieve the KPI's in the Category C events, as well as the Beef Profit Partnership groups.

During the course of the last instalment of the Beef CRC, WA adopted the Beef Profit Partnerships (BPP) program with gusto, developing seven groups during the early period of MBfP Phase II. Key to the success of the BPP groups in WA was the Esperance BPP group, of which MBfP producer advocate Phil Chalmer was an integral member. Phil was a driving force within the Esperance BPP group and also presented at the inaugural meetings of the other groups to inspire and encourage other beef producers to participate in the program. *"The More Beef from Pastures program has helped me to lift my beef production from 180 to 400kg/ha. It has provided me with the motivation, techniques and confidence to make positive changes"*. Phil Chalmer, MBfP producer advocate.

The BPP program (now wound down due to the cessation of the Beef CRC) was another key program that assisted DAFWA in achieving the KPI's for Category C events. The Category B events were met in a through a variety of workshops including some drought/dry season management workshops.

In southern Western Australia, 2010-2011 were particularly tough years for WA beef producers with a dry season declared. As part of the response to the dry season, DAFWA invited two key drought experts from NSW Department of Industry and Innovation (Greg Meaker and Phillip Graham) to come and train DAFWA staff in the StockPlan program. These series of workshops assisted beef (and sheep) producers to assess their stock and feeding options during dry conditions. WA MBfP supported the delivery of these workshops across Southern Western Australia. This activity also assisted DAFWA to meet its KPI's for Category B events.

As well as the seven StockPlan workshops, other workshops were held to meet the Category B KPI for the MBfP program. These included reproductive workshops that were held in conjunction with the Beef CRC to discuss Beef CRC maternal productivity results, show producers tools such as the feed demand calculator – to help match seasonality of supply with the biggest need of the breeding herd. Live animal assessment workshops were also held during MBfP Phase II in a number of key locations across South-West WA. Both these workshops involved key speakers that ranged from collaborators on Beef CRC research projects to private consultants (local and interstate), some of which travelled from the Eastern states (NSW and SA) for the workshop delivery.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation information required by MLA from the MBfP program differs for each event category, however the basic information is provided via feedback forms which includes information such as herd size, satisfaction scores, and thoughts on the event; follow up from the event as well as personal details. Category B events required a deeper level of information obtained from a pre and post feedback form designed to show a change in knowledge through a series of questions relating to the topic of the event they were in attendance. Category C evaluation was again more in depth with participants listing changes to their enterprise as a result of key activities organised through MBfP.

Some types of events make collecting information for monitoring and evaluation purposes difficult; for example a Category A event such as a field walk where participants are standing and not sitting, moving between paddock sites, often without writing implements makes it difficult to ensure an adequate level of feedback information is collected, if any at all. The electronic hand held devices (e.g., Turnpoint® handheld keypads) which are quite often popular at Category A events (and with private delivery agencies) are designed to collect only 'yes/no' or multiple choice questions. This level of feedback is often not sufficient to meet MLA's requirements for feedback information which must include herd size, property size, satisfaction scores, so on and so forth.

An additional reason for low evaluation return rates (Table 4.2) could be the reconciliation between number of participants and the number of businesses attending workshops. The requirement of MLA through the MBfP monitoring and evaluation data is that an activity debrief report is provided as well as the feedback information. The debrief activity report asks the deliverer to list the number of participants however quite often two (or more) people attend an event from one business. Often only one feedback form is completed per business which does not match against the number of participants at the event. In future, either the state coordinator or MLA need to place emphasis on either one completed feedback form per person or listing the number of businesses attending workshops, not participants.

4 Results

DAFWA has skilfully met all KPI's as set out by MLA for the MBfP program Phase II. During the three years, DAFWA has co-ordinated 53 workshops with a total of 2,036 attendees. A detailed list of all MBfP activities co-ordinated by DAFWA is listed in Appendix 7.4. DAFWA has exceeded the agreed KPI's by 89% in Category A, 108% in Category B and 108% in Category C, as shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 WA % of three year target achieved for 'Number of Attendees' in Category A, B and C activities

WA ATTENDEES KPI			
	KPI	Actual	% Achieved of 3 Yr Target
Category A KPI	713	1,349	189%
Category B KPI	215	448	208%

Category C KPI	115	239	208%
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As a requirement of MBfP, feedback sheets are completed by event/activity participants with the information from these collated and sent back to MLA on a quarterly basis. Table 4.2 shows the evaluation feedback form rate of return to MLA from WA MBfP activities. The evaluation return rate is calculated separately for each event Category: *Category A* 65%; *Category B* 80% and *Category C* 80%. While the evaluation return rate for Western Australia is particularly low in Category A, it is low across all categories. Interestingly, few states managed to meet the evaluation return targets set out by MLA. However the low rate of return in WA is of concern. In the discussion/conclusion the results for 'evaluation return rate' will be explored in more detail along with possible reasons for the low return rates.

Table 4.2 WA % of three year target achieved for 'Evaluation Return Rate' in Category A, B and C activities

WA RETURN RATE KPI			
	KPI	Actual	% Achieved of 3 Yr Target
Category A KPI	65%	457	55%
Category B KPI	80%	339	76%
Category C KPI	80%	46	68%

The KPI's, as broken down by targeted herd size, are listed in table 4.3. The KPI's by herd size were also exceeded on a whole; however the KPI for 100-400 head was not met by 2.7%. Nevertheless the KPI's for 400-1600 and 1600+ head were surpassed by 35.7% and 3.9% respectively. This is reflective of the WA Beef team's focus on beef producers whose herds number 500 head and above.

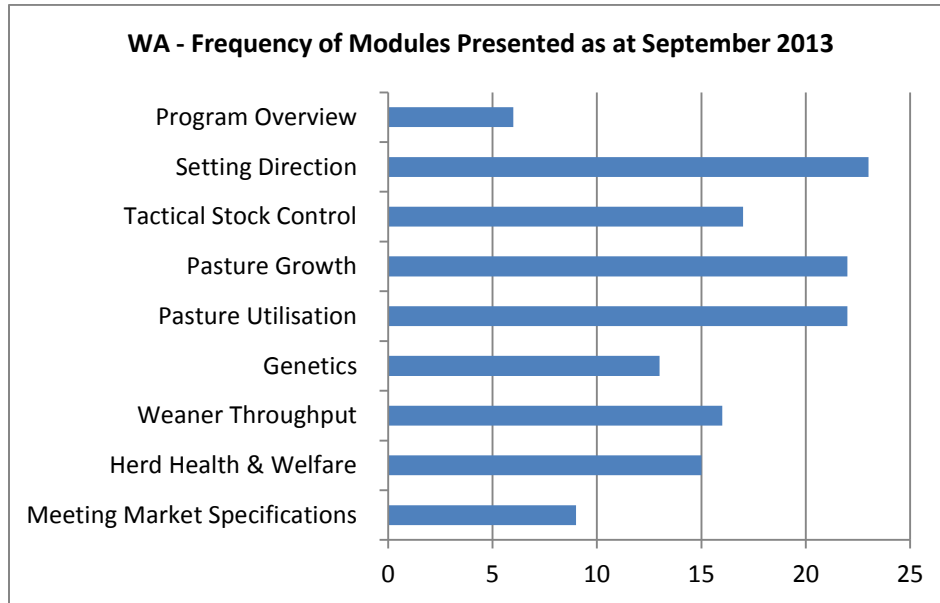
Table 4.3 WA number of cattle of MBfP participants

	September Quarter 2013		
	100 – 400 head	400 – 1,600 head	1,600+ head
KPI	40%	7%	7%
No. Participants	246	282	72
% achieved	37.3%	42.7%	10.9%

The frequency of MBfP modules delivered in Western Australia is displayed in Figure 4.1 below. Module 1 Setting Direction has been the most popular module, both pasture modules 3 and 4 were the second most popular module delivered followed by module 2 tactical stock control. These results

are reflected by the nature of events co-ordinated by DAFWA, where the focus has been on achieving practice change through increasing awareness of business profit drivers and technology adoption.

Figure 4.1 WA MBfP Modules delivered



On each individual feedback form is a section for participants to score how satisfied they were with the event they attended. As illustrated in Figure 4.2 the overall satisfaction rates across all states is high with a national average of 8.59. WA MBfP overall satisfaction scores only vary from the national average by 0.29. This would suggest that WA MBfP event attendees are largely very satisfied with the topic, quality of material and quality of speakers at events overall.

Figure 4.2 Average overall satisfaction rating by State

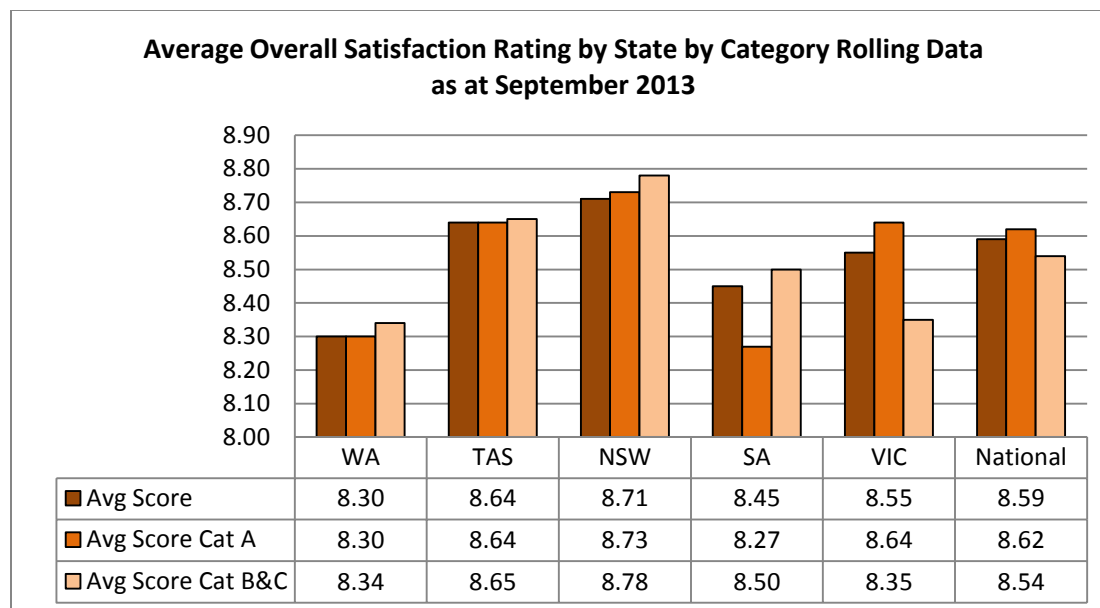


Figure 4.3 shows the percentage of correct scores for the pre and post workshop knowledge and skills audit for Category B and C events. Overall WA had higher scores than the national average for both the pre and post questions. This shows that WA MBfP participants had a sound knowledge of the topic prior to the workshop but also demonstrated good knowledge after the event, demonstrating that the workshop event was successful in educating participants.

Figure 4.3 Percentage of correct scores for pre and post workshop knowledge and skills audits

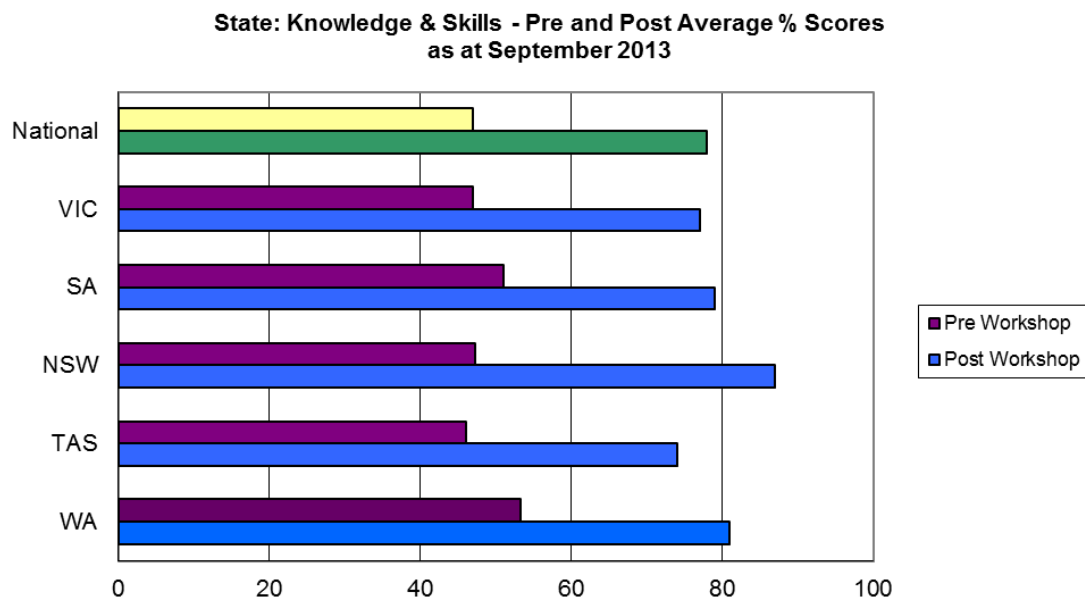


Figure 4.4 displays the number of each MBfP event type organised in WA during Phase II. Most popular event type was the forum/workshop/seminar style of event followed by field day/field walks and producer group activities.

Figure 4.4 Breakdown of WA MBfP Event types (by percentage)

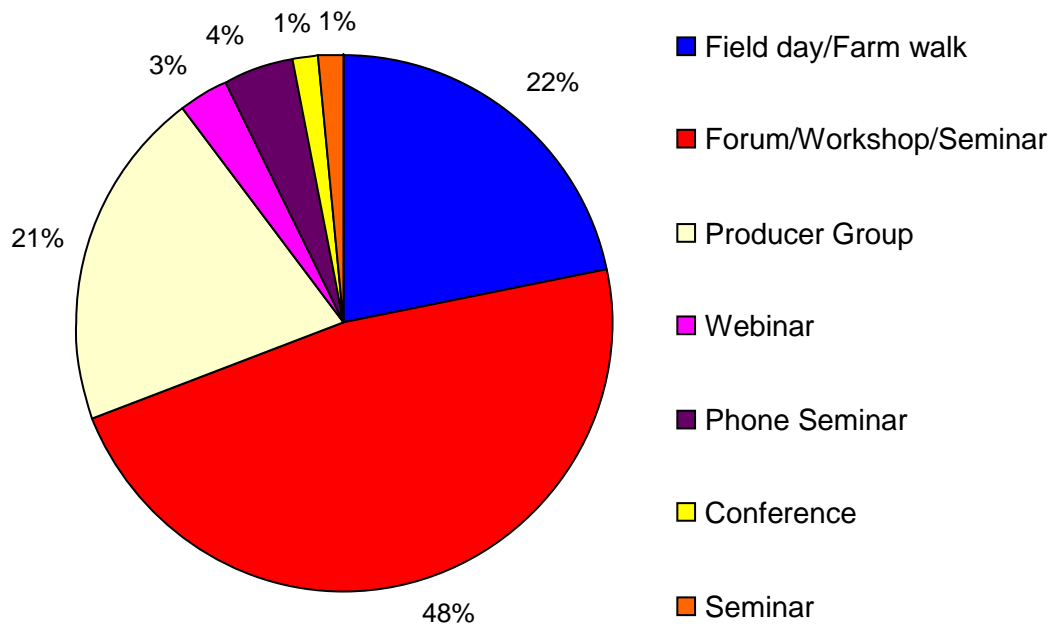
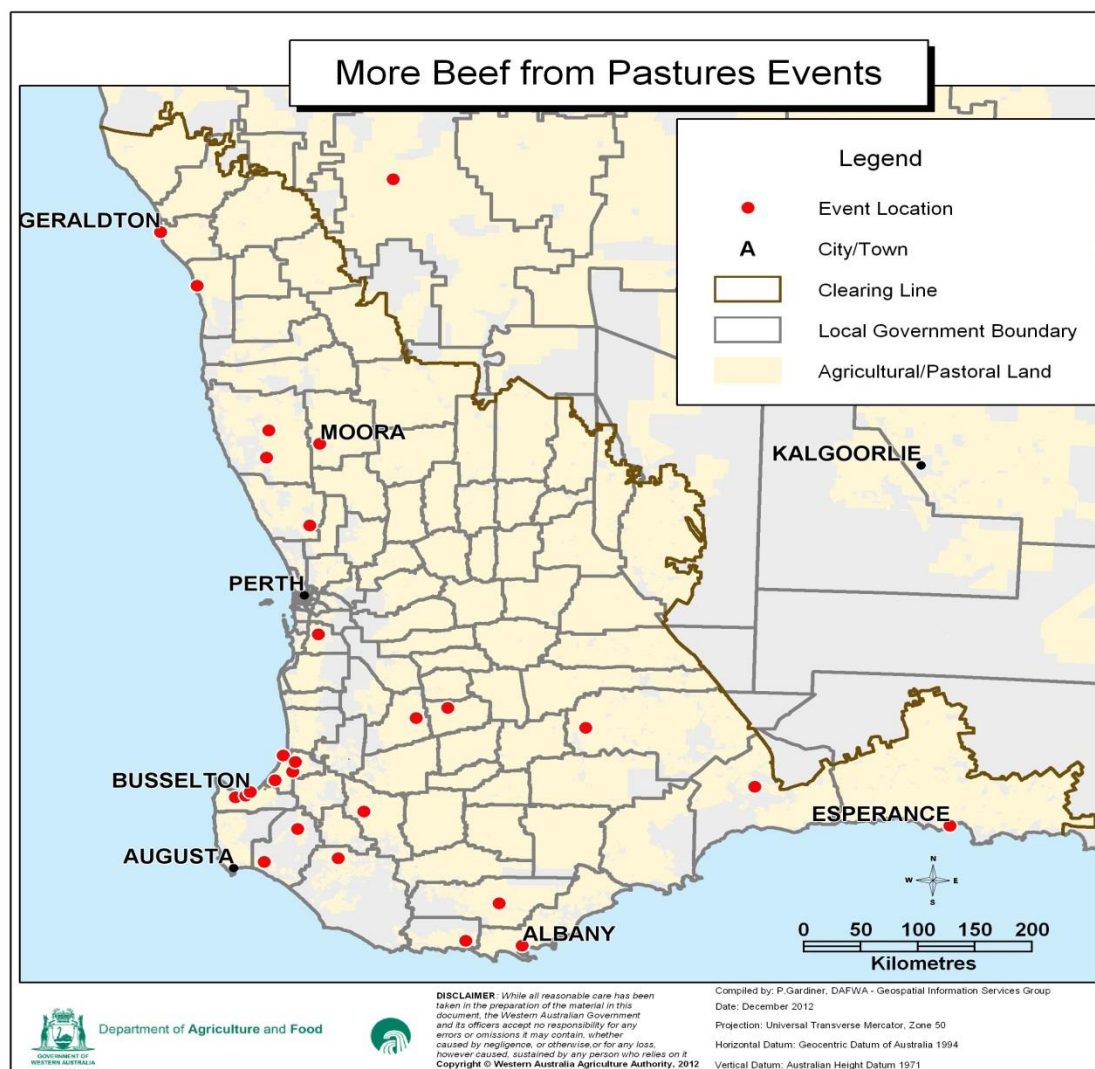


Figure 4.5 shows the geographic locations of where MBfP events were held in WA. The red dot illustrates where events were held. These events were spread well across the south-west land division in Western Australia. Some locations hosted more than one workshop throughout the three year period.

Figure 4.5 WA More Beef from Pastures events map

5 Discussion

DAFWA was engaged by MLA to deliver the MBfP Phase II program over a three year period throughout southern WA. Throughout this time WA beef producers have had the opportunity to engage in a wide range of diverse activities to assist them in improving profitability, resource management and capability. Continued practice change has been implemented through the BPP program and the My Beef My Business (Red Sky) project, identifying key business profit drivers and areas within the business that could be manipulated for maximum effect. The MBfP program has not only benefited WA beef producers, but also the WA MBfP delivery team through improved access to information and innovations being implemented across other states in Southern Australia. The level of involvement between states in the MBfP program would not have occurred to the same level if not facilitated by MLA MBfP. Key learning's have been made by WA state coordinators Sue-Ellen Shaw and Fiona Jones, which have been brought back to WA for future consideration.

The delivery of the MBfP activities has engaged a significant number of beef producers across southern WA. KPI's have been met with overwhelming success, and the target for attendance has been exceeded for each category. This highlights the relevance of the MBfP material being delivered by the WA Beef team and effectiveness of the WA State Coordinator in organising timely and relevant workshop topics.

The MBfP program objectives and administration were delivered by the West Australian State Coordinator and extension team. The State Coordinator has been actively involved in the management of the program and the further development of the program for future delivery. Through MBfP key relationships have been formed with private service providers and independent grower groups, for example Evergreen Farming Group, West Midlands Group and the Mingenew Irwin Group. Without the MBfP package these relationships might not have grown as strongly or as quickly. It is through the extensive resource package which can provide technical advice and support to a wide range of activities and topics as well as the MBfP funding that made it possible for DAFWA to grow these relationships.

During the first year of MBfP Phase II DAFWA aimed to develop and train a network of private delivery partners in the area of business management. Private consultants were invited to participate in training for the Red Sky/My Beef My Business program, with the aim of developing a network of private delivery partners. This was not to eventuate, in part due to low returns in cattle enterprises, and thus the reticence of the producers to employ consultants. DAFWA's ability to deliver on this commitment to engage private deliverers has been limited due to lack of available deliverers (as outlined in the WA MBfP business case February 2011). Although DAFWA was unable to build a network of private consultants able to carry out beef business analysis, DAFWA was successful in cultivating a close working relationship with the Evergreen farming group which was successfully engaged during 2012/3. This working relationship has been integral towards DAFWA achieving Category A KPI's.

Over the past few years, DAFWA has moved from a major research focus to a more extension centred focus. The MBfP program has assisted the DAFWA beef team adapt to this focus shift and has enabled us to work towards a goal of a 'world class competitive supply chain for WA Beef'. The WA state coordinator has organised a range of thorough seminars/workshops on topics from improving reproductive success to live animal assessment workshops.

This focus for the WA Beef team has resulted in activities that have been wide and varied in event style and topic. In addition to events organised solely by DAFWA, key events organised by private deliverers have been co-ordinated to great success. Many of the Category A events have centred around popular modules such as pasture growth, pasture utilisation and weaner throughput. For Western Australia, these three modules certainly seem to be a key theme as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

The Category A events key performance indicators have been achieved through one day workshops/seminars for field walks. Field walks and seminars are particularly popular with private delivery organisations such as Evergreen. The flexibility and ease of organisation for the Category A events has meant that some events have been impromptu and based on issues/demand at the time. The MBfP program has allowed DAFWA the ability to respond quickly to issues that have emerged that somehow impact on beef production as well as meet demand for workshops (etc) on topics of interest to beef producers. For example, the nutrient mapping workshop held in Gingin during 2011. Although this was a last minute activity, the flexibility and wide ranging topics of MBfP allowed the DAFWA delivery team to support the local beef community in order to achieve a common interest in looking at the pH and nutrient features across the farm and how they relate to pasture production.

Registered courses were not able to be offered throughout Phase II of MBfP due to a lack of availability or relevance to WA. Most of the registered courses available are centred on pastures and markets using eastern states data which is therefore not directly relevant. Locally, WA currently lacks the infrastructure to be able to register courses for beef producers. Therefore DAFWA has had to be extra creative in the workshops/activities they offered in order to achieve KPI's (table 4.1) for the Category B and C events which has been painstakingly undertaken by the WA MBfP delivery team. The requirement for pre and post workshop feedback forms meant that the events for this Category had to be specialised and carefully planned. Many of the Category B events involved external speakers from other state departments, universities and consultancies. For example, the delivery team through its involvement in the maternal productivity research with the Beef CRC organised a series of breeder management workshops. This collaborative approach included presentations from key Beef CRC researchers, DAFWA staff as well as private consultants and local veterinarians. The workshops looked at the latest Beef CRC southern maternal productivity research results as well as combining practical hands on sessions looking at the conformation and attributes of female and male breeding stock.

Another key workshop series was the live animal assessment workshops which involved the NSW Industry and Investment employee and Beef CRC Champion Brett Littler. Again key research findings, program features and a practical hands-on session looking at assessing live animals gave attendees a unique skill set that also met DAFWA's aim of a world class supply chain. These activities would have not been possible without the involvement with the MLA MBfP program.

The KPI's (see table 4.1) for Category C events could not have been achieved without the key relationship built with the WA Beef Council. It was the WA Beef Council in partnership with DAFWA that pioneered the Red Sky (later known as My Beef My Business) project. Through the My Beef My Business project DAFWA engaged Red Sky® Agri, a company that specialises in Agricultural business analysis. Analysing the beef business was a new enterprise for the company and DAFWA assisted them with ensuring the program catered for the WA beef producer. After producer engagement, the DAFWA MBfP delivery team were sent out to collect individual business information via a spreadsheet provided by Red Sky® Agri. This information was then analysed in combination with financial statements to produce a financial report highlighting areas of strength and weakness, in addition to producing state averages for beef production in the South West WA. From this information, participants were then able to identify key areas within the business where changes could be made in order to improve efficiency and/or profitability.

The idea of investigating a beef business's key profit drivers and delving into the business side of the beef enterprise was a difficult activity to involve beef producers in for a number of reasons. This style of workshops and activities are new to WA and perhaps a small level of initial interest might grow into something more promising.

6 Conclusion

In summary, over the three year delivery period the MBfP program in Western Australia has provided the opportunity beef producers to attend wide range of activities in order to improve business resilience, capacity and sustainability. WA beef producers haven't been the only ones to benefit from the MBfP program, through DAFWA's involvement as WA State Coordinator many educational and networking opportunities have been presented to staff. The monitoring and evaluation of the MBfP program in WA was slow to take place however after year one, this significantly improved to the credit of the DAFWA beef team.

The delivery of MBfP events has engaged a significant number of beef producers across the agricultural region of Western Australia, above the target number detailed in the objectives. The MBfP program objectives and administration have been delivered by the Western Australian state coordinator and extension team.

7 Appendices

7.1 An example of an article supplied for the MBfP e-newsletter; March 2013

Managing the maiden heifer

The reproductive success of maiden heifers is critical to the future potential of the cow herd, and has significant implications on herd profitability, productivity, longevity and potential genetic gain.

The traditional wisdom that says that ensuring heifers have sufficient energy reserves at first joining is important for achieving high conception rates is also supported by research from the Beef CRC.

So as we move into autumn, cows and in particular heifers should be front of mind when considering feed allocation.

The importance of liveweight and condition

Key indicators for reproductive herd fertility traditionally have been condition score for cows and liveweight for heifers.

Heifers mated at 15 months of age so that they are calving as two-year-olds has been found to be more profitable than heifers calving as three-year-olds. Being able to achieve pregnancy at 15 months of age requires the onset of puberty which is variable between breeds and is largely dictated by liveweight. Generally heifers should be at 65 percent of mature cow weight at the time of joining.

Critical mating weight is the minimum weight which must be achieved by heifers to ensure that the majority of the herd are cycling at first joining to increase likelihood of high conception rates in a controlled joining (typically six to nine weeks).

Research by the Beef CRC at Struan in South Australia and Vasse in Western Australia found a strong correlation between sufficient energy reserves, as measured by the BREEDPLAN Rib Fat EBV (estimated breeding value), and conception rates. Two groups of heifers, one with low Rib Fat EBV and the other with a high Rib Fat EBV were compared under otherwise similar circumstances. The high Rib Fat EBV group were found to have significantly higher conception rates as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Age, weight, rib fat depth at joining and conception rate for high and low Rib Fat EBV heifers

Heifer group	Pre-mating Age (days)	Weight (kg)	Rib fat depth (mm)	Conception rate (%)
High Rib Fat EBV	475	360	4.5	91.2
Low Rib Fat EBV	461	363	3.6	83.0

This not only means that heifers must be managed toward achieving the desired level of fat at first joining, but also that producers should consider genetic fat, as represented by the BREEDPLAN Rib Fat EBV, when selecting heifers. A high Rib Fat EBV should not be the sole selection factor for

replacement heifers but it is an important consideration when looking to the future of the breeding herd.

Bull selection

When selecting a bull for use over maiden heifers, special consideration should be given to calf birth weight and calving ease. BREEDPLAN and EBVs are useful tools, when used in conjunction with visual appraisal, to aid the selection of a suitable bull.

Daughter fertility is also a major factor when considering a bull. The fertility of a bull's progeny has been directly correlated to scrotal size, so selecting for a bull with larger testicles will help ensure more fertile daughters (minimum 32-34cm) with the extent of this effect depending on breed.

When formulating a breeding plan, traits should be considered in the context of a selection index which takes into account market requirements and the herd's local environment, rather than being based on a few traits alone.

Checklist for managing the maiden heifer

- Ensure adequate feed resources to achieve optimum condition for joining.
- Implement a management system that ensures heifers are meeting critical mating weights.
- Heifer joining period of six weeks (as opposed to nine weeks) provided they are of adequate weight and fat.
- Ensure feed resources aren't too plentiful - over fat heifers can suffer from calving difficulty and fatty udder syndrome.
- It is well documented that the second calf is often the hardest to achieve due to difficulties in returning the cow to oestrus - ensure adequate nutrition to achieve desirable joining weights.
- Select fertile and healthy bulls to ensure condensed calving spread and fertile (female) progeny.
- Pregnancy test 1-2 months after bull removal.
- Work toward minimum rib fat depth of 4mm and no greater than 9mm at joining for optimum conception rates.
- Ongoing selection for desirable traits such as fertility and temperament.
- Implementation of a vaccination program will ensure heifer health and future reproductive performance - contact your local vet for the best program for your area.

For further information download the [Beef CRC fact sheet: Selection and Management of the Maiden Heifer](#) or contact: Rebecca Butcher

7.2 MBfP e-newsletter article, March 2013

Are you feeding what your cattle need?

Meeting the feed requirements of each class of cattle is important in producing productive and healthy livestock. To do this, you need to understand both the feed requirements of your cattle as well as the value of the available feed.

This is just as important when feeding hay. Hay quality varies dramatically depending on:

- the stage of maturity at which it's cut
- the composition of the hay
- the weather – whether it has been rained on or not

This means it's often a game of roulette when you are buying in or making hay to meet cattle feed requirements. The only way to be sure of the quality of your hay and that it's meeting your livestock's specific feed requirements is to have it tested for energy and protein.

Energy is reported as megajoules of metabolisable energy per kilogram of dry matter (MJ ME/kg DM). This represents the amount of energy available to the animal in each kilogram of feed and is usually the most important limiting factor in conserved feed.

Crude protein (CP) is the other main consideration as this is the building block of the body. CP is particularly important during late pregnancy and lactation and is also critical for growing livestock and rumen function.

It's important to consider whether the hay or supplement you are supplying meets the demands of your animals and whether you are allocating the appropriate feed source to match those demands.

Feed test results on hay in Western Australia last year varied from 5.4 - 9.3MJ ME/kg DM and 5.6 to 11 percent CP with the variability due largely to a wet spring and poor hay making conditions. Much of the hay produced was not of sufficient quality in terms of MJME and CP to meet the nutritional requirements of particular livestock classes (see Table 1) and would have to be fed in combination with other supplements, such as grain, to boost energy and protein levels.

In considering the quantity and quality of the feed, it's important to recognise that cattle are only able to consume a certain amount of feed before they are full, particularly in the case of low quality hay. This means that the animal needs to meet its daily nutritional requirement before they reach this point. This nutritional requirement will, of course, vary according to the livestock class and the stage in the production cycle (see Table 1).

The bottom line is to know the quality of the feed you have on hand, whether you need to supplement it, and how it should be allocated to meet your production objectives.

Table 1 Feeding requirements for feeding various classes of cattle

Class of stock	Live Wt.	Daily gain	Daily DM intake	Total	ME	Protein
	kg	(kg/day)	kg	MJ ME/day	MJ ME/kg DM	%

Yearling heifers	360	0.4	7.6	64	8.3	8.2
	360	0.6	7.9	72	9	8.8
Pregnant mature cow (last 3rd of pregnancy)	550	0.4	10.1	81	8	7.8
Nursing heifer - 2yrs First 3 months	400	0.2	8.7	83	9.5	10.4
Nursing cow First 3 months	550	0	10.5	88	8.4	9.3
Medium frame steers calves	270	0.2	6.3	49	7.9	8.2
	270	0.9	6.8	69	10.2	10.5
Medium frame heifer calves	270	0.2	5.7	48	8.5	8.1
	270	0.9	6.1	71	11.6	10.4

For further information contact:

Fiona Jones

More Beef from Pastures State Coordinator, Western Australia

T: (08) 9780 6263

fiona.jones@agric.wa.gov.au

7.3 WA Farm Weekly article: My Beef My Business 2013

74 Farm Weekly Thursday, June 6, 2013

LIVESTOCK

Business switch provides beef boost

FOR Narrikup beef producers, Jean and Harley Webb, an in-depth business analysis was the stimulus to change their business focus to concentrate on pushing kilograms of beef produced per hectare.

Over the past two years, Jean and Harley have taken part in the Department of Agriculture and Food's MyBeef-MyBusiness program, which involves an in depth business analysis.

"Looking at the figures in our analysis we identified that we could be more profitable if we changed our focus to increasing beef produced per hectare," Jean said.

"We used to target the vealer market, aiming to produce heavy calves weighing 400kg or more.

"We are now focused on increasing our breeder

numbers so that we can produce more beef/ha.

"Calves are sold into the feedlot market at a lower weight of around 350-360kg.

"Our current stocking rate, now sits around 18-19 DSE/ha. We will mate 290 head this year and our aim is to push breeder numbers to 300 head."

Other simple changes have also contributed to improving business profitability for the Webbs.

A few years ago they changed their grazing management from set-stocking to rotational grazing, and have found the resulting increase in pasture production has helped support their increase in stocking rate.

Table 1: Values from two years of Harley and Jean's business analysis compared to the average for all producers in the 2011/2012 analysis.

	2010/2011	2011/2012	State average 2011/2012
Beef produced (kg/ha)	206	267	208
Pasture harvested (t/DM/ha)	3.3	4.0	2.7

"We decided to try rotational grazing after visiting some rotational grazing systems on beef properties in Esperance with our local better beef group," Harley said.

"Instead of investing in expensive infrastructure we adapted the principles to our existing infrastructure by increasing mob sizes and moving these around our existing paddocks.

"We grow so much more feed now and have also noticed that there are fewer weeds since implementing rotational grazing."

The Webbs also critically assess their costs, which are detailed in their analysis, to see where they can make savings.

One of the more significant costs savings they have made has been in fertiliser costs. They now soil test their whole farm and only apply what they actually need.

The figures in Harley and Jean's business analysis certainly prove the value of the changes they have made with both beef produced per hectare and pasture harvest increasing and being

considerably higher than the average from the 2012 analysis (Table 1).

Their cost of production has also seen a significant decrease, not only because their costs are spread over the increased kilograms of beef they now produce, but also due to some of the cost savings they have been able to identify.

Harley and Jean will be taking part in the MyBeef-MyBusiness program again this year.

"We need to increase our opportunities to survive in this business," Jean said.

"The business analysis lets you know where you sit and gives you a better idea of how you can improve your business."

□ The 2012-2013 MyBeef-MyBusiness program (formerly known as RedSky) begins in July. If you are interested in taking part in the program or would like any further information contact Allison Watson Ph: 9892 8437 or email allison.watson@agric.wa.gov.au or Rebecca Butcher Ph: 9651 0540 or email: rebecca.butcher@agric.wa.gov.au

Beef Cattle assessment school

Tuesday, July 9 -
Thursday, July 11, 2013

WA College of Agriculture – Harvey

Topics Covered Include

- Structural Soundness
- Breeding for performance
- Breeding for target markets
- Assessing fat and muscle
- Assessing carcasses
- Assessing steers for different markets

Overjudge

Lew Smit, Koojan Hills stud, Kojonup, WA

Facilitator:

Bob Dent, Glen Innes, NSW

Costs:

\$350 for adults and

\$250 for secondary school students

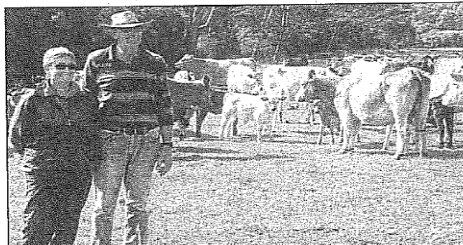
Limited to 50 participants

Enquiries and Bookings:

Ken MacLeay Ph/fax: 08 9755 1136 or

email: blackrockangus@bigpond.com

Bookings close Friday, June 21



□ Jean and Harley Webb with some of their crossbred cows and calves.

7.4 List of MBfP activities in Western Australia for Phase II 2011-2013

WA MBfP Activities 2011					
When	Where	Title	Who	No	Module
March	Gingin	Healthy cows, more Calves! Dollars and disease information day.	R Butcher	21	Weaner Throughput, Herd Health
March	Dandaragan	Healthy cows, more Calves! Dollars and disease information day.	R Butcher	17	Weaner Throughput, Herd Health
March	Williams	StockPlan	J Hill, J Accioly	12	Tactical Stock Control, Setting Directions
March	Boyup Brook	StockPlan	J Hill, J Accioly	7	Tactical Stock Control, Setting Directions
March	Moora	StockPlan	R Butcher, A Gray	4	Tactical Stock Control, Setting Directions
March	Lake Grace	StockPlan	J Hill, J Accioly		Tactical Stock Control, Setting Directions
April	Manjimup	StockPlan	J Hill, J Accioly	4	Tactical Stock Control, Setting Directions
April	Ravensthorpe	StockPlan	R Master	4	Tactical Stock Control, Setting Directions
May	Gingin	Nutrient Mapping	R Butcher	14	Grazing management
July	Vasse	Beef and Dairy Genetics Day	J Accioly		Genetics
April	Geraldton	StockPlan	R Butcher, A Gray	5	Tactical Stock Control, Setting Directions

August	Manjimup	Hay and Silage Day	J Hill	23	Pasture utilisation, Grazing Management
August	Scott River	Producer group	J Hill	13	Pasture utilisation, Grazing Management
October	Boyanup	Pastures as Crops	F Jones	12	Pasture Utilisation, Grazing Management
November	Dongara	Healthy Animals Healthy Soils	A Gray	45	Tactical Stock Control, Pasture utilisation
November	Carnarvon	Healthy Animals Healthy Soils	A Gray	20	Tactical Stock Control, Pasture utilisation
November	Yalgoo	Healthy Animals Healthy Soils	A Gray	23	Tactical Stock Control, Pasture utilisation

WA MBfP Activities 2012					
When	Where	Title	Who	No	Module
May	Mount Barker	Soil Health Soil Wealth	R Master	35	Pasture Growth, Pasture utilisation
May	Nannup	Nannup Producer meeting	F Jones	9	Pasture utilisation and weaner throughput
June	Mount Barker	Breeding for Success	R Butcher	56	Weaner throughput, animal health and welfare
June	Dongara	Breeding for Success	R Butcher	25	Weaner throughput, animal health and welfare
June	Albany	Red Sky Teleconference	V Surridge	20	Setting Direction and Pasture growth and utilisation
June	Esperance	Red Sky workshop	V Surridge	6	Setting Direction and Pasture growth and utilisation
June	Mount Barker	Red Sky workshop	V Surridge	13	Setting Direction and Pasture growth and utilisation
June	Nannup	Red Sky workshop	V Surridge	21	Setting Direction and Pasture growth and utilisation
August	Manjimup	Manjimup Plant evaluation Trial	R Master	22	Tactical stock control
August	Albany	Increase your pasture utilisation	R Master	47	Tactical stock control and pasture utilisation
August	Nannup/Capel	South west pasture tour	F Jones	27	Pasture utilisation and Growth
September	Vasse	Vasse Spring Field day	J Accioly /F Jones	25	Genetics
September	Dongara	Feeling your way through the beef market	R Butcher	16	Meeting market Specifications and Weaner throughput

September	Carbanup	Feeling your way through the beef market	F Jones	15	Meeting market Specifications and Weaner throughput
September	Bunbury	Maternal Productivity Master class	J Accioly	7	Genetics
October	Teleconference	Control of Worms in cattle	A Watson	35	Animal Health and Welfare
December	Webinar	Pestivirus in Australian Beef Herds	A Watson	12	Setting Direction, Herd health & welfare

WA MBfP Activities 2013					
When	Where	Title	Who	No	Module
January	Albany	Building a better beef business	A Watson	5	Setting Direction. Tactical Stock Control, Pasture growth, Pasture Utilisation
January	Nannup	Building a better beef business	A Watson	14	Setting Direction. Tactical Stock Control, Pasture growth, Pasture Utilisation
January	Perth	Building a better beef business	A Watson	2	Setting Direction. Tactical Stock Control, Pasture growth, Pasture Utilisation
January	Kojonup	BullSELECT Workshop	F Jones	18	Program Overview, Genetics
January	Esperance	BullSELECT Workshop	F Jones	19	Program Overview, Genetics
January	Serpentine	BullSELECT Workshop	F Jones	18	Program Overview, Genetics
January	Karridale	BullSELECT Workshop	F Jones	21	Program Overview, Genetics
March	Bridgetown	Beef: Because it is good Business	S-E Shaw / A Watson	33	Setting Direction
March	Dandaragan	Beef: Because it is good Business	S-E Shaw / A Watson	6	Setting Direction
April	Webinar	Control of Calf Scours in beef herds	A Watson	16	Herd health & welfare
April	Gingin	MBfP Evergreen pasture walk	E Gorter (Evergreen Farming Group)	17	Pasture growth, Pasture Utilisation
August	Donnybrook	John Fry Farm Walk	F Jones	10	Genetics, Pasture Growth
September	Dongara	Meeting Market Specification	R Butcher	11	Weaner throughput, Meeting Market Specifications
September	Gingin	Meeting Market	R Butcher	15	Weaner throughput, Meeting Market

		Specification			Specifications
September	Bunbury	Meeting Market Specification	F Jones	42	Weaner throughput, Meeting Market Specifications
September	Mt Barker	Meeting Market Specification	F Jones	21	Weaner throughput, Meeting Market Specifications
September	Esperance	Meeting Market Specification	F Jones	11	Weaner throughput, Meeting Market Specifications
September	Dandaragan	West Midlands Group Spring Field Day	F Jones	10	Pasture Growth, Pasture Utilisation
October	Manjimup	MBfP Evergreen pasture walk	E Gorter (Evergreen Farming Group)	64	Pasture Growth, Pasture Utilisation, Weaner Throughput