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## More Beef from Pastures

WA Department of Agriculture & Food

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## **Abstract**

The More Beef from Pastures (MBFP) project is a MLA southern beef program initiative. The MLA MBFP program is a package of information and resources that cover the key aspects of beef production and provide a pathway for southern beef producers wanting to lift the profitability of their beef enterprise. The program is a complete package of information for producers committed to implementing long term changes to their business operations. The Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia delivers the project on behalf of MLA in Western Australia, through the administration and management of a state coordinator.

In 06/07 over 1000 Western Australian beef producers have been exposed to the program through a variety of forums ranging from simple trade displays through to large targeted expos, field days and workshops. These producers have been located across the entire agricultural region which spreads from Northampton in the North to Esperance in the South East. The primary objective in 06/07 has been to increase the awareness of the program, the associated tools and their benefits to Western Australian beef producers. The future of MBFP in Western Australia will be reliant on the integration of its principles into the activities of existing beef groups and activities of the Department of Agriculture and Food.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Why was the work done?**

The MLA More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) program is positioned primarily as an awareness campaign and aims to direct producers to learning, information sources and services appropriate to their individual needs and location. The state coordinator was part of a national team, lead by an MLA-funded coordinator to develop material and presentations suitable for delivery of the MLA MBfP program activities within their state.

The purpose of the program is to assist producers to identify and manipulate key profitability control points in all aspects of their business. How to improve the utilisation of pasture is the centre piece of the program and this lead on to the larger perspective through interrelated modules on:

- setting the strategic direction of the beef enterprise;
- tactical control of stocking rate;
- optimising pasture growth and quality;
- cattle genetics;
- maximising weaner throughput;
- management of cattle health and welfare; and
- meeting market specifications

### **What was achieved**

In WA in 06/07, More Beef from Pastures activities have involved over 1000 beef producers on a variety of levels ranging from a simple awareness and understanding of the program and its benefits, to on farm practice change (calculating cost of production, assessing feed supply and demand across a twelve month period etc). A large amount of the awareness activities have involved demonstration and presentation of the tools associated with the program, primarily the Cost of Production Calculator, Rainfall to Pasture Growth Outlook Tool and the Feed Demand Calculator. The practice change that has occurred is a direct result of activities such as Cost of Production workshops, Feed Supply and Demand workshops and other presentations (such as Expos) where producers have taken the concepts and principles home and applied them with success ie calculating feed supply and demand and making strategic changes (ie time of calving , purchase of trade animals etc). The extent to which MBFP has influenced practice change in WA has not been evaluated sufficiently and is currently based verbal feedback and anecdotal evidence. Thus it is conceivable that practice change has occurred to a greater extent than initially thought.

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## 1 Background - Section

The MLA More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) program is positioned primarily as an awareness campaign and aims to direct producers to learning, information sources and services appropriate to their individual needs and location. The state coordinator works as part of a national team, lead by an MLA-funded coordinator to develop material and presentations suitable for delivery of the MLA MBfP program activities within their state.

The purpose of the program is to assist producers to identify and manipulate key profitability control points in all aspects of their business. How to improve the utilisation of pasture is the centre piece of the program and this lead on to the larger perspective through interrelated modules on:

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- tactical control of stocking rate;
- optimising pasture growth and quality;
- cattle genetics;
- maximising weaner throughput;
- management of cattle health and welfare; and
- meeting market specifications

## 2 Project Objectives - Section

By 30 June 2007:

1. Attend MLA MBfP national extension team meetings coordinated by the MLA MBfP national extension coordinator (estimate 3-4 workshops/year):
  - a. to develop and quality assure as part of a team, MLA MBfP extension material and presentations for the delivery at national and/or local forums
  - b. develop generic templates for specific workshops and short forums;
  - c. coordinate extension events;
  - d. co-ordinate co-branding of all program deliverables to appropriately recognise the contribution of MLA, state departments, and other program partners; and
  - e. lead the further development of extension products, including courses, and tools associated with the MLA MBfP program.
2. Allocate the equivalent of 55 days of staff time to this project.

3. Assist the development of applications for Producer Learning Network (PLN) and PIRD grants by producer groups and intermediaries for submission to MLA (funding ranging from \$2,000 to \$15,000 pa)
4. Contribute to the review of PLN grant applications
5. Coordinate 1 major workshop for intermediaries per year sponsored by MLA, initially to update them on the MLA MBfP program, and subsequently to provide technical updates on R&D output.
6. Work closely with Service Providers (e.g. Livestock Agents and Agriculture Consultants) to develop systems which will allow them to enhance the use of the MBfP package with their clients.
7. Assist Service Providers in the use of MBfP package in the form of assisting with the organisation and facilitation of forums or workshops (e.g. Cost of Production workshops).

### **3 Methodology - Section**

The methodology utilised during the reporting period is summarised as:

The State Coordinator will:

- Identify opportunities to organise extension activities for beef producers across the agricultural region of WA.
- Hold information and awareness sessions for Service Provider/ Consultant groups as required.
- Organise MLA training seminars for interested Service Providers/Consultants when required
- Assist in delivering or, organising trained facilitators to deliver, producer workshops being held by Service Providers/Consultants at least monthly.
- Coordinate at least one major MBfP expo per year sponsored by MLA, to update stakeholders on the MBfP program and subsequently provide technical updates on R&D output.
- Provide Service Providers and Consultants with the necessary resources and assistance for them to transfer MBfP knowledge to their clients.

### **4 Results and Discussion - Section**

The plan for the MBFP component in Western Australia was to firstly introduce producers to the concepts of the program and then build on these primarily through the MBFP Expos and DAFWA livestock updates. The main areas of the MBFP program that have been promoted to Western Australian producers are better understanding the beef business (particularly through aiding farmers to understand their cost of production) and improving the understanding of feed supply and demand (and how they can be better aligned).

#### **Expos**

In the last 18 months five More Beef from Pastures Expos have been held across Western Australia. The first round of expos held in Bridgetown and Geraldton in 2006 showcased the 'Tools for the Time Challenged'. This included the Cost of Production Tool, The Rainfall to Pasture Growth Outlook Tool and the Feed Demand Calculator. In addition, presentations by producer advocates were included to demonstrate how these tools could successfully be used to improve the beef business. A presentation was also given from a local agronomist who gave good take home information on how to grow and use more pasture. Feedback from these events was that they were extremely well-received by both producers and industry representatives. The evaluation report for these expos (conducted by MLA) has not yet been received by DAFWA.

In 2007 a further three expos were held in Western Australia. Two of these expos, in Bindoon and Esperance, were in the 2006 format and showcased the 'Tools for the Time Challenged'. The third expo was held in Geraldton and was targeted at 'Rebuilding for Profit'. These expos were well received by producers and industry alike. The evaluation report for these expos (conducted by MLA) has not yet been received by DAFWA.

### **Agribusiness & Regional Livestock Updates**

In order to increase the awareness of producers to the MBFP program, the DAFWA state coordinator actively promoted the manual and its tools at the 2007 Agribusiness Livestock Updates, and the 2006 and 2007 Regional Livestock Updates. The Agribusiness Livestock Updates is a two day conference held in Perth each year that targets service providers to the beef and sheep industry. The purpose of the updates is to provide agribusiness professionals with access to the most up to date information on sheep and beef production, marketing and industry issues, and facilitate interaction between agribusiness, DAFWA and the two sponsors, MLA and AWI. MBFP had a large interactive display at this years updates which showcased the tools and information included in the program. Available at the display were the case study videos from the producer advocates that attendees could watch in an informal and casual environment. There were also copies of the program available, copies of the Tips and Tools plus assistance from Emma Giumelli and Bill Hoffman to demonstrate the tools. Emma and Bill also presented papers at the conference, Emma on the Feed Demand Calculator and Bill on the Cost of Production Calculator. Both presentations were well attended and the feedback received was very positive (Kondinin Group want to do a case study on one of the NSW producer advocates as a result of Bill's presentation on Cost of Production).

Part of the advertising for the Agribusiness Livestock Updates included a series of media releases, showcasing some of the presentations that were on offer at the Updates. One of the submissions chosen was "Understanding Feed Supply and Demand", which discussed the benefits of the Feed Demand Calculator. This media release generated a massive amount of interest for both the More Beef from Pastures program and the Feed Demand Calculator. The Western Australian state coordinator received a large number of phone calls requesting copies of the program on CD and assistance in using the tool on their home computer.

Following the Agribusiness Livestock Updates, the Regional Livestock Updates took place across agricultural Western Australia. More Beef from Pastures played an active role this year, with all of the presentations in some way incorporating messages from the program. These presentations, along with the evaluation ranking are summarised in the appendices.

### **Manjimup Pastures Group - PIRD**

In 2006 the Manjimup Pastures Group were successful in obtaining a PIRD grant to investigate opportunities for increasing stocking rate. This group, who work closely with the WA MBFP state coordinator (and DAFWA) and Agrom Management consultant, Paul Omodei have established several on farm trials and instigate monthly pasture walks to discuss results and pasture



management tactics for the current season. Preliminary results indicate some significant positive increases in annual gross margin returns for improved annual pasture systems. The paddock gross margin analysis for one particular farmer (John Mottram) showed positive results due to increased utilisation of pasture through fodder conservation and seed harvesting. The group have also conducted other information days eg animal health, genetics and breeding and a session on the Feed Demand Calculator.

### **Miscellaneous MBFP Activities**

In 2006/2007 there have been many activities held across WA that are linked to improving the exposure and awareness of the More Beef from Pastures program. The majority of these have revolved around presenting the tools available in the program through formal presentations or through trade displays that have been held at a variety of field days and conferences. These are summarised in the appendices.

## **5 Success in Achieving Objectives - Section**

### Objective 1

The WA DAFWA state coordinator attended all the quarterly meetings in the 06/07 period. Namely Melbourne (July), Hobart (September), Mansfield, VIC (February) and Sydney (May). The state coordinator also participated in teleconferences as required.

### Objective 2

A minimum of 55 days of staff time were dedicated to work on the MBFP project.

### Objective 3

In early 2006 a PIRD grant was received for the Manjimup Pastures Group, who work closely with the MBF state coordinator, to investigate techniques for increasing stocking rate. This project has been progressing and will continue in the 2007 growing season.

### Objective 4

The WA state coordinator was heavily involved in the submission and review of the Manjimup Pastures Group PIRD submission.

### Objective 5

A train the trainer course was held for service providers in April 2006 in Busselton. Whilst this event was deemed very successful and worthwhile for those that attended it was thought that WA would not be able to support a second train the trainer course in the 06/07 period. Service providers to the WA beef industry have been serviced indirectly through their involvement with the livestock updates and other field days (actively attend presentations and field days). They have also actively sought the assistance of the state coordinator as required.

The More Beef from Pastures program has now become an important reference for TAFE colleges across WA and the animal science degree at Murdoch University who use it as a reference for various sections of the curriculum.

### Objective 6

A proportion of time in 06/07 has been invested in working with service providers to develop systems which will allow them to enhance the use of the MBFP package with their clients. A large amount of the service providers attended the Expos and/or the train the trainer course which initially exposed them to the tools and program. The state coordinator has provided support both over the phone and

in person, primarily troubleshooting for those service providers that have taken the tools to their clients and then encountered difficulties or had questions.

#### Objective 7

The service provider sector for the beef industry in Western Australia are yet to fully embrace the More Beef from Pastures program. They have not commenced running workshops (such as Cost of Production workshops) as there has been little demand. In many cases this is an area that is already perceived as being over serviced by private consultants using more highly powered complex tools for business and enterprise analysis. They are still keen to be involved in attending and sponsoring field days and also inviting the state coordinator to present at their days/workshops. Many of the service providers have also developed their own program/tools as a means of market differentiation which has also contributed to the diminished uptake of MBFP activities (Grow Profit courses run by CSBP, ELMS by Elders, The Sheep's Back by ICON Agriculture etc). Some service providers within organisations are undoubtedly using aspects of the program in their work, but it is more likely to be as a background support tool rather than something that is used face to face with a client.

## **6 Impact on Meat and Livestock Industry – now & in five years time**

It is indisputable that the MBFP program has had a positive impact on the WA beef industry. A large proportion of WA beef producers are not only aware of the programs existence but have an understanding of what the program promotes. Producers have become more aware of the importance of utilising more of their home grown feed (and thus the need to have a better understanding of feed supply and demand) and also the value of measuring business performance (understanding the cost to produce a kilogram of beef). Unfortunately no evaluation process has been implemented to effectively quantify the impact that MBFP has had on achieving practice change on farm.

The More Beef from Pastures program compliments the 2007 DAFWA Beef Industry Plan. This plan is specifically targeting improved pasture utilisation, finishing systems and improved growth rates and the incorporation of NRM strategies to improve the sustainability of production. The future impact of the MBFP program in Western Australia will depend heavily upon it integrating with existing Departmental programs. This is primarily due to limitations in financial and human resources coupled with the wide geographic area across which beef production takes place.

A potential linkage for MBFP in WA is with Beef Profit Partnership (BPP) groups. These beef businesses work in partnership with Beef CRC facilitators and technology specialists, using the CRC's novel process of 'Continuous Improvement and Innovation' (CI & I). The partnerships have a common focus of achieving an additional 5% improvement in individual business growth by June 2008. Members of the groups commits to review progress every 90 days, over at least two years, to design, test and evaluate new opportunities for business improvement. The process uses a proven action-learning framework, where the BPP groups trial and measure the economic impact of new technologies in their own beef businesses on an ongoing basis. In Western Australia, *Beef Profit Partnerships* have been established at Esperance and Albany. A Beef Supply Chain Partnership has also been established in conjunction with Harvey Beef. These groups can conceivably use the tools and concepts developed in MBFP in this CI & I process.

## **7 Conclusions and Recommendations - Section**

The awareness phase of More Beef from Pastures in Western Australia has had a long gestation. The Department of Agriculture and Food's beef project is challenged by limited human resources coupled with a very large advisory district (Northampton to Esperance). A complicating factor is also the high utilisation of private consultants in Western Australia. Many mixed beef and cropping enterprises employ the services of a private consultant, and are more likely to utilise the services and advice of these consultants than subscribe to the MBFP program. Therefore the continued success of MBFP in WA will involve highly targeted extension to smaller groups in an effort to increase measured on farm change. It is envisaged that the BPP groups (as instigated by the Beef CRC and supporting partners) will provide a suitable framework for conducting this extension and evaluation. It is envisaged that as part of the process of evaluating the financial impact of adoption of various technologies, the BPP groups will have the option of using tools from the MBFP program. The added bonus of integrating with BPP is that an effective evaluation process is already built into the activities of the group. The MBFP state coordinator will also need to identify opportunities and be proactive about approaching existing groups (other than BPP) and offering aspects of the program to these groups.

Another option for overcoming limited extension capacity is to work more closely with service providers, such as Elders, Landmark and independent agribusinesses. The main challenge with working with this sector is they are limited in the amount of time they can spend training and upskilling (particularly livestock agents). In order for service providers to take any ownership in co delivering parts of the MBFP program they will need to be sold the financial benefits of being involved. The added challenge is that many of these service providers, in an attempt to differentiate themselves in the market place, have developed their own programs which compete with MBFP and will undoubtedly take priority.

Any future MBFP activities conducted by MLA and DAFWA in WA will need to have an improved evaluation component to quantify the impact of the program on the beef business.

## 8 Appendix

When	Where	Rating	What	Pax	Detail
<b>2006</b>					
July	Boyup Brook	2	Boyup Brook Beef & Sheep Updates	130	Trade Display & Program Showcased by Presenter as means for groups
July	Bremer Bay	3	Bremer Bay Beef & Sheep Updates	60	Presented program and tools
July	Manjimup	3	Manjimup Pasture Group	15	Pastures Walk - Pasture growth & Utilisation Focus
August	Esperance	3	Esperance Beef and Sheep Updates	150	Presented program and tools
August	Manjimup	2	Manjimup Pasture Group	15	Pastures Walk - Pasture growth & Utilisation Focus
September	Manjimup	3	Manjimup Pasture Group	15	Feed Demand Calculator to run scenarios, pasture walk & genetics
September	Mt Barker	2	Pasture for Profit	60	Rod Manning discussed the role of MBFP in his business
September	Badgingarra	3	Badginagarra Research Station FD	50	Present program & tools
October	Manjimup	2	Manjimup Pastures Group	15	Pasture Growth & Utilisation Focus
<b>2007</b>					
March	Esperance	3	Expo	60	original format
March	Geraldton	3	Expo	50	new format
March	Bindoon	3	Expo	60	original format
March	Manjimup	2	Manji Hort. Research Institute Field Day	30	Pastures presentation-showcase fdc, brs tool
May	Manjimup	2	Manjimup Pastures Group	25	Animal health seminar
July	Perth	3	Understanding Feed Supply & Demand	45	Presentation & Trade Display
July	Perth	3	Cost of Production	45	Presentation & Trade Display
July	New Norcia	3	'Cost of Production'	47	Presentation x 3
July	Geraldton	2	'Managing Cattle in Dry Season'	33	Presentation x 3
August	Narrogin	3	'Cost of Production'	56	Presentation
August	Esperance	1	'Better Bull Buying'	98	Presentation x 2
August	Boyup Brook	2	'Is There a Better Time to Calve?'	97	Presentation
August	Albany	3	(1) 'Cost of Production'	80	Presentation
August	Albany	2	(2) 'Is There a Better Time to Calve?'	80	Presentation

\* Forum rankings (based on impact in terms of stimulating action to change from MBfP manual):

1 = awareness 2= co sponsored day, professionally prepared and presented talks 3= full branded MBFP day focused on at least one module

