

# final report

Project code: B.LSM.0066  
Prepared by: Natasha Morley  
Rural Directions Pty Ltd  
Date published: June 2014  
ISBN: 9781740362269

PUBLISHED BY  
Meat & Livestock Australia Limited  
Locked Bag 991  
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

## **Quantifying labour input of individual operations in Australian sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises**

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

This publication is published by Meat & Livestock Australia Limited ABN 39 081 678 364 (MLA). Care is taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication. However MLA cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information or opinions contained in the publication. You should make your own enquiries before making decisions concerning your interests. Reproduction in whole or in part of this publication is prohibited without prior written consent of MLA.

## **Abstract**

The aim of the project was to collect baseline data to quantify labour input of individual operations undertaken in Australian sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises.

The Quantifying Labour Input (QLI) timesheet system was developed to enable recording of activities undertaken by sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises via an online database.

Unfortunately the project did not engage the target number of participants required to represent an effective sample of the sheep and beef cattle industry. In addition to this, of the producers who had registered to participate in the project, only a small number had provided data into the online database. It was also determined that it was unlikely that the project would achieve a sufficient volume of quality data that would provide sufficient rigor to meet the project objectives.

As a result MLA, in consultation with the research organisation, determined that the project would not be able to deliver on its objectives and it was agreed that it was appropriate to terminate the project.

## Executive summary

The aim of the project was to collect baseline data to quantify labour input of individual operations undertaken in Australian sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises.

The project objectives were to:

1. Develop a timesheet data collection system which enables efficient capture and reporting of time spent undertaking on-farm operations.
2. Engage a minimum of 250 red meat enterprises that will adopt and implement the timesheet tool within their businesses, with at least 60% of businesses engaged providing sufficiently accurate data across an annual production cycle for analysis.
3. Quantify the labour input of participating sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises to individual operations/task types.
4. Identify where the greatest opportunities exist to improve efficiency of labour use by region and enterprise mix/type.

An online, Quantifying Labour Input (QLI) timesheet system was developed to enable recording of activities undertaken by sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises via an online database. Individual reporting capabilities were developed to allow participating producers to access their raw data in user-friendly reports.

The project sought to develop a quantitative baseline dataset of livestock management activity by time allocated. This would permit quantitative evaluation of potential labour efficiency enhancing practices, infrastructure and technologies, and also enable livestock producers to assess labour efficiency within their enterprises.

Forty two livestock producers expressed interest in the project. From those, 24 registered as 'active participants' and four to five participants indicated they no longer wished to be involved and were removed from communications lists.

Twelve individuals registered for 'QLI updates only'. These people were not producers or interested in participating, but were interested in the project outcomes. This group was primarily made up of industry service providers.

Across the five month registration period 30 producers were motivated to sign up, and investigate the project and database. Unfortunately the project did not engage the target number of participants required to represent an effective sample of the sheep and beef cattle industry to the end of March 2014. In addition to this, of the producers who registered to participate in the project, only a small number had provided data into the database. It was also determined that it was unlikely that the project would achieve sufficient volume of quality data that would provide sufficient rigor to meet the project objectives.

With a lack of data across a production year, the research organisation was unable to confidently report any trends across enterprises, or regions to a DSE, hectare of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) basis.

As a result, MLA, in consultation with the research organisation, determined that the project would not be able to deliver on its objectives and should therefore not continue.

When seeking feedback from producers involved in the project, there appeared to be a conflict between the producers' expectations and the requirements of the research project in meeting the project objectives.

Despite the project being a research and development project (and communicated to potential participants in all promotional material in this way), with clear objectives, producers didn't see this as the priority or the main reason for their involvement. Producers appeared to be expecting a system which was more applicable, with direct benefit to their business, with the capability of adaptation to their individual enterprises, rather than being a participant in a research and development process. Once they began using the system, a number of producers felt that it was 'clunky', 'too detailed' and 'time consuming' to work with and couldn't see the benefit of them being involved. It appeared that participants were unable to recognise that the level of detail that was required by the research project was to allow for effective analysis and reporting of findings to the funder.

Labour efficiency and understanding the allocation of labour across their enterprises was important to all producers engaged, however, the barriers of 'measuring' time using the QLI system appeared to outweighed any of these benefits.

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Background.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Project objectives .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Results.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>16</b>

# 1 Background

While labour is one of the biggest costs to a business, Rural Directions Pty Ltd has observed many businesses do not put an appropriate value on their time or analyse how their time is spent. This is an issue for understanding productivity and profitability, but also for looking after the people in the business (ensuring sound work-life balance and a safe work environment). Industry has also recognised there is a lack of data on the amount of time spent on different jobs in livestock enterprises to effectively assess the role of labour saving technologies and practices.

The Quantifying Labour Input (QLI) timesheet system was developed by Rural Directions Pty Ltd to enable recording of activities undertaken by sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises via an online database. Individual reporting capabilities were also been developed to allow participating producers to access their raw data in user-friendly reports.

The project sought to develop a quantitative baseline dataset of livestock management activity by time allocated. This would permit more meaningful quantitative evaluation of potential labour efficiency enhancing practices, infrastructure and technologies, and also enable livestock producers to assess labour efficiency within their enterprises.

Developed as a two year project, the aim was to engage a minimum of 250 red meat businesses. An engagement strategy was implemented, however as the project progressed it struggled to generate sufficient producer interest and it became clear that engaging the minimum numbers for the project was a significant risk.

The database system, accessible via a remote desktop connection was developed with three main sections being '*Business and Enterprise Details*', '*Timesheets*' and '*Reports*'. Following a pilot period, Version 1.02 was launched 25<sup>th</sup> October 2013 allowing registered participants to implement the system and begin data collection.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2014, Rural Directions Pty Ltd met with MLA via teleconference to discuss the future of the project.

Unfortunately up to this point, the project had not engaged the target number of participants required to represent an effective sample of the sheep and beef cattle industry. In addition to this, of the producers who had registered to participate in the project, only a small number had provided data into the database. It was also determined that it was unlikely that the project would achieve a sufficient volume of quality data needed to provide sufficient rigor to meet the project objectives.

As a result MLA, in consultation with the research organisation, determined that the project would not be able to deliver on its objectives and should therefore not continue.

Rural Directions Pty Ltd delivered this project within the terms of the contract up to the end of March 2014, following agreement to finalise the project with MLA. This included the completion of Milestones 1 and 2; however Milestones 3 and 4 as contracted were not completed.

This Final Report reports the outcome of the project to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 including producer feedback and key learnings.

## 2 Project objectives

By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015:

1. Develop a timesheet data collection system which enables efficient capture and reporting of time spent undertaking on-farm operations.
2. Engage a minimum of 250 red meat enterprises that will adopt and implement the timesheet tool within their businesses, with at least 60% of businesses engaged providing sufficiently accurate data across an annual production cycle for analysis.
3. Quantify the labour input of participating sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises to individual operations/task types.
4. Identify where the greatest opportunities exist to improve efficiency of labour use by region and enterprise mix/type.

## 3 Methodology

There were 4 key components to this project:

1. Development of timesheet database and SaaS (Software as a Service) facility
2. Engagement of participants and project induction
3. Data collection
4. Reporting – for participating producers periodically and development of industry reports

Given the project ceased in March 2014, this report concentrates on reporting the methodology undertaken relating to key components 1 to 3.

### (i) Development of time sheet system

The QLI timesheet system was developed by Rural Directions Pty Ltd to enable recording of activities undertaken by sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises via an online database.

The database system, accessible via a remote desktop connection was developed with three main sections being: '*Business and Enterprise Details*', '*Timesheets*' and '*Reports*'. The system was developed and ready for piloting from the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

The Pilot ran from 26<sup>th</sup> August 2013 until 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013 (4.5 weeks). A Pilot information pack was provided to the participants to provide context of their role in informing any changes or developments required for the project.

A number of changes to the database were suggested based on feedback collected during and following the Pilot, and from feedback from other consultants and service providers. These changes, plus additional feedback from MLA, were confirmed with MLA and implemented.

Development of a set of hard copy input sheets for the business and enterprise details and the timesheet entry sheet was necessary as a risk management approach for participants. A key barrier to participation that was identified during the pilot was 'difficulty logging in'. Input sheets in PDF format which could be

downloaded and printed allowed participants to begin the data collection process while the technical issues experienced are resolved.

Version 1.02 was launched for registered participants on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

Individual reporting capabilities were developed to allow participating producers to access their raw data in a user-friendly manner. These reports, contained raw data only (time spent per activity per person/per enterprise). No analysis was undertaken to populate reports or trends identified.

Reports included:

- *Business and enterprise details*  
Summary of all business and enterprise details entered.
- *Timesheet details*  
This function allowed the participant to select the team member and time period to be reported. The report shows:
  - the activity by day and date,
  - the time spent undertaking the activity over the period, and
  - the total number of livestock treated/handled per activity.This report summarised time spent by person. It allowed the participant to view a timesheet summary for all team members for a specified period of time.
- *Activity summary*  
This function allowed the participant to select the team member and time period to be reported. The report:
  - listed all days spent performing that task/activity,
  - provided a sum of all time spent in a table at the end, and
  - outlined the number of livestock treated/handled for each time period for that activity.This report summarised time spent by activity per person. This report also allowed the participant to view all team members for a specified period of time by activity.
- *Activity summary by enterprise*  
This function allowed participants to define a time period to generate a summary by enterprise. This report summarised all time spent per activity by enterprise by grouping all activities performed. Activities were grouped under the sections:
  - General,
  - Sheep,
  - Beef and
  - Cropping (or as applicable depending on the enterprises managed).
- *Timesheet activity listing*  
The timesheet activities report provided a list of all of the codes built into the system for sheep, beef cattle, cropping and general. This was where the most current version of the timesheet codes and activities was stored and retrieved from.



All reports could be previewed, printed or sent to the participant via email as a PDF. Once emailed to the participant as a PDF file, the report can be saved to their local computer.

## **(ii) Engagement of Participants and Project Induction**

A promotional strategy was implemented in August 2013 with the development of:

1. Project image (to be used for all project promotions and materials)
2. QLI information pack (Appendix 1)
3. Case study (Appendix 2)
4. Dedicated web page – [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli)

The information pack and case study are provided in Appendix 1 and 2.

These promotional materials were developed in consultation with MLA and followed the MLA Style Guide.

Producers were encouraged to express interest to participate in the project by 4<sup>th</sup> November 2013, to allow a core group to begin the project together. A second promotional period was prepared in December, and implemented in January to engage producers in the New Year, to begin data collection in March 2014. The 2<sup>nd</sup> round of promotional material promoted the opportunity to enter a competition to win a pre-paid fuel card.

The purpose of the competition was to provide another incentive for producers to join the project and maintain involvement throughout the minimum 12 month period.

Participants registered via [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli). The registration process collected basic contact information, enterprise type/s, motivation to participate, plus request for participants to detail how they found out about the project. A function to subscribe to project updates was also included on this page.

It was anticipated that project updates, via an e-newsletter would be sent from time to time to assist in maintaining producer engagement in the project. It aimed to act as a method for participants to highlight the opportunity for involvement to their networks. No e-newsletters were sent because there was not sufficient data in the system to communicate, with no 'notable' points of interest.

Following online registration, an induction process was implemented and participants were allocated a username and password, and sent an email with the login details, plus instructions to step them through implementation of the system on their local computer. A detailed Users Manual has been developed which included screen shots of each of the sections of the database.

## **(iii) Data collection**

Participants were expected to enter data into the online database into two main sections, '*Business and Enterprise Details*' and '*Timesheets*'. There was a once-off requirement to outline business and enterprise details including contact details for all users from the business, business structure, enterprise structure, production averages including average annual rainfall, livestock turn off weights, areas managed

and grazed, lambing/calving percentages and weaning percentages. A livestock calendar of operations was also completed.

Time sheet data for each person working in the business was required for at least 12 months.

The non-electronic data collection method (via the carbon copy notebook) as outlined in the project plan was not pursued given the investment required for the low number of participants engaged to February 2014.

## 4 Results

Forty two livestock producers expressed interest in the project. From those, 24 registered as 'active participants' and four to five participants indicated they no longer wished to be involved and were removed from communications lists.

Twelve individuals registered for 'QLI updates only'. These people were not producers or interested in participating, but were interested in the project outcomes. This group was primarily made up of industry service providers.

Following the second promotional period, there were only three new registrations, and 2 expressions of interest from service providers to receive updates.

Only six producers entered data into the system. The most data entered for one producer was 21 days, however this producer was registered and an 'active participant' for more than three months.

Across the five month registration period 30 producers were motivated to sign up, and investigate the project and database. It was clear that labour efficiency and understanding the allocation of labour across their enterprises was important to them, however, the barriers of 'measuring' time using the QLI system appeared to outweighed any of these benefits.

This prompted a follow up meeting on the 21st February 2014 between Rural Directions Pty Ltd and MLA via teleconference to discuss the future of the project. MLA, in consultation with the research organisation, determined that the project would not be able to deliver on its objectives and should therefore not continue.

All participants were contacted by email to inform them that the project was being terminated. As part of participant follow up, all participants were provided with PFD reports of the data they submitted plus all raw data in Excel format.

Participants were allowed 10 days to enter any data into the system before reports were finalised. These reports were the same as what participants were able to generate from the system. The reports were not analysed, rather they included the raw data that had been collected and entered. This included the business and enterprise details, and any time sheet data.

### ***Feedback and ideas received from participating producers***

The following feedback was captured via either the registration process, phone conversations with participants or email feedback received.

*Feedback on 'what motivated you to express interest in this project?'*

- 'Looking at ways to improve productivity, employees vs. contractors, best value for money.'
- 'We too recognise the importance of labour input in farm businesses...'
- 'An interest in just how much time we do put into the sheep enterprise.'
- 'Looking to quantify time allocation in our business.'
- 'I am doing the MLA challenge and have a KPI to increase labour efficiency.'
- 'We run a diverse farm and labour utilisation is a big unknown'
- 'As semi-retired, very small, (35 breeders) we need to know if it is worth it all or at all.'
- 'Keen interest to be able to quantify the labour inputs in our business including being able to differentiate between enterprises.'
- 'Improve labour efficiency of my business'
- 'Labour efficiency'
- 'Currently record labour hours for benchmarking'
- 'Better understanding of time spent undertaking tasks'
- 'Develop farm more as a business'
- 'Interested to see what time is being allocated to the operation to see how it affects the cost of production.'
- 'Labour efficiency is very important to me'
- 'The MLA Challenge'
- 'MLA Challenge'
- 'The need to efficiently record time in a farming enterprise.'
- '...to more easily track employees enterprise allocation of time'
- 'To find out how to take the labour out of farming'
- 'Because it is a vitally important issue in the sheep and beef industries'
- 'Improving our own efficiency'
- 'Keen to do something like this to help with making economic decisions'
- 'Labour is one of our highest costs'
- 'Accountability of labour'
- 'Looking at benchmarks and industry averages'

*Feedback received regarding 'barriers to participation'*

- "I am still recording my labour input into the diary, but have not got around to logging onto the system. Just finding the right time to do so is the thing. I also work as a teacher, and have had less time on the farm recently and more preoccupied with other matters. What I do find, and I need to reflect on this more, when time constraints become more pressured, e.g. shearing, school, preparing paddocks for sowing, feeding sheep, marketing sheep, family time etc., the business of the business stops reflective thinking and bookwork. Particularly when making decisions on your own. I know more corporate farming has regular business meetings, but how to build that into my business is something I have not fully come to grips with. I am at the stage where I probably need to create more structure with regular check-ups with bank managers/accountants, perhaps even a farm advisor to build more of a pattern into my bookwork and farm monitoring.... if only I had the time!"

- “We are very keen to be involved in research that helps understand labour use on farms and where and how productivity improvements can be mapped and compared to other producers in the industry. Barriers to research information collecting:
  - The information being sought after is a lot, which is great for research purposes, however, it is very time consuming to complete, especially given seasonal outlook and a never ending job list. So unfortunately, when prioritising this sort of thing falls off the radar and when also there is no remuneration or cash incentive to be involved in the research.
  - I understand MLA has limited funding and there may be no resources available which is similar to us farmers on the ground.
  - I look forward to more contact with you to see how we can overcome this hurdle. I do think it's a terrific project.”
- “I must apologise for my inaction on participating the QLI project. I have found it a little intimidating to put the data in and getting others in the business to do so would be even harder. I just simply have put it on the back burner a bit, and because of this I didn't rank it high on my list of things to do, etc. I know this isn't much on an excuse but when I was busy I had simply put it in the back of my mind.”
- “I can only reiterate that I have found the system of data entry cumbersome and clunky – if there was to be a re-run of the project, this side of it needs to be reviewed.”
- “We started filling out the time sheets, and it was really onerous. I had two of my blokes and myself filling them out, and we did 2 weeks and reckon we nearly put half an hour a day into filling them out, finding the codes, and thinking about what we did for the day. I think it is a good idea, but just too much time needed.”
- “Getting some resistance, and mainly from Dad. We have been entering the timesheets on paper and have put paper copies on clipboards in the utes. There are a few gaps, but we are slowly getting into it.”
- “We are still very keen to be part of the project and we have a hand written log of time since January 1<sup>st</sup> when we started. Between 3 young children, renovating the house and in the process hopefully of purchasing a new property I haven't got as far as entering data electronically but have every intention of getting to it soon. I guess it is one of the reasons we are interested in the process to give us more info on time management and efficiencies across our business and how to better manage them. A case in point.”

*Feedback from producers who registered, then communicated they were no longer wishing to be involved:*

- “...I am sorry to say I have not been unable to get around to getting into the database. Very dry up here and putting in a lot of time feeding stock. Sorry to muck you around...”
- “...My apologies, when I put my hand up for this project I thought I would save time because I currently record my workman, myself and contractors hours on an excel spreadsheet. However, the understandable rigor of your project

means that this would not be the case. I will not be farming for many years more so I do not think I am willing or able to continue with the project....”

- “I decided not to participate in the MLA labour usage survey in the interests of labour efficiency. The questions were not a good fit with our operation and to make our data fit what you are requiring would have required a lot of work on my part. The info back would not have given us much benefit as it then wouldn't fit with what we do. We are running pastoral, inner grazing and mixed cropping operations together, with stock moving freely between the different systems. Within each property different areas are set stocked, rotated, strategically grazed and so on with different categories of stock at different times of the year. Likewise we use a blend of different labour sources at different cost and their output reflects their cost so their FTE rating would need to be adjusted to output.”

#### *Feedback received regarding 'ideas for future labour productivity projects'*

- “Possibly an outcome from this to make it easier may be to have an app that can be used whilst at work to log times and tasks, this could be easier to use and faster to get data into the database”

#### *Other feedback received*

- “I think there was some great potential there for the project; in my case, I was hoping it would alleviate the reliance on diaries and best guesses at what everyone's time was spent on. In the event of complete failure of the project, it has inspired me to look at setting up our own system.”

## **5 Discussion**

The concerns about the lack of data to be able to make any sound observations about how time is spent in sheep and cattle enterprises has been ongoing since November 2013, as has been the discussions between Rural Direction Pty Ltd and MLA about this.

Unfortunately the project did not engage the target number of participants required to represent an effective sample of the sheep and beef cattle industry. In addition to this, of the producers who had registered to participate in the project, only a small number had provided data into the database. It was also determined that it was unlikely that the project would achieve sufficient level of quality data that would provide sufficient rigor to meet the project objectives.

As a result MLA, in consultation with the research organisation, determined that the project would not be able to deliver on its objectives and should therefore not continue.

With a lack of data across a production year, we could not confidently report any trends across enterprises, or regions to a DSE, hectare of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) basis.

It was however clear from the participants who registered for the project (and their response to questions on motivation to participate) that labour efficiency and understanding the allocation of labour across their enterprises was important to them.

The barriers of 'measuring' time using the QLI system however outweighed any of these benefits.

It has been recognised that the Agriculture industry as a whole does not track or record timesheets effectively. With even the simplest of timesheet processes, individuals struggle to prioritise this type of measurement and monitoring, despite recognising the value the information could provide to their business.

### **What worked well?**

- Effective collaborative approach with MLA program managers, including timely and ongoing communication.
- Brand/image of the project.
- Promotional strategy – engaging networks and well promoted nationally.
- Support of MLA to promote the project via MLA Feedback and Friday Feedback, including their networks (Appendix 3 and 4).
- Integration of a previous time recording system and customising it to meet the requirements of sheepmeat and beef cattle producers and allow for comprehensive reporting and observations to be made via robust analysis.
- The project highlighted that labour efficiency is important to producers based on the feedback received about participant's motivation to be involved.

### **What didn't work so well?**

- Overall engagement. Targets were not met within the first 6 months of the project and unable to foresee targets being achieved to meet project objectives.
- Broad scale newspaper promotions. At the time of promoting the project we were unable to get permission to undertake a media campaign via rural or local regional newspapers from MLA Communications. It is unclear why permissions were not granted, however it was understood that MLA was not undertaking any media campaigns at that time.
- There was a conflict between the producers expectations and the requirements of the research project in meeting the project objectives.

Despite the project being a Research and Development project (and communicated to potential participants in all promotional material in this way), with clear objectives, producers didn't see this as the priority or the main reason for their involvement. Producers appeared to be expecting a system which was more applicable, with direct benefit to their business, with the capability of adaptation to their individual enterprises, rather than being a participant in a research and development process. Once they began using the system, a number of producers felt that it was 'clunky', 'too detailed' and 'time consuming' to work with and couldn't see the benefit of them being involved. It appeared that participants were unable to see that the level of detail required by the research project to allow for effective analysis and reporting of findings to the funder.

The system was developed based on an existing timesheet system. The key differences with the two timesheet systems was the level of detail required by the QLI timesheet system. The level of detail was necessary to allow for effective analyses and observations to be made regarding key tasks undertaken in the livestock industry to allow for analysis of time spent on a per task basis.

The original timesheet system developed and implemented by Rural Directions Pty Ltd (on which the QLI system was modelled) was cropping focused, and did not consider individual task categories for the livestock enterprise, it grouped all sheep management tasks as 'sheep work' for example. As a result, there was a lower time commitment required by the user to enter the data. The clients of Rural Directions Pty Ltd who have implemented the original timesheet system could be regarded as lead users, and were dedicated to understanding how time was spent by people in their business. It was a timesheet recording system only allowing for broad observations about how time was spent between enterprises and key tasks. These clients were not analysing the data to the level expected of the QLI system to meet the project objectives, and consequently participants were not required to enter the business and enterprise details as required of the QLI system. It could be assumed there were fewer barriers to participation with the original system from a user's perspective; however this would not have achieved the objectives of the MLA project if this simplified approach was adopted for the QLI system.

- Other barriers to participation included the time required to complete the timesheets on a daily basis, the need for an internet connect to enter data, and the mode of delivery (on-line database).

## **6 Conclusion**

It is clear from discussions with sheepmeat and cattle producers, plus others working in the industry (service providers, group facilitators and consultants) that labour productivity is a key area of concern for businesses, and an area businesses would like to address. Unfortunately this project was not on track to meet the objectives and was unable to continue. The barriers of 'measuring' time using the QLI system outweighed the benefits of involvement for producers.

## 7 Appendices

### Appendix 1: QLI Information Pack (see PDF attachment)

### Appendix 2: QLI Producer Case Study – Scott Campbell (see PDF attachment)

### Appendix 3:1 MLA Feedback article, MLA Feedback, September 2013 page 4

## Measuring the work

**A** new online tool, called the Quantifying Labour Input Database, is available to help producers measure labour efficiency and identify areas for improvement.

With funding from MLA, Rural Directions Pty Ltd has developed a user-friendly tool that will quantify the labour input of individual operations.

Registered producers will have free access to the time sheet system, which is an industry-specific, whole-of-business tool.

The tool will allow participating producers to gain a thorough understanding of labour use in their enterprises, enabling them to assess labour efficiency and benchmark their results against industry peers.

Recent R&D projects and reviews have indicated that there is a lack of data available on the amount of time spent on

each of the different jobs undertaken in a livestock enterprise.

"Many current systems do not record information to the task level. More commonly, tasks are grouped together and recorded as 'sheep work' or 'cattle work'. This lack of data makes it difficult to effectively assess the role and benefits of adopting labour saving technologies and practices," Rural Directions project leader Natasha Morley said.



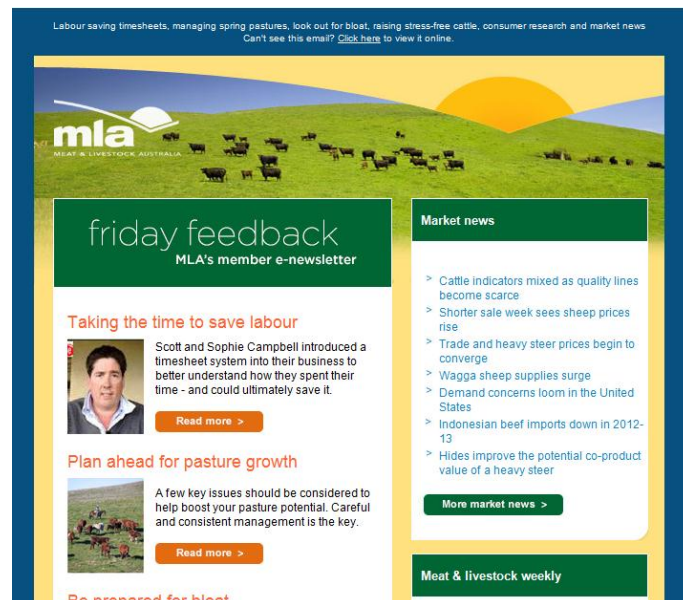
**Natasha Morley** // T: 08 8841 4500  
E: nmorley@ruraldirections.com



To find out more and register to participate visit  
[www.ruraldirections.com](http://www.ruraldirections.com)



## Appendix 4: 2MLA Friday Feedback, Friday 11 October 2013 promoting the QLI project with linkage to the QLI Case Study about Scott and Sophie Campbell



## **Appendix 1 QLI Information Pack**



# **Research to quantify labour inputs of Australian sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises**

**Your opportunity to take part**

## New research to quantify your labour input

Labour is a significant contributor in the cost of running a sheepmeat or beef cattle enterprise in Australia however there is little data on how much individual tasks contribute to this cost. In new research, Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is looking to industry to help quantify this gap to ensure it can appropriately develop options for improving labour productivity and efficiency.

The research, being conducted by Rural Directions Pty Ltd, is inviting sheepmeat and beef cattle producers to participate in the project which essentially asks them to sign up to use a new online tool that quantifies the labour input of their individual operations.

### About the project

Labour is becoming increasingly difficult to source, particularly skilled labour, and so livestock businesses need to use labour more efficiently. To do this the first step is to understand how time is currently allocated across their business by measuring existing output levels to create a baseline position and that is where the quantifying labour input tool can assist.

Recent R&D projects and reviews have indicated that there is a lack of data available on the amount of time spent on each of the different jobs undertaken in a livestock enterprise. Many current systems do not record information to the task level. More commonly tasks are grouped together and recorded as 'sheep work' or 'cattle work'.

Rural Directions Pty Ltd will use the data collected through this process to understand time spent undertaking individual tasks across an annual production cycle and this will be reported to MLA. We believe variation exists in the amount of time that it takes to complete the same 'activity' on-farm, but the extent of this variation is unknown.

"Participating producers will get a thorough understanding of their enterprise's labour use which enables them to assess their labour efficiency and benchmark their results against industry peers," explained MLA's Sheep R&D Project Manager Richard Apps.

"For industry as a whole, this process will permit more meaningful quantitative evaluation of potential labour efficiency enhancing practices, infrastructure and technologies."

### Why has MLA invested in improving labour productivity?

Labour productivity is a major factor in the profitability of sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises across Australia. MLA has identified that new Research and Development (R&D) is required to ensure that the industry has additional options for improving labour productivity.

MLA is funding R&D that creates opportunities for labour efficiency increases across the supply chain for the sheepmeat and beef cattle industries, through the development and communication of new practices or technologies.

### Who can get involved?

This R&D project is being delivered nationally. All sheepmeat and beef cattle producers are invited to participate. We have designed the system to meet the needs of northern and southern production systems.

It is suggested that all workers involved in your business are engaged in the project to give you the most benefit from your involvement.

The only cost to you to be able to participate is your time – making your participation in the project a great investment into learning about how time is actually spent in your business.

'You cannot manage what you do not measure'





## What will you need to do?

1. Be prepared for your business to commit for at least 12 months.
2. Express your interest in participating.
3. On registration, provide business and enterprise background including:
  - contact details for all users from your business
  - business structure
  - enterprise structure including annual average livestock numbers by age class
  - production benchmarks including annual average rainfall, livestock turn off weights, area managed and grazed, lambing/calving percentages, weaning percentages, etc
  - livestock calendar of operations
4. Daily data entry for at least a 12 month period to capture a full production year. You will be able to tailor the tool to your needs, where it will only include enterprises applicable to your business.

For data security see page 4.

## How will timesheet data be collected?

You will have a number of data entry options, however, to participate all data must end up in the online database as the final step. There are a number of ways you can collect your data for data entry into the system including:

- Paper version (ordered at registration) with carbon paper and perforated pages for ease of data management and entry. This would be handy if you prefer to capture your timesheet data on the go – this book could be kept in the ute for easy access.
- Direct into the quantifying labour input tool online via:
  - Login section on [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli) or
  - Remote desktop location – an icon, that links you to the system via the internet
- You may choose to collect your data via voice recording on your mobile, or via the Notes app on your smartphone, then transfer the information to the Quantifying Labour Input database in the evening or each week.

For ease of management, we suggest you enter data at least on a weekly basis. This is how you will gain the most benefit from being involved in the project as you will be able to review time spent on tasks on the go and make individual business observations.



## What's in it for you?

1. Funded by MLA, you will have access to an industry specific, whole of business (including cropping) timesheet tool. For the purpose of this research the time sheet tool will be available to you for up to two years. The only cost to you is your time to set up details for your business and enterprises at the time of registration and subsequent daily time sheet data entry.
2. This tool gives you a 'hands on' approach to time management and information gathering.
3. The ability to download individualised reports, accessible 24 hours a day from your unique user login. You will be able to report by activity, person and overall business for time spent by all people across all activities for use in your business.
4. Access to updates and insights as the project progresses.
5. Access to relevant industry reports generated following data analysis, providing you with an opportunity to benchmark your results against industry peers.
6. Involvement in this project allows a platform on which further discussions of labour productivity can be structured.
7. You will gain an increased understanding of the distribution of time spent working throughout the year. This aids in understanding the impact of peak times and the importance resourcing your business appropriately to handle overtime and strike an appropriate work-life balance for you and your team.
8. You will be able to identify opportunities to improve labour productivity as a result of assessment of your own data trends throughout the project.
9. A time sheet tool which meets Fair Work Act 2009 requirements. The Act outlines that all employers must keep accurate records for all employees. This includes hours worked. Records kept relating to hours worked are required for casual or irregular part time workers, and for any other employees where overtime is concerned. This project will provide a tool which assists in meeting this legislation requirement.
10. By submitting your labour data and telling us in 25 words or less what labour saving investment or management change has had the greatest impact on your business, you could win a pre-paid fuel card. There are three fuel cards to be won. Two fuel cards to the value of \$500 each, and one to the value of \$1000. Terms and conditions apply – visit [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli).

## What support will you receive?

We understand and appreciate the level of commitment required by participating producers to deliver this project. The project team at Rural Directions Pty Ltd is dedicated to excellence in consultancy and project delivery. As a result we are excited to be working with sheep and cattle producers nationally to deliver this project and are committed to providing you with dedicated support and encouragement to maintain your engagement throughout the project period.

You will receive:

- A practical user's guide including Standard Operating Procedures for the use of the Quantifying Labour Input tool.
- Ongoing technical support throughout the project.
- Ability to email for technical support directly from your unique user login.
- Phone support when required with the project team.
- Regular e-newsletters direct to your inbox communicating project updates and key findings throughout the project life.

## How will your industry benefit?

By participating in this R&D project you will be assisting industry to understand the opportunity for increasing productivity and profitability. Industry benefits include:

- Quantification of the labour input of participating sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises to individual operations/task types across an annual production cycle will enable identification of where the greatest opportunities exist to improve efficiency of labour use by region and enterprise mix/type.
- This project provides the opportunity to build capacity through awareness, adoption and practice change activities which link the findings of this project with the wider industry. It encourages the uptake of best practice time management and tools that improve labour efficiency on-farm.
- This project presents an opportunity to link with other relevant R&D projects and associated activities.

## How will my personal information and data be protected?

Operating in a confidential manner and protecting your data is paramount. Any data collected by Rural Directions Pty Ltd and used in this project will be done so that individual participating businesses cannot be identified. Confidentiality is maintained at all times.

The latest security technologies have been implemented for this system, with disaster recovery built-in to protect all data.

## When does it start?

A group of producers are already participating in this project, and collecting data.

Register by the 21 February 2014 to participate in Round 2.

Participants can join the project at any time. However, a commitment of at least 12 months (one production cycle) is required.

**Get involved today - you could WIN A PRE-PAID FUEL CARD\***

To register, visit [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli)

Contact    Natasha Morley  
T 08 8841 4500  
E [nmorley@ruraldirections.com](mailto:nmorley@ruraldirections.com)



**\*Competition details.** To enter, entrants must register to participate in the MLA research project Quantifying labour input of individual operations in Australian sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises by providing their full name, address, email address, phone number via [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli) plus submit their enterprise and labour data, and 25-word answer where prompted in the Project database. By submitting your labour data and telling us in 25 words or less what labour saving investment of management change has had the greatest impact on your business, you could win a pre-paid fuel card. There are three fuel cards to be won. The promotion commences at 9:00am AEDT, 1 February 2014 and closes at 5:00pm AEDT, 30 October 2015.

**Prizes.** All prizes will be awarded to the best entries, as determined by the judging panel. The first two prizes, pre-paid fuel cards to the value of \$500 each will be awarded on 1 September 2014. The overall winner of a pre-paid fuel card to the value of \$1000 will be selected by the judging panel on 1 December 2015.

Terms and Conditions apply. Visit [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli) for more information and to review the competition terms and conditions.

### Disclaimer

Care is taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication. However Rural Directions Pty Ltd and MLA cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information or opinions contained in the publication. You should make your own enquiries before making decisions concerning your interests.

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

## **Appendix 2 QLI Producer Case Study – Scott Campbell**



**Research to quantify the labour input of Australian sheepmeat and beef cattle enterprises can also give you insights into your business**

## **Case Study**

**Scott and Sophie Campbell**



# A very good decision making tool

Scott and Sophie Campbell  
Brecon Proprietors, Keith, South Australia

Scott and Sophie Campbell have been using an electronic time sheet system for about three years. They manage a diverse enterprise mix including a self replacing merino flock, and first cross ewes for prime lamb production; lucerne seed; lucerne hay and cropping near Keith in South Australia. Everyone in their business uses the system; their four employees plus Scott and Sophie. Data is entered into the online database, which allows them to report by team member, activity or to the whole of business level per activity.

Scott implemented the timesheet system into their business because they wanted to understand how they were spending their time. Specifically they have been interested in understanding time spent on repairs and maintenance for machinery and property, and the time spent on administration/office work. It was also important to Scott to gain a better understanding of the time spent running the lucerne enterprise and time involved in irrigation, to use the information as a guide for determining labour needs during key times of the year. Having the categories broken down to allow for individual activities to be measured was very beneficial to allow for this.

"We have used it to assess the time spent baling lucerne and discovered during these peak times, we have been lacking labour units. We now have a better understanding of our labour needs for baling," Scott explained.

"Completing time sheets is a requirement of all team members as part of our ongoing 'paper trail' – yes, it's tedious, but the benefits of this information is fantastic, and heavily outweighs the time to document and enter the data."

Scott reinforces that to gain the most value from the tool; everyone in the business needs to have their time entered.

"It's also important that everyone is clear as to which activity goes to which category to get the most value from the data" he said.

"We have also used our time sheet information to compare against a couple of other similar businesses to see how our time spent on certain activities compares. This was a good process, as it highlighted that our R&M for machinery and property was similar."

None of the data has shocked Scott at this stage, but he enforces the power of the information in decision making and he reviews the data every 6 months, or if there is a new piece of machinery or equipment being considered.

Using the information when assessing new machinery or equipment purchases has been an invaluable decision making tool for the business.

In new research, Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is looking to industry to help quantify the labour input of their individual sheepmeat and beef cattle operations. The research, being conducted by Rural Directions Pty Ltd invites sheepmeat and beef cattle producers to participate in the project. Register your interest to take part in this research project, get access to the new online tool and start to understand how to make the most of your labour on-farm.

## Disclaimer

Care is taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication. However Rural Directions Pty Ltd and MLA cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information or opinions contained in the publication. You should make your own enquiries before making decisions concerning your interests.

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.



"We know the time it takes before the machinery purchase, and can use this to validate making a new investment for the business. Once the new piece of equipment has been implemented, we can very quickly see the improvements in efficiency. We have the data, it's all there in front of us, and we can't believe the labour saving we have gained. Through purchasing the bale stacker, we have saved 300 hours of labour per year - incredible!"

"We have saved 300 hours of labour per year - incredible!"

"I feel, as farmers, we don't often understand where our time goes. Farmers can often spend 10 hours a day working, and half of us get to the end of the week and wonder where the time was spent. The QLI (Quantifying Labour Input) tool is a fantastic tool to monitor how time is spent in your business, and across enterprises to allow you to make improvements.

"It will give you the ability to identify problems, and bring your attention to other issues that you may have overlooked normally without this information.

"We have found the tool really handy in infrastructure and machinery changeover decisions. The system puts a 'time factor' to it – it's a very good decision making tool."

## Get involved today

Visit [www.ruraldirections.com/qli](http://www.ruraldirections.com/qli)

Contact Natasha Morley on 08 8841 4500

E [nmorley@ruraldirections.com](mailto:nmorley@ruraldirections.com)

