



Final report

Australian Lot Feeders' Association Annual Service Agreement

FY 2023

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Introduction

The Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) / Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Service Level Agreement Project provides a platform to focus attention on the areas of ALFA-MLA consultation, ALFA-Animal Health Australia (AHA) consultation in the areas of animal welfare and biosecurity, industry leadership & capability building, and adoption.

Key benefits include improved MLA-ALFA engagement and communication of key MLA outcomes, improved AHA-ALFA engagement and input into welfare and biosecurity activities, quarterly feedlot statistic development, the provision of key capability development programs for the feedlot sector (including Student Scholarships, ARLP, TRAIL, AICD, an FCDT), direct Technical Assistance to lot feeders, industry and stakeholders; development and delivery of agreed ALFA-MLA extension campaigns to drive adoption of key MLA products and improved awareness of outcomes of grain-fed levy investment.

Consultation

Feedlot industry consultation

ALFA participated in MLA's Annual Consultation and Taskforce process providing MLA guidance on the feedlot Industry's priorities and areas of grain fed levy investment. The identification of priorities was obtained through feedback from ALFA members and discussions with representatives through ALFA's Committee and Council process. These consultation processes culminated in ALFA's input into MLA's Annual Investment Plan for the period and continue to guide our strong relationship with MLA.

Feedlot Research & Development

ALFA's Research & Development Committee worked closely with MLA to identify priority areas and invest grain fed levies into research for the betterment of the feedlot industry and operators. During the period ALFA and MLA continued to align investment priorities with *The MLA & ALFA Feedlot Program R&D Strategy – 5 year horizon*, which aim to focus on key opportunities that can benefit and advance the industry and provide a return on research funds.

Its purpose is to accelerate outcomes to provide the best possible economic, social, animal welfare, economic and environmental benefits to the feedlot industry. Key highlights in these focus areas are included below:

Feedlot Labour

- Two training courses released on the Feedlot Tech Platform, including Fundamentals of nutrition, feeding and milling and Fundamentals of livestock handling.
- Continued support of scholarships for emerging leaders in the industry. Course 28 ARLP Scholars Don Madden (Smithfield Cattle Company) & Emily Perkins (Shorthorn Beef) have graduated from their programs, along with Trail Scholarship awardees Angus Lee (ACC Opal Creek) and Jacob Leak (Tey's Jindalee feedlot).
- Sponsorship of 10 student scholars to attend ALFA Beef Ex in October, 2022 to network and engage with the feedlot industry

Preventative Health & Welfare

- "Going under Cover" shade and shelter webinars and industry tour rolled out to 200 feedlot stakeholders in WA, VIC and SA.
- Western Australian shade trial completed reporting a 6.8% improvement in Average daily gain over a 70-day measurement period, along with demonstrated welfare benefits.
- Development of a funding partnership between MLA, Apiam Animal Health, and University of Adelaide to investigate the efficacy of customised autogenous vaccines for *Pasturella multocida*, *Histophilus somni*, and *Mycoplasma bovis* in Australian feedlots.

Environmental Sustainability

- Completion of trial work for the Review of feedlot enteric methane calculations for the national greenhouse gas inventory. Scientific journal articles are currently being prepared for submission to the Federal Government for determination of a revision.
- Continued work in the MLA Donor company to evaluate methane and performance effects of methane inhibitors including Bovaer, Asparagopsis and novel molecules.

Feedlot Productivity

- Short duration lairage – demonstration that limiting time in lairage to less than 4 hours can increase hot carcass weight of mid-fed export cattle by 6.2 to 7.4kg (advantage over 26.5 & 16.5 hours in lairage, respectively).
- Short duration lairage is now adopted for 425,600 head of the grain-fed supply chain.

Feedlot Automation

- Continued adoption of Bunk management automation in the feedlot industry with ute-mounted scanners now determining feed remaining on 150,000 cattle on a daily basis.
- Bunk bot demonstration completed and first commercial system sold. The system is now calling pen autonomously 3 times per day.

Quarterly Feedlot Survey

ALFA undertook the ALFA/MLA Quarterly Feedlot Survey throughout the period which presents results of cattle on feed and other important Feedlot Industry market indicators. The data from the survey, generated quarterly and obtained by ALFA through consultation with feedlot operators, captures important commercial information that is used by MLA to report the dynamics of the grain fed beef supply chain.

ALFA also provided MLA with regular updates of its forecast grain fed cattle turnoff model which assists providing projections on levy revenue for MLA financial planning purposes.

Animal Health, Welfare and Biosecurity

ALFA participated in Animal Health Australia (AHA) led consultation Industry Forums and Committees providing valuable input into surveillance and biosecurity initiatives.

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) preparedness

In 2022, as COVID-19 receded, new challenges emerged with the confirmation of Lumpy skin disease (LSD) in March and Foot and mouth disease (FMD) in April in nearby Indonesia.

Upon detecting LSD in Indonesia, the Red Meat Advisory Council (RMAC) and industry bodies like the National Farmers' Federation and Australian Dairy Farmers formed an Industry Taskforce. The Taskforce coordinated prevention and planning efforts. As the biosecurity situation evolved in Indonesia, the Taskforce expanded to address the FMD threat, including the sheep, pork, and wool industries in its membership.

The Industry Taskforce's Working Groups comprise representatives from Peak Industry Councils, including ALFA, State Farming Organisations, state and federal governments, Animal Health Australia, and specialised technical experts.

Key areas of focus included:

1. Overseas in-country support – to develop proposals for providing support to Indonesia and other neighbouring countries in their mitigation and management of FMD/LSD and to contribute to proposals for support in overseas markets put forward by other parties.
2. Trade and protocols – to undertake specific market risk analysis and market prioritisation and determine protocol and health certificate needs, both pre-emptive and reactive
3. Domestic containment strategy – to develop effective strategies to inform the containment and management of the spread of FMD/LSD should it arrive in Australia, complementing existing processes and plans, such as AUSVETPLAN, as well as other work being developed.
4. LSD diagnostic capability and vaccine development – to develop strategies for the development of diagnostic capability and vaccines to diagnose, prevent and manage the spread of LSD, should it arrive in Australia.

The Taskforce and associated working groups have exemplified the collaborative efforts of industry and government to strengthen Australia's robust Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) response capabilities.

AUSVETPLAN Reviews

As a member of Animal Health Australia and a signatory of the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA), ALFA was actively involved in evaluating Australia's response strategies for both Lumpy skin disease (LSD) and Foot and mouth disease (FMD), and the plans in place to address an outbreak if it was to occur in Australia.

The Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN) outlines the national approach for managing EAD incidents. It comprises manuals and supporting materials designed to facilitate outbreak coordination and management. ALFA played an active role in reviewing these resources, alongside assessing the LSD National Action Plan.

ALFA's Strategic Response to the threat of LSD/FMD

During 2022 ALFA developed a comprehensive strategic response to the EAD threat titled: *Feedlot Industry response to the threat of LSD/FMD - Building Australian feedlot capability to prevent and respond to an LSD/FMD incursion.*

The strategy includes a suite of initiatives aimed at building feedlot capability and preparedness to respond to the threat.

Among the initiatives under the strategy, ALFA has collaborating with Animal Health Australia (AHA) to review and enhance the AUSVETPLAN Feedlot Enterprise Manual. Concurrently, model Biosecurity and Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) response procedures are being developed. These aim to empower feedlot operators with the ability to effectively implement AUSVETPLAN if or when required.

Once completed, these resources will be shared with feedlots, bolstering their preparedness to prevent and respond to potential EAD outbreaks.

Shade Initiative

ALFA continued to promote its *Shade Initiative* asking all Australian feedlots to make a pledge to provide cattle under their care with access to shade by 2026.

To support lot feeders implementing shade, ALFA continued to promote shade adoption throughout 2022 and 2023 via the delivery of engaging content, including videos and articles such as:

- Shade providing benefits to cattle and people alike at [Angora Feedlot](#)
- Building productivity: How shade changed the game at [Mayura's 'Moo Cow Motel'](#)
- The benefits of shade at [West Wimmera Beef](#)
- [Hay sheds, an economical solution to providing cattle shade in feedlots](#)
- [Going Under Cover](#) Feedlot tour a success
- [Raroola Structural](#) - Feedlot Shade Structure Construction

The widely praised 'Going Under Cover' Feedlot Tour in May 2023 and the 'Going Under Cover' WA Information & Networking Session in March 2023 were notable efforts that facilitated valuable information exchange among feedlot operators.

Since the launch of the ALFA Shade Initiative in late 2020, an impressive 26% of the industry's unshaded capacity has been transitioned to shaded conditions, compared to the 2019-20 baseline. This voluntary effort has elevated the number of cattle under shade from 810,376 head (56% of capacity) in June 2020 to 1,065,502 head (68% of Australia's feedlot capacity) in June 2023.

CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE NATIONAL FEEDLOT ACCREDITATION SCHEME (NFAS)

The [National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme \(NFAS\)](#) is the feedlot industry's quality management system, which underpins the integrity of grain fed beef.

NFAS has elevated the reputation of the Australian feedlot sector by ensuring the production of high-quality grain fed beef that adheres to food safety, animal welfare, and environmental

standards. Independently owned and operated by AUS-MEAT, NFAS's oversight falls under the Feedlot Industry Accreditation Committee (FLIAC).

A review in 2020 prompted a revision of NFAS Rules and Standards by FLIAC, reinforcing the scheme. These changes were introduced in 2021 and auditable since January 2022.

A strategic partnership among ALFA, AUS-MEAT, and MLA's Integrity Systems Company has perpetuated the communication momentum supporting NFAS standards updates. A significant element of this strategy involves regular Open Zoom Forums, launched the previous year. These forums address areas of lower conformance or misconceptions, continuing through FY 22-23 with consistent, and at times increased, participation.

The strategy's efficacy lies in its simplicity, driving change and QA system adoption. Feedback highlights the value of this initiative, fostering a participatory culture. In the 2022/23 period, 127 feedlots—36% of NFAS-accredited ones—enrolled for one or more Open Forums, with small to medium feedlots resonating with the content and format. A substantial portion registered for multiple forums.

Each forum informs the creation of accompanying resources, often co-developed with presenting feedlots. These resources include user-friendly templates to capture audit information effectively.

Industry leadership and Capability Building

ALFA is dedicated to boosting industry capacity and supporting members in providing access to quality learning programs for their teams. Building capable, high-performing teams is key for operational excellence and attracting future talent.

ALFA achieves this through annual vibrant events, training programs, online courses via Feedlot TECH, workshops, tours, development courses, scholarships, and our annual conference.

During the period ALFA upskilled close to 2,000 industry participants. With 2,000 employees in the Australian Feedlot Industry, this engagement demonstrates our commitment to members and the broader feedlot industry.

Capacity Building Activity Snapshot 2022-23

-	Number of registrations to ALFA in-person training courses	1,900
-	Number of online training enrolments on Feedlot TECH	1,360
-	Number of individuals using Feedlot TECH to upskill	1,503

FEEDLOT TECH –training, education and careers hub

Launched in October 2021, Feedlot TECH is an online platform that showcases the many career, employment, and professional development opportunities available within the feedlot sector, across all career stages.

The tool provides the Australian feedlot sector, its businesses, and current and prospective employees with a clear career pathway and associated training, professional development and support networks.

Feedlot TECH is designed to do this through:

Career Pathways: Feedlot TECH promotes the vast feedlot career opportunities and pathways available to individuals coming into the sector, along with the associated training required to progress through the industry.

Training: Feedlot TECH provides links to training and professional development opportunities through a 'directory' that relates training courses to feedlot teams and stages along the career pathways. The online Training Hub provides training courses that are practical, cover core feedlot skills and can be easily integrated into daily operations and training of staff. A range of online training courses and resources are available, including training on Feed Shed Loader Operations, Feed Truck Operations, Cattle Backgrounding and Induction, Antimicrobial Stewardship, Pen Cleaning, Manure and Environmental Management, Caring for Cattle, Practical Bovine Post-mortem Techniques, and more.

Resources: Feedlot TECH brings together feedlot-specific resources in one easily-accessible location, including up-to-date information on new technologies, best practices, 'how to' guides and links to standards and guidelines, to assist lot feeders with daily feedlot operations.

Feedlot Fundamentals – an online e-learning journey

ALFA and MLA's capability-building strategy focuses on online courses through Feedlot TECH, addressing essential skills across all feedlot departments. This ambitious approach involves delivering a comprehensive set of Feedlot Fundamentals short courses. These courses cover various skill areas within feedlot operations. ALFA's Feedlot Fundamentals program aims to streamline upskilling for feedlot operators.

During 2022-23 two key areas of feedlot operations were delivered via eLearning:

Feedlot Fundamentals - Feedlot Nutrition, Feeding and Milling Operations

In October 2022, ALFA and MLA introduced the "Feedlot Nutrition, Feeding and Milling Operations" course on Feedlot TECH. This course is part of the Feedlot Fundamentals online training series.

These concise online courses encompass crucial subjects including feedstuff energy, ration components, milling essentials, advanced milling and grain processing, commodity and ration testing, and effective record-keeping techniques.

Feedlot Fundamentals - Livestock Handling

In February 2023, ALFA and MLA introduced the "Livestock Handling" course as part of the Feedlot Fundamentals training on Feedlot TECH.

This comprehensive course is divided into seven modules, imparting skills in low-stress livestock handling. It covers areas such as evaluating animal well-being, adhering to fit-to-load standards, and implementing safety protocols for both staff and cattle.

AWO Training goes online

Ensuring excellent animal health and welfare outcomes is pivotal for Australia's cattle feedlot industry. ALFA's priority is to conduct the Animal Welfare Officer (AWO) Certified Training bi-

annually in person, with the next session set for 2024. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2021, an online training course was developed to cover AWO topics and objectives, providing an option when in-person training is unfeasible.

The online course, launched in June 2023, has trained 80 individuals through Feedlot TECH. While face-to-face training remains preferred and will continue bi-annually starting 2024, the online option offers flexibility when travel is restricted or demand exceeds capacity. MLA's funding support has been instrumental in developing these training materials for lot feeders.

'Going Under Cover' Feedlot Tour

ALFA and MLA organised a four-day bus tour in May 2023 to disseminate MLA Research Project findings about shade and shelter structures in Australian feedlots. This initiative aimed to enhance comprehension and adoption of shade solutions.

The tour included visits to multiple feedlots showcasing diverse shade systems. It allowed lot feeders to directly learn from their peers about the benefits of these structures. With 48 delegates present, topics covered barriers to adoption, financing, animal welfare advantages, research results, and access to resources including design guides and manufacturers.

'Going Under Cover' WA Information & Networking Session

In March 2023, ALFA, along with MLA, joined forces with the WA Lot Feeders Association, BetterBeef, to organize an informative networking session for 103 delegates. This event aimed to amplify the findings of MLA Research Projects related to shade and covered housing structures, promoting their understanding and adoption in Australian feedlots.

Grain Fed Beef Industry Scholarship to ARLP Course 29

The Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) is based on the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation's (ARLF) 30 years of experience, with a leadership model that reflects current thinking and practice in the areas of adult education, leadership and capacity building. ALFA, with the support of MLA and grain fed levies, supported Tim Brennan and Ryan Brown to participate in Course 29.

Grain Fed Beef Industry Scholarship to TRAIL 2022

ALFA, with the support of MLA and grain fed levies, supported two positions on the ARLF's TRAIL Program in 2023. TRAIL is a cross-sector, challenge-based leadership program set in Canberra and region, for Australia's future emerging rural leaders.

Opal Creek Feedlot's Angus Lee and Jindalee Feedlot's Jacob Leak were awarded scholarships to attend the TRAIL Program which commenced in March 2023.

Adoption

One-on-one technical support for lot feeders

As a complimentary service to all lot feeders, ALFA, in partnership with MLA, offers a dedicated Technical Services Officer, Jeff House, who delivers the latest technical information, education, training and support to feedlot operators in the field. Each feedlot visited receives a *Research Extension Information Pack* consisting of ALFA and MLA research and development resources. With COVID-19 travel restrictions now in the past, Jeff enjoyed getting back out on the road, visiting over 100 feedlots.