FEEDBACK

MLA – FOSTERING PROSPERITY

WINTER 2025

MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA

MLA fosters the long-term prosperity of the Australian red meat and livestock industry by delivering world-leading outcomes that fuel global competitiveness, sustainability and producer profitability.

Cover: (From left) Alex Walter with Tom, Anne and Todd Woodard at the Woodard family's beef and sheep property near Naracoorte, SA. Learn more about their feedbase success story on page 12.

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Have your say!

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MLA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, work and care for. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, as we recognise their history, culture, connection to land and water, and share in their commitment to caring for Country.

A note from the MD

Welcome to the winter edition of *Feedback* magazine.

I want to begin by acknowledging the tough conditions that many MLA members have been grappling with – severe drought gripping parts of SA, Victoria and Southern NSW, record floods in western Queensland in March, and another major flooding event in May along the NSW and Queensland coast.

The stock losses and damage to infrastructure are devastating.

Our thoughts go out to all producers dealing with these significant natural disasters.

Governments have created assistance packages for producers and MLA has collated information on recovery and response, available at mla.com.au/dealing-with-natural-disasters, which I encourage you to visit.

Strategic Plan 2030

MLA's new *Strategic Plan 2030* sets our strategic direction over the next five years to capture and create value for the industry. It was shaped by strong consultation with members and key stakeholders, and is aligned to *Red Meat 2030* – the industry's shared 10-year plan. Turn to page 4 to read more about our bold ambitions for the red meat and livestock industry.

International trade

The global trade environment is facing uncertainty following the decision from the United States in April to impose tariffs on its trading partners.

The overall demand outlook is very positive however there are knock-on effects around the world which are complex and create both opportunities and challenges for Australia.

I was able to hear directly about these complex trade relationships in April when I visited several key Asian markets for Australian red meat – including Japan, China and Korea – the week after the tariff announcements.

One of the key messages was that there is much to be excited about when it comes to selling Australian red meat into international markets. The overall sentiment was one of positivity when it came to the relationship of our partners with Australia.

The way we do business, the reliability of our product and the demand outlook for Australian red meat is very strong.

Australia remains a highly trusted trading partner with our three largest Asian trading partners: Greater China, Japan and Korea.

Our product is renowned for being safe, sustainable, having a long shelf-life and being high quality, meeting a broad range of cuisines and using a wide range of cuts across their different ways of consuming red meat.

Our teams working in our international markets are doing a fantastic job. They have strong relationships with our government representatives, with the importers, exporter representatives and with the breadth of retail and foodservice customers. They are committed to driving demand and capturing opportunities for the beef, sheep, lamb and goatmeat sectors.

Capturing value for the Australian industry has been greatly enhanced by the extensive work of the industry's investments in international marketing through MLA, using a broad range of strategies to build the Australian brand.

Standout examples include the Aussie Beef Mates and Lambassador programs, which use local chefs and food professionals in-market as advocates for Australian product. By working with the MLA teams on the ground in-country, these advocates develop an in-depth understanding of the immense value of Australian product.

Other major initiatives include promotions with major retail chains and partners, and working behind the scenes with Australian government representatives to maintain market access and share insights.

These activities – and many more – support demand in these countries which has significant flow-on benefits for producers.

While overseas, I was also able to see some rapidly emerging positive trends that you will hear more about in months and years ahead. For example, goatmeat volumes in South Korea have gone from 1,000 tonnes in 2020 to 8,000t in 2024.

In Japan, lamb has become a top food trend particularly in younger consumers who are seeking out new protein options, meaning there are plenty of opportunities in addition to our traditional market segments.

While there are headwinds around cost of living, trade uncertainty, and filling available quote volumes, MLA will continue to work with industry and partners to enhance these market opportunities, capturing value for producers. ■

Michael Crowley – MLA Managing Director

I am always keen to hear MLA members' thoughts and feedback – please email me at **managing.director@mla.com.au**

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Industry appointment

Congratulations to Sarah Strachan, who has been appointed MLA's General Manager – Research Development and Adoption (RDA).

Scan or click the QR code to learn more:

What do US tariffs mean for your business?

In April, the US Government announced a baseline 10% tariff on Australian beef, sheepmeat and goatmeat. While these tariffs present challenges, the Australian red meat industry is well prepared with a strong and diversified global trade network.

MLA's core focus remains on growing demand for Australian red meat globally. Our international markets program supports improved access to global markets, works alongside commercial partners to expand opportunities, and promotes Australian red meat's reputation as a safe, healthy, and high-quality product.

Scan or click the QR code to find out more about the tariffs and how MLA is working closely with industry and government to safeguard the interests of Australian producers:

MLA UPDATES

Towards 2030: Driving prosperity through

Save the date!

MLA's flagship event, MLA Updates, is heading to Adelaide, SA, in November.

The program includes:

- **19 November:** a collaborative field trip with Livestock SA and the University of Adelaide, followed by the Livestock SA Annual General Meeting (AGM), welcome drinks and a Livestock SA dinner.
- **20 November:** MLA Updates, including an industry breakfast, practical demonstrations, presentations and panel sessions, as well as MLA's AGM and a sundowner social event.

Last year's MLA Updates event in Perth attracted more than 350 attendees to hear about how MLA's investments in research, development and marketing can add value to their red meat and livestock businesses. This year's event promises to be even bigger, and will also provide insights into how the first year of MLA's new *Strategic Plan 2030* is delivering practical outcomes to improve producers' productivity, profitability and sustainability.

Mark the date in your calendars and keep an eye out for more detail on the event later this year at updates.mla.com.au or sign up to *The Weekly* e-newsletter at mla.com.au/enews

Accelerate productivity this sale season

Heading to a bull or ram sale soon? Flick to MLA's *Genetics quick guide* inserted in this edition of *Feedback* for some handy tips and tricks to set you up for the sales.

Designed for commercial cattle and sheep producers, this guide:

- gives a simple overview of genetic tools
- offers practical insights into sire shopping
- spotlights a leading producer who has incorporated genetics into his business
- outlines what training programs are available to sharpen your genetic knowledge.

Accelerating your productivity has never been easier – see insert to find out more, or visit genetics.mla.com.au

Chat to ISC, anytime

Integrity Systems Company (ISC) has launched a 24/7 online support tool – ISC ChatBot.

The new ChatBot is a great option to access around-the-clock support for electronic National Vendor Declarations (eNVD), the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) and Livestock Production Assurance (LPA), as well as many other enquiries.

You can find the ISC ChatBot in the bottom right-hand corner of the website as well as the myMLA and LPA account pages. To receive answers that are more tailored to your needs, log in via myMLA for account-specific guidance.

If you prefer to chat to a person, ISC's customer service desk is still on hand seven days a week from 8am–7pm (AEST) Monday–Friday and 9am–5pm (AEST) Saturday–Sunday: 1800 683 111.

integritysystems.com.au

Five resources to use and share this season

MLA members are facing challenging seasonal conditions this season.

We recognise tough conditions look different for different regions, so we've compiled a list of five of our information hubs to navigate through this time.

Please share these with your on-farm team, neighbours and friends who might need resources, reassurance and support. ■

Drought hub

Tools, guides and case studies for producers as they manage through and plan to recover from drought: **mla.com.au/drought-management**

Flood recovery hub

A directory of services, contacts, support and resources to manage and recover from extreme rainfall and flood: **mla.com.au/flood-recovery**

Wellbeing and disaster recovery hub

Contacts if you or someone you know wants to talk through how you're feeling, as well as tools and resources for online support: **mla.com.au/mental-health**

Containment feeding resources

Producer guides, webinars and case studies covering design, nutrition, health and management of stock in containment through the dry: **mla.com.au/containment-feeding**

Transport hub

Tailored, practical livestock preparation guidelines to ensure the safe transport of livestock – including considerations when transporting livestock impacted by challenging seasons: **mla.com.au/transport-hub**

Beef's first-class ticket

Aussie beef has a starring role as a premium option at 1,233 Subway stores around Australia, with a new MLA co-developed steak sandwich featuring on the quick-service restaurant's 'Signature Menu'.

The Philly-style three-cheese steak, which launched in March, was the result of a combined new product development session between Subway and MLA's Business Development and Australian Beef Marketing teams.

Subway's transformative Signature Menu gives customers curated, great-tasting creations without having to select every ingredient. The Signature subs are chef-designed to deliver fresh taste experiences with a simplified ordering process.

MLA's product and business development manager and corporate chef, Sam Burke, said the Philly-style sandwich features Aussie beef steak, three cheeses (mozzarella, cheddar and old English), capsicum, onion, jalapenos and garlic aioli on toasted white bread.

"Subway Australia markets this sandwich as an indulgent experience, so it ties in perfectly with building the superiority of beef by inspiring Australians to choose beef as their number one choice when they want the best," Sam said.

The collaboration between MLA and Subway is the result of a targeted strategy to expand the repertoire of beef on menus beyond the burger and steak.

"It's one example of how MLA's Business Development program is demonstrating the profitability and commercial benefits of red meat through culinary workshops and menu development with high-volume foodservice operators to ensure continued and expanded red meat menu penetration." ■

Sam Burke **sburke@mla.com.au**

Production and profitability at centre of MLA's new strategic direction

MLA has launched our new *Strategic Plan 2030*, with the vision to deliver productivity and profitability to underpin the sustainability and prosperity of the red meat and livestock industry.

The plan was shaped by strong consultation with MLA's members and key stakeholders and sets out to achieve five bold ambitions (outlined on page 5–7):

- Contributing to Australia's net zero ambition.
- Delivering value-based marketing.
- Establishing multibreed genetic evaluation and livestock credentials.
- Driving demand through marketing, market access and social capital.
- Investing in our industry's people.

Here are highlights from the Strategic Plan 2030 – to read the full document and see how MLA's performance will be measured, head to **mla.com.au/strategic-plan-2030**

How the plan was developed

Over the past year, we held more than 20 consultation sessions nationwide, engaging producers, industry groups, government and our people.

We received thousands of responses through face-to-face events and online feedback. This input helped us refine our direction and ensure our priorities align with *Red Meat 2030* – the industry's 10-year plan. Working closely with peak industry bodies was essential to this process.

Our goals and guiding principles

MLA's *Strategic Plan 2030* is insight-led and market-driven, keeping customers and consumers at its core. and focuses on value creation and capture along the supply chain to drive profitability for beef, sheep and goat producers.

The plan reflects our commitment to meet evolving market needs, with pricing and feedback guiding supply. Advancing market access and reducing technical and non-tariff trade barriers will continue to unlock value for the industry.

Strategic partnerships will support value-based marketing and help shift from a supply chain to a true value chain. This includes redeveloping NLIS to strengthen our integrity systems and enhance data capabilities, enabling seamless information flow and greater value.

The *Strategic Plan 2030* is centred on innovation. A balanced portfolio of research and development will deliver practical, measurable outcomes. Our people will work directly with producers, researchers and supply chain partners to drive this impact.

The plan sets out how sustainability efforts will focus on reducing emissions and improving efficiency, supported by our partnership with the Zero Net Emissions Agriculture Cooperative Research Centre. We'll continue investing in carbon storage and emissions avoidance to enable growth with positive environmental outcomes.

As we deliver for industry, we'll share our story with the community through platforms like Australian Good Meat to deliver a more prosperous, sustainable red meat industry.

Learn more about MLA's vision and our bold ambitions for the next five years on the next page.

Our *Strategic Plan 2030* vision

Productivity and profitability will underpin the sustainability and prosperity of our great industry

By focusing on value creation and capture along the supply chain, we will deliver benefits that translate into profitability for the production sector

will be delivered by MLA values

- **Integrity at heart**
- **Stronger together**
- **Future focused**

Our priorities for 2025–30

Optimise demand by expanding markets and creating and capturing value

The global red meat industry is changing rapidly. MLA's priority is to ensure Australian red meat remains the top choice for consumers at home and abroad. Through market insights, expanded demand and strong supply chain collaboration, MLA is focused on creating lasting value across the entire industry. We will:

- Position Australian red meat as the most trusted protein of choice in both domestic and international markets.
- Expand high-value markets, strengthen trade relationships and identify and capitalise on global trends to maximise value across the supply chain.

Drive profitable, productive an sustainable growth

Over the next five years, MLA will lead efforts to enhance the natural carbon cycle, improve animal wellbeing, accelerate genetic progress, strengthen supply chains and drive innovation. We will also focus on building a future-ready workforce through leadership development, safe and inclusive workplaces, and clear career pathways. We will:

- Invest in research, development and adoption to ensure long-term success to enhance productivity and resilience for producers and the supply chain.
- Strengthen national traceability and quality assurance programs to reinforce Australia's global reputation and maintain our competitive advantage in premium markets.
- Accelerate the adoption of cutting-edge technology and innovation.
- Lead the industry's path to sustainability and contribute to Australia's net zero ambition.

Strengthen the industry's foundation

To deliver on its vision, MLA must be equipped with the right people, tools and strategies. A strong internal foundation built on efficiency, adaptability and clear communication will ensure MLA continues to deliver value to the red meat and livestock industry. We will:

- Ensure MLA is an agile, responsive service company delivering real impact for levy payers by collaborating with industry to respond to global uncertainty.
- Maximise the impact of our funding by partnering with world-leading research organisations to drive innovation, foster thought leadership and support disruptive solutions that deliver outcomes for industry.
- Collaborate and engage with institutional partners including government agencies and other RDCs to maximise the value delivered by MLA's investments.

→ **while focusing on our Strategic Plan priorities** → **to achieve our bold ambitions**

Optimise demand by expanding markets and creating and capturing value

Drive profitable, productive and sustainable growth

Strengthening the industry's foundation

- **Contributing to Australia's net zero ambitions**
- **Delivering value-based marketing**
- **Establishing multibreed genetic evaluation and livestock credentials**
- **Driving demand through marketing, market access and social capital**
- **Investing in our industry's people**

continued next page

Our bold ambitions

MLA's Strategic Plan 2030 provides a clear, ambitious roadmap to boost profitability through innovation, value capture and productivity. This will be underpinned by five bold ambitions:

Contributing to Australia's net zero ambition

We are committed to driving the innovation agenda to deliver productivity-driven sustainability outcomes. This will be achieved by focusing on efficiencies that deliver improvements in the net emissions per kilogram of production.

By continuing to focus on emissions intensity and land stewardship, the red meat and livestock industry can help tackle global climate challenges while growing a profitable and resilient sector that feeds the world.

We will achieve this by leading world-first initiatives that support environmental sustainability while boosting on-farm profitability. The Biogenic Carbon Cycle Program will pioneer a comprehensive approach to measuring the full carbon cycle of grazing ruminants, improving both resource efficiency and the accuracy of emissions calculators and inventory methods.

At the same time, MLA will deliver practical land management strategies that focus on improving water and soil management, optimising grazing systems, enhancing forage conservation, supporting lot feeding, and encouraging income diversification.

To help producers meet increasing market and community expectations, the Environmental Credentials Initiative will provide digital tools such as eLearning modules, calculators, and checklists to support the tracking and adoption of sustainable on-farm practices.

Delivering value-based marketing

Creating and capturing value is central to MLA's vision for a more profitable red meat industry. By moving beyond traditional models, we aim to unlock value at every stage of the supply chain.

MLA's value capture program focuses on providing tools, systems and feedback loops that allow individual livestock carcases to be assessed on traits like meat yield and quality.

Carcase feedback will reach all parts of the supply chain and MLA will continue to support and enhance traditional commodity markets, ensuring industry can access a full range of marketing opportunities.

We will achieve this by enabling a value-based marketing approach that connects market demand with on-farm decisions.

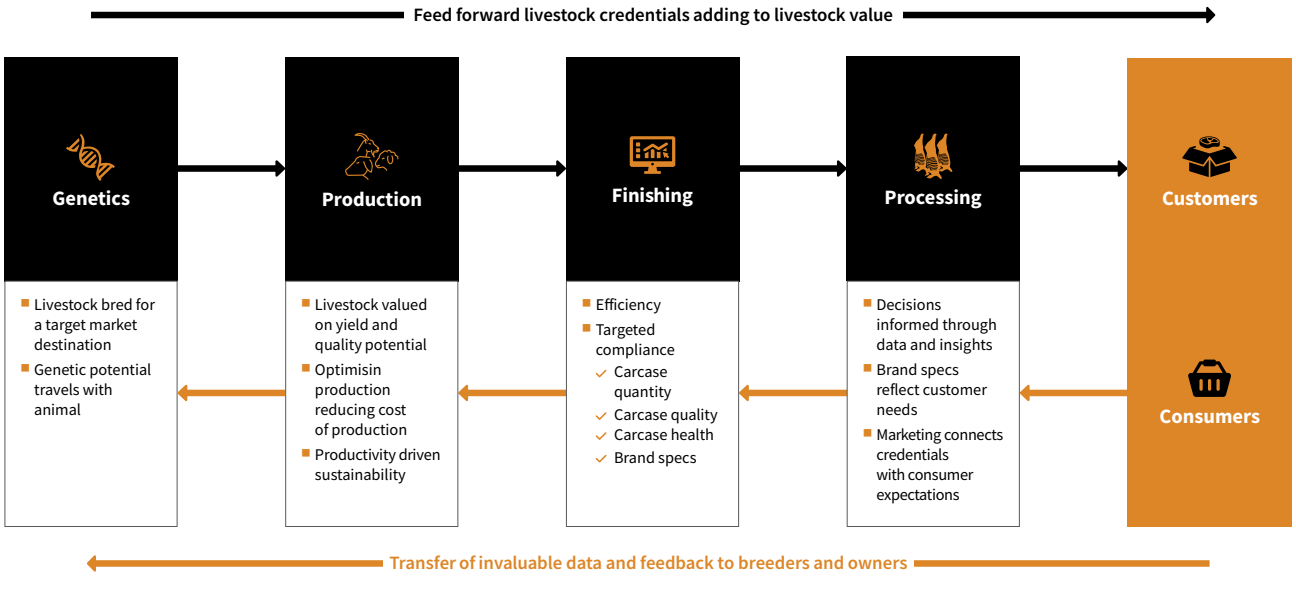
MLA will develop tools that support a value capture model, where market signals are based on objective traits like yield, eating quality, and brand specifications. Real-time, two-way data flow will provide clear pricing signals and generate pull-through demand, driving production decisions.

To support this, MLA will invest in digital platforms that integrate production, genetics and market data, delivering predictive analytics and real-time feedback.

By embedding genetics and eating quality data into decision-making and promoting the use of ag-tech and data dashboards, producers will be better equipped to target premium markets and improve efficiency.

Adoption will be supported through tailored workshops, digital tools and platforms like myFeedback, giving producers the skills and confidence to transition to value-based systems.

Verified livestock credentials will also be developed to independently demonstrate traits valued by the market.



Establishing multibreed genetic evaluation and livestock credentials

MLA is driving genetic progress by investing in tools that support smarter, data-driven breeding decisions. These innovations will improve productivity, eating quality and livestock resilience while supporting profitability and market performance.

Through robust data systems, livestock credentials will flow through the supply chain to underpin industry's commitment to traceability, animal welfare and sustainability.

By combining modern genetics with advanced traceability, MLA is positioning Australia as a global leader in sustainable, high-quality, livestock production.

We will achieve this by advancing genetic evaluation and livestock credentialing to strengthen supply chain alignment, productivity, and market access.

MLA is developing a commercial-scale, multibreed genetic evaluation system to drive improvements in key traits such as fertility, carcase quality and feed efficiency.

At the same time, the expanded use of genomic tools and advanced analytics will enable producers to select for traits such as disease resistance and feed efficiency.

A new digital system will also be introduced to trace and verify livestock credentials from paddock to plate. These feed forward credentials will provide trusted, data-backed evidence of livestock quality, animal welfare and sustainability practices.

Driving demand through marketing, market access and social capital

MLA's marketing efforts drive demand both at home and abroad, while also strengthening the industry's social capital, which is built through public trust and community support, essential to the long-term prosperity of the Australian red meat and livestock industry.

Our social capital depends on how well we connect our industry with communities and communicate our focus on animal welfare, the environment and nutrition.

MLA will target high-growth markets across Asia, the Middle East and other emerging regions while defending and growing our position in key markets like Japan, South Korea and North America.

To support this growth in value, MLA will strengthen partnerships with governments and industry to defend and improve trade access. This includes proactively managing risks, addressing trade disruptions and ensuring Australia's red meat remains a trusted and competitive choice around the world.

We will achieve this by driving global demand for Australian red meat through consumer-led marketing, stronger market access, and proactive storytelling that builds trust and social capital. Campaigns shaped by consumer insights will position beef, lamb and goat as premium proteins.

To secure future demand, MLA will engage younger Australians and culturally diverse communities with tailored messaging, ensuring red meat remains relevant across generations and dietary preferences.

Fact-based storytelling across digital, traditional and social platforms will counter misinformation and showcase the industry's leadership in sustainability, animal welfare, and nutrition.

We'll also work with educators, influencers and industry leaders to strengthen public understanding of red meat's role in a healthy diet and in global food security.

Internationally, MLA will grow loyalty in high-potential markets like South-East Asia, Greater China and the Middle East, while defending Australia's premium reputation in North America, Japan and South Korea. Efforts will align with consumer expectations for ethical, healthy food.

We are firmly committed to the live export trade and will strengthen supply chain capability while driving new market opportunities.

Finally, MLA will work with industry and government to protect and expand trade access, tackling tariffs, quotas and regulatory barriers to keep Australian red meat competitive, compliant and globally respected.

Investing in our industry's people

The future of Australia's red meat and livestock industry depends on a skilled, safe and resilient workforce. MLA is committed to developing the people in the industry through education, leadership development and workplace safety.

We will achieve this by investing in our industry's greatest asset, its people. MLA is committed to developing the workforce of the future by connecting with students through school programs and collaborating with education providers, industry and employers to create clear, rewarding career pathways into the red meat and livestock sector.

To ensure a vibrant and resilient workforce, we are working with industry and government to build safe, inclusive and appealing workplaces that foster wellbeing and long-term careers. This includes promoting a culture that supports diversity, mental health and work-life balance.

We are also nurturing the next generation of industry leaders through a suite of development programs, including formal leadership training, PhD sponsorships, the Intercollegiate Meat Judging (ICMJ) program, our Red Meat Ambassadors initiative, and a growing network of co innovation managers.

Through MLA's Reconciliation Action Plan, we are also deepening our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By building cultural understanding, sharing knowledge and supporting care for Country, we will create stronger relationships and more meaningful connections across the industry.

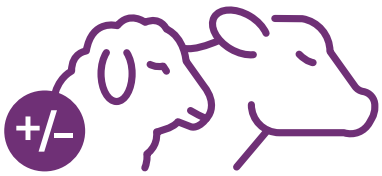
Together, we will ensure that Australian red meat remains the world's premier choice – trusted, sustainable and unmatched in quality.

The stock/take

with Stephen Bignell, Manager – Market Information

MLA's Market Information team unpacks trends and data, to help inform your business.

Projections tip record-breaking production



MLA recently released the latest projections to forecast the national herd, flock, slaughter, carcase weights and production for the next three years.

On the back of 2024 – a year of records for Australian beef, lamb and goat production following several favourable seasons – the industry now has its sights set on what will happen this year: Are further production records on the horizon? What will happen to the flock and herd size over the next few years? Can we maintain the current record slaughter rates?

The aim of the biannual MLA sheep and cattle projections is to provide insights to stakeholders about the supply of Australian sheep and cattle. The projections are released in March, then updated in September on information that becomes available across the year.

Here's a look at highlights from the March projections:

Cattle

- The national cattle herd will remain above 30 million head in 2025, easing slightly as a result of the dry southern region and the delayed wet season. The high female slaughter rate also indicates that Australian slaughter above 8 million is eating into our future breeding herd.
- Australia is expected to slaughter 8.5 million cattle in 2025, an extra 200,000 head or 2.5% on 2024 (a year when record beef production was achieved).
- Australia is expected to achieve record beef prodcution in 2025, producing 2.6 million tonnes. Australia's record production will occur at a time when USA and Brazilian beef production falls due to both of our main competitors entering herd rebuilds.

Sheep

- The sheep flock is expected to be 73.2 million head at 30 June 2025 – a fall of 7.4% due to high mutton slaughter in the second half of 2024 as it became more attractive to processors.
- Lamb production in 2025 is expected to top the record volumes achieved in 2024. In 2025, Australia will produce 629,000 tonnes of lamb meat.
- Lamb production is expected to remain high over the next three-year period, sitting above 600,000 tonnes due to high slaughter and carcase weights.
- Lamb slaughter is expected to remain elevated and sit above 25 million head until 2028. This reflects a change in the Australian flock demographics towards more meat production and meat/shedding breeds.

Bedourie, Queensland – March 2025.

What about the tariffs and flooding?

It's important to note MLA's projections were completed prior to ex-tropical Cyclone Alfred and the extreme rainfall which fell across western Queensland earlier this year and northern NSW in May. These weather events may impact the projected herd and slaughter numbers – this will be reflected in MLA's next release of projections in September.

The US tariffs were also announced and introduced after the projections were released and are therefore not incorporated into these numbers.

Australia continues to respond to strong demand for high-quality red meat globally, exporting record amounts in 2024 to more than 100 countries, with more than 85% of exports covered by free trade agreements. MLA will continue working with industry to support the wind back of tariffs and to grow market demand globally. ■

- MLA market reports: **mla.com.au/prices-markets**
- MLA trends analysis: **mla.com.au/trends-analysis**
- Stephen Bignell **sbignell@mla.com.au**

DIG DEEPER

For more information, scan or click the QR codes:

- Sheep industry projections:
- Cattle industry projections:
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Learn how saltbush and legumes can boost paddock productivity

More lambs for the Mallee

With cropping rotations taking paddock priority in Victoria's northern Mallee, mixed farmers are testing practices to ensure productivity isn't compromised within their sheep operations.

Producers involved in an MLA Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) trialled different management practices with the goal to increase reproduction rates by 5–10%.

PDS facilitator Erica Schelfhorst, Agriculture Victoria, said after workshops with industry experts, producers have chosen to implement different practices to complement their operations.

"The PDS has drawn a range of producers. Some had cattle but have transitioned to sheep so were starting with the basics and wanted to learn everything. Others simply want to improve their reproductive rate or are rebuilding from tough seasonal conditions."

PDS participants used a combination of strategies to get more lambs on the ground. These included:

- later lambing (moving from April to late July/August)
- the 'ram effect' (using teasers)
- improved scanning practices
- managing nutrition
- smaller mob size for twin-bearing ewes.

Before joining: the ram effect

Typically, ewes in the Mallee are joined in early November for more than six weeks. However, introducing testosterone-injected wethers ('teasers') into the mob for two weeks prior to joining induces ewes to cycle. This leads to a more compact joining period when the rams are introduced and a higher conception rate. As such, the joining period can be reduced to six weeks, leading to a more condensed lambing.

Within the PDS, three producers used teasers in their operation – and all experienced better reproduction rates compared with the year prior.

One producer – who is entering his third year of using the practice – has reduced his joining period from 50 to 35 days.

"The bonus of using the ram effect is they've also shortened their joining period, so instead of having lambs being born over seven to nine weeks, they're born over a shorter five-week period," Erica said.

"This change leads to more efficient management and supports lamb finishing."

Later joining: later lambing

A Mallee producer involved in the PDS took the bold step to shift their time of lambing from May to late July to coincide with available green feed for lambing ewes and take advantage of day-length benefits, leading to higher fertility.

This required rejigging their annual sheep husbandry calendar.

"For that producer, later lambing has improved scanning rates and allowed the producer to better align feed demand with availability," Erica said.

"It has also removed the stress of feeding ewes during lambing."

Before lambing: scanning and nutrition

When cropping commands the paddocks, finding appropriate space for ewes to thrive before lambing is difficult.

Limited paddocks and watering points means producers may be unable to separate single and twinning mobs, which can impact lambing survival.

To remedy this, containment feeding was a key practice implemented on farms in the PDS. As well as a practical option for feeding during summer–autumn when stubbles are finished and sowing is underway, ewes can be separated into smaller mobs for targeted management.

The results of lambing can often be determined by activities from the year before.

In the Mallee, lambs are traditionally sold off ewes as suckers with the remaining lambs weaned late. The group also focused on the importance of condition pre-joining, during pregnancy and at lambing to increase reproductive rates.

The reproduction results from all host farms improved between the 2023 and 2024 lambings.

Scanning percentages increased by more than 20% on two farms and, in some some instances, the number of adult ewes carrying twins increased by up to 20%.

The marking rate increased by more than 10% on some farms and the number of dry ewes decreased by up to 5 percentage points across all farms.

With the PDS wrapping up in late 2025, this season and the strategies implemented will reveal how and whether Mallee properties were able to reach their goal of an extra 5–10% reproduction rate. ■

Erica Schelfhorst **erica.schelfhorst@agriculture.vic.gov.au**
Alana McEwan **amcewan@mla.com.au**

Shifting dates helps cruise through dry

When Bec Cruise and her family reintroduced sheep to their operations after 20 years, things weren't all as they remembered – and the challenges were quickly revealed in their lambing percentage.

When she came back to the family farm 11 years ago, Bec was eager to return to sheep production, a goal she finally achieved in 2020.

She drew on local knowledge to set up an initial flock management calendar.

"I called around to all the producers in the area, to work out when everyone put their rams in for joining, took them out, when they were shearing etc," Bec said.

"We followed those dates, but after two years of having to feed during lambing, I thought: 'Why are we doing it this way?'"

Condition scoring sheep at Bec and her family's Carwarp property.

With lambing falling in April – a typically dry period on their Mallee-based farm – Bec realised feeding during lambing would almost always be the normal scenario.

"It wasn't working. We were bringing in hay and filling up grain feeders – lambs were everywhere, and ewes would leave their lambs to come running after us for feed."

The resulting lamb mortalities prompted Bec to find a solution.

Creating a new timeline

In a quest for better results, Bec joined a Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) managed by Agriculture Victoria, which aims to increase the number of lambs weaned for host farmers by 5–10%, using a combination of practices (see story opposite).

"The PDS coordinators encouraged me to change my lambing calendar to lamb later, when we had more feed."

With support from the PDS, in 2024 the family started joining rams in mid-February, which moved lambing from April to mid-July.

As expected, the shift meant a change to their entire production calendar, which required careful planning and negotiating of any seasonal consequences.

One of those changes was to the shearing schedule, which was a blessing in disguise.

"We don't want to be shearing the ewes when they have lambs, so we moved shearing to a couple of weeks after joining," Bec said.

"We use a neighbour's shearing shed, so it worked really well having different shearing times."

Improved lambing

The results of the change became clear at lambing.

From 2023 to 2024, the number of dry ewes decreased by 4% and scanning percentage increased by 24%. Their marking percentage increased by 15% to 126%.

Still, there were challenges.

"Because we now had so much feed during lambing, it went the other way. The lambs were much bigger, so birthing was more challenging," Bec said.

"Every year is different, so there may not always be that much feed at that time – we're going to try the same program again this year, but bring the lambing forward one week.

"Moving lambing will avoid some of the cold weather. We want to be finished lambing well and truly before the end of August."

More changes to come

As part of the PDS, producers were encouraged to implement several practices to improve their production outcomes, including mob size, nutrition, scanning practices and joining length.

Infrastructure is a priority for the family, as they adjust to having sheep back in their business.

"We have to rebuild fences so we can wean lambs off and then put them on our legume stubbles to finish.

"We want to get them off mum, gain weight and get them sold as soon as possible," Bec said.

They also trialled teasers (introducing wethers to induce cycling in ewes prior to joining) but with the production calendar shift this became unnecessary as joining later meant ewes were naturally cycling better.

In the long-term, introducing perennial pastures will be a key focus to eliminate time and costs associated with sowing fodder crops.

Confidence to change

Bec and her family intend to continue operating with the modified production calendar, tackling challenges as they arise.

Beyond the operations support, the PDS involved expert-led workshops and on-farm days to learn about feed and nutrition, lamb autopsies, biosecurity and other elements to improve lamb production for participants.

SNAPSHOT

BEC CRUISE –
Carwarp, Victoria

AREA
4,000ha

ENTERPRISE
1,500 sheep

PASTURES
Variable

SOILS
Sandy, sandy loam

RAINFALL
270mm

TOOLBOX

- Make more from your sheep: **makingmorefromsheep.com.au**
- MLA's eLearning library has tips to improve the time of lambing – scan or click the QR code to learn more:
- Join a PDS: **mla.com.au/pds**

Bec attributes the confidence to try something new to her involvement in the PDS.

"When it comes to a big change like this, there are so many factors to manage. Having the support and expertise of the PDS coordinators is the only way we could have had the confidence to change the program," Bec said.

> **"When it comes to a big change like this, there are so many factors to manage. Having the support and expertise of the PDS coordinators is the only way we could have had the confidence to change the program."**

Bec Cruise **bec@newhavenfarms.au** Alana McEwan **amcewan@mla.com.au**

Making their mark

The Woodards use data to make rational decisions to manage their livestock regardless of what seasonal challenges they face.

Over nearly three decades of stewardship, the Woodards have transformed their south-east SA grazing enterprise into a resilient business with land, livestock and family at its heart.

Todd and Anne Woodard, through the 'Peel Pastoral' partnership with Todd's mother Heather and sister Sue, purchased the 930ha 'Walnamere' at Wrattonbully, outside Naracoorte, 27 years ago. Although Todd and Anne are the first generation to run this property, their management is grounded in their industry experience.

Their complementary qualifications in Farm Management and Agricultural Production (Todd) and Natural Resource Management (Anne) from SA's Roseworthy Agricultural College took them around Australia before they found a place to call home in the prime agricultural region of the Limestone Coast.

Today, Peel Pastoral has expanded to 3,600ha of owned and leased country. It's home to a 1,300-head self-replacing Angus breeder herd and 3,000 ewes based on White Suffolk genetics with a high-fecundity Multimeat gene. The team has grown to include Assistant Manager Alex Walter, and Todd and Anne's son Tom, in the role of Livestock Manager. Their daughter Pip and her husband Pieter are involved in another farming business in the region.

Although Peel Pastoral is a family business, it has a corporate structure to include off-farm family investors. This professional approach flows throughout the business, and Anne has implemented processes such as workplace safety systems and professional development opportunities.

Regenerative evolution

The region's Mediterranean climate delivers hot summers and cool, wet winters. While the average rainfall throughout the Woodards' ownership sits at 520mm, their 12-month rolling rainfall through to May 2025 was 400mm.

When *Feedback* visited the Woodards coming into autumn, the amount of standing dry feed on offer made it hard to believe they were emerging from one of the driest 12 months on record.

Rather than depend on containment feeding, extensive supplementation or significant destocking, the family has a detailed grazing strategy to secure feed despite what the season throws at them.

"We always say, you have to love grass more than livestock," Todd said.

"If you can get your pastures and soils as productive as possible, your livestock enterprise will flourish on top of that."

This focus on grass is founded on three core principles of grazing management to support and enhance permanent perennial grasslands:

- working with nature: matching animal nutritional requirements with peak pasture growth (timing of reproduction)
- matching carrying capacity with stocking rates
- data-backed decisions.

Todd and Anne Woodard at 'Walnamere' Wrattonbully, SA.

SNAPSHOT

TODD AND ANNE WOODARD – 'Walnamere', Wrattonbully, SA

AREA
3,600ha

ENTERPRISE
1,300 Angus breeders and 3,000 composite ewes

PASTURES
Phalaris, cocksfoot, chicory, plantain

SOILS
Sandy alum/loamy sand over clay

RAINFALL
520mm

Grazing cycles

The Woodards have split their land into 210 paddocks ranging from 15–25ha. Livestock are moved across this network to support pasture rest/recovery phases.

"Our pasture management is based around permanent, perennial grasslands," Todd said. "Perennials are so important because of their roots, their durability if they are managed correctly, and their robustness.

"They enjoy a short intense graze and long rest, so we move livestock based on ground cover targets, animal nutritional requirements and paddock rest."

The deep-rooted nature of perennials – combined with 80% ground cover to minimise evaporation, erosion and high soil temperatures – allows the Woodards to take advantage of any, even out-of-season, rain.

Grazing to protect plants' roots also supports soil biology, to enhance carbon capture and reduce inputs.

The resulting paddock health supports robust populations of dung beetles. Tom and Alex regularly turn over dung in paddocks to monitor beetle activity and to check for dietary signs that cattle are ready to move on to new paddocks. They've been involved in projects to breed new varieties of dung beetles for year-round activity and soil and carbon benefits.

The family has also instigated soil carbon projects, to create another layer of capital.

"We not only see a huge production benefit by increasing our soil carbon, but it also enables us as producers to be involved in the wider conversation around carbon credits and access emerging markets based on our carbon balance sheet."

Set-aside paddocks

Coming into spring, the Woodards pull out up to 600ha from the grazing rotation, creating a bank of reserve feed to draw on through the following autumn feed gap.

"With our spring flush, feed gets ahead of us so we drop 15–20% out of the rotation. This allows us to concentrate on managing the pastures in the remaining paddocks," Todd said.

"These set-aside paddocks are essentially our 'hay stack' for deferred grazing. By the time stock come onto them in April/May, there's about 200 days rest in them and they take us through to the opening break. This allows the rest of the paddocks in the rotation to grow enough pasture to support the animals when they come out of the set-aside paddocks. We use electric tapes to section paddocks to achieve high-impact, high-density grazing."

This philosophy of working with the environment, rather than against it, extends to all aspects of management. For example, they realigned calving and lambing from autumn to winter, to better match feed on offer with animals' nutritional requirements.

Tom said this grazing system has delivered solid reproduction rates despite a tough season, with minimal reliance on supplementation apart from a loose lick through summer for protein.

"We recorded 143% lambs marked to ewes mated, and our cattle had 90% conception with older breeders (or 88% including heifers). This was achieved with a 42-day joining period, which we feel is efficient given the seasonal conditions," Tom said.

Decisions based on data

The Woodards use data to support rational decisions when times are tough.

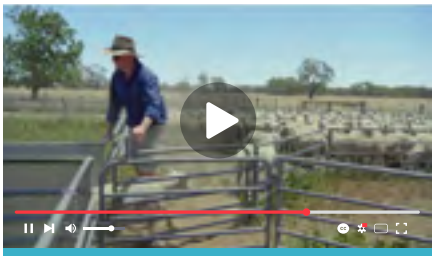
"Our strategy is simple. We set key dates, formulate plans around those dates, then act on those plans," Todd said.

"We've developed predictive mechanisms in our business, based on data such as rainfall and feed on offer, to understand in advance where we're going. This data has built up over time to become accurate and highly meaningful to making business decisions."

They crunch the numbers three months out from key dates (such as the autumn feed gap) to calculate how many animals they can take to their 'green date' (the start of the new growing season). The predictions are ground-truthed with pasture measurements to identify if triggers need to be pulled to adjust stocking.

"We're always calculating how much grass we've got in front of us, to form a picture about whether we are under or over-stocked. In response, we can trade cattle to capitalise on surplus grass or sell animals we've already identified to lighten the load."

These 'first to go' stock include dry animals, as well as second-cycle calvers which are identified with foetal ageing at preg testing. These cows are initially retained but can be sold if pasture availability necessitates reduced numbers.



Peel Pastoral was featured as a virtual farm tour at MLA's recent Naracoorte MeatUp event - scan or click the QR code to watch:

Breed selection

In keeping with their philosophy of working with nature, the Woodards have fine-tuned their herd and flock to be seasonally responsive.

Alex said the main breeding objectives are fertility, followed by good growth and carcase traits.

"Ideally, we're looking to breed an animal that suits our system and environment, and is going to produce a good quality calf which can either be a replacement breeder or is saleable for our target markets."

Their composite flock is primarily geared to the store lamb market but also supports opportunistic finishing if the season allows.

"Likewise, on the cattle side of the business we turn off weaners to repeat local clients – but if we have a good year, we can keep them for longer," Todd said. "We love the flexibility this gives us."

Alex uses tools such as electronic identification to record data about weight gains and fertility, and regularly condition scores to 'pull levers'.

"Condition scoring is very useful for making decisions," Alex said. "We often do our weaning based on the condition score of the cow, rather than a set date. I aim for a condition score of three for cows at calving and at weaning – this allows us to keep a bit more condition on the cow, which she may need to draw down on later in the season."

Looking ahead, Todd said their goals were to continue making Peel Pastoral more robust and resilient as they navigate climate and market variabilities, with a particular focus on how they understand and manage natural capital on-farm. ■

Turn the page to see Peel Pastoral's management toolbox, and check out page 26 to learn more about an MLA Producer Demonstration Site the business was involved in.

"We recorded 143% lambs marked to ewes mated, and our cattle had 90% conception with older breeders (or 88% including heifers). This was achieved with a 42-day joining period, which we feel is efficient given the seasonal conditions."

continued next page

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What's in our management toolkit?

The team at Peel Pastoral share their top tips and tools:

Todd Woodard
Manager

Forward plan

"Collect data, look ahead and set key dates to trigger actions. Set procedures and policies so you know exactly what to do when you get to those dates – and make decisions early."

mla.com.au/meatup

Monitor

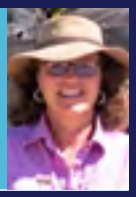
"Continually monitor feed availability and identify animals which can go out of your system, so when you get to a key date you can quickly destock if you need to."

etools.mla.com.au/fbrp

Soil biology

"Dung beetles are part of the story about being robust and working with what is available to build soil health – they're a really important part of nutrient cycling."

mla.com.au/dung-beetles



Anne Woodard
Office manager

Farm safety

"We use an occupational health and safety app, Safe Ag Systems, for staff inductions and to record our policies and procedures. We also make sure everyone has up-to-date first aid training."

safeagsystems.com

Professional development

"Our staff are our biggest asset. We give our team access to off-farm activities and events, so they can bring new knowledge and ideas back into our business."

mla.com.au/events

Research

"We've hosted MLA-funded Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) events. Learning is a two-way street – we get feedback on our challenges as well as learn from other producers."

mla.com.au/pds

Tom Woodard
Livestock manager

Market flexibility

"We usually sell lambs as stores but last year the price was down, so we held onto them and finished them on our centre pivots to achieve a better result. Monitoring pastures, animals and the market allows us to make accurate decisions, early."

mla.com.au/prices-markets

Nutrition

"We've developed spreadsheets to calculate the energy requirement of ewes and any deficiency, based on feed availability. Last year was the first time we didn't have sufficient feed for our June/July lambing, so we had to rely on trail feeding. We target 150% lambs to ewes joined – last year it was 143% but we were happy with this result, given the season."

mla.com.au/bwfw

Breeding objectives

"Our breeding objective is to produce as many lambs as possible. We also select for traits such as growth rate and worm egg counts, to maintain a healthy, productive flock."

genetics.mla.com.au

Alex Walter
Assistant manager

Electronic identification (eID)

"We do a lot with our eIDs – we record weight gains and pregnancy status, so we can track their performance year-to-year. They give us useful information to make decisions."

integritysystems.com.au/eid

Low-stress handling

"We use low-stress stock handling techniques, especially through weaning. This helps with weight gain and with management through their life, so we have nice, quiet cows that are easy to work with."

mla.com.au/animal-handling

Fertility

"We apply selection pressure for fertility with a six-week joining followed by preg testing and foetal-ageing to identify the performers. We're going to use Angus HeiferSELECT as a tool to inform the selection of heifers."

genetics.mla.com.au
angusaustralia.com.au

> **"Our staff are our biggest asset. We give our team access to off-farm activities and events, so they can bring new knowledge and ideas back into our business."**

mla.com.au/meatup **peelpastoral.com.au** Todd and Anne Woodard **peelpastoral@bigpond.com**

Herd classification made easy

Northern beef producers now have a tool to overcome challenges presented by the previous lack of clear and consistent livestock classifications.

Bush AgriBusiness recently released new *Australian Herd Classification Guidelines*, which are supported by an MLA Donor Company project to develop an online platform, Herdflow.

These guidelines provide clear descriptions of cattle classifications, which producers can use when reconciling herd numbers. Herd reconciliation delivers a herd asset inventory which can be used to improve management, or for valuation purposes.

The initial challenge

Bush AgriBusiness Director, Ian McLean, said if herd numbers aren't reconciled, then herd productivity estimates are not accurate (and are usually overestimated).

"In our experience working with hundreds of extensive cattle businesses, many producers can find it quite challenging to reconcile their stock numbers," Ian said.

"Keeping on top of specific classes and numbers is not always an easy task – incomplete musters, fence crawlers, multiple brandings/weanings and unknown deaths make it more difficult."

He said even corporate businesses – which often have a dedicated employee responsible for managing stock numbers – can still face a lack of clarity and consistency about herd class.

"What one producer might label a heifer, another might label a breeder or even a joiner.

"The impacts these inconsistencies can have on a producer's ability to make business decisions or gain access to finances to improve the business often go unnoticed right up until the moment they have to produce a detailed record of herd numbers."

Understanding the value

Ian said the elements of a reconciled herdflow requires details about:

- how many animals were in each class at the start of the year
- movements throughout the year (purchases, natural increase, class transfers, sales and deaths)
- what numbers were on hand at the end of the year.

"It's a way for producers to record the data that will guide decisions, allow purchases and investments to be made with confidence, and act as supporting documentation when seeking a bank loan," Ian said.

"If recorded in a nationally standardised way, this data can be submitted to generate industry statistics that will give producers insights into where they are sitting on the national scale of production.

"Ultimately, it's a resource that can be used to improve the productivity and profitability of your business."

How they work

Where possible, Ian said these new guidelines have been developed to be consistent with and complementary to the *National Bovine Livestock Language Guidelines*.

"The national livestock guidelines, while comprehensive when it comes to physical attributes, do not clearly identify how to categorise a crop of animals at a point in time and do not include animal or age group tracking over time," he said.

"The goal with our newly developed guidelines is to improve how we collect herd data by facilitating a consistent application across the industry – formalising what many producers are already successfully doing in a way that will ensure a better impact."

The guidelines for classifying animals developed by Bush AgriBusiness include:

- Age by year (AgeYear) (primary)
- Sex (primary)
- Reproductive status (primary)
- Management groups (secondary)
- Animal classification (secondary).

"We aren't expecting total uniformity from everyone in the industry, but we are expecting that these guidelines will allow for an easier to use system that can be interpreted by all," Ian said.

For example:

- in northern Australia cattle, are typically branded with a number corresponding to the financial year a calf is born
- in southern Australia, calves are marked with a coloured tag that corresponds to their calendar year of birth.

"Both situations are completely fine to use within the guidelines, but the approach to classifying AgeYear should be clearly communicated and kept consistent.

"Ultimately, we want producers to be able to make the most out of the data they're recording."

Useability and accessibility

Producers in MLA's Northern Breeding Business (NB2) program have been trialling the guidelines (in an Excel spreadsheet template) and providing feedback on its useability and benefits.

Bush AgriBusiness and MLA are continuing to develop the online Herdflow platform, which is set to become accessible to producers by the end of 2025. A free one-year subscription to the app will be available to producers with a myMLA membership. ■

TOOLBOX

Scan or click this QR code to access the *Australian Herd Classification Guidelines*:

Become a myMLA member at **mymla.com.au**

> **"It's a way for producers to record the data that will guide decisions, allow purchases and investments to be made with confidence, and act as supporting documentation when seeking a bank loan."**

Ian McLean **ian@bushagri.com.au** Tony Parker **tparker@mla.com.au**

NB2 pieces together pasture puzzle

Weaners in the yard at 'Drumburle' following last year's weaning muster.

Stuart and Katie Barrett have overcome a productivity challenge in their breeding and backgrounding operation 'Drumburle', south of Biloela in Central Queensland.

By accessing historic forage mapping and the expertise available through MLA's Northern Breeding Business (NB2) program, they solved the puzzle of why there were inconsistencies in grazing pressure in some of their highly productive growing country.

Led by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (QDPI), this NB2 pilot program involved producer groups across northern Australia.

Stuart has been part of the Fitzroy NB2 program since 2021 and took on the role of producer coordinator for the nine other grazing businesses involved.

Pasture insights improve productivity

The program's skill-building activities unlocked key insights into why areas of the Barretts' pasture were being underutilised despite being located on heavier, more productive scrub soils.

Stuart used DPI's Grazing Resilience and Sustainable Solutions (GRASS) program to access Drumburle's historical ground cover percentages – it revealed clues on how to improve the feed quality in these areas.

He paired this with on-ground observations. After purchasing land which had a valley with deep black soil, Stuart noticed his cattle were favouring soft natural grasses on the lighter land types on higher ground.

"The valley consistently had really good ground cover – you'd think the cattle would be down in the valley getting the best pasture from this soil, but they were actually up on the ridge," Stuart said.

A closer look at pasture type revealed why.

"There's an abundance of setaria species like purple pigeon grass and Biloela buffel growing there. They're persistent and perennial but not particularly palatable."

Chatting to other producers in the group revealed they had experienced similar issues with these species.

Eat your greens

To encourage his cattle to make use of the valley's productive and plentiful grasses, Stuart introduced the protein-packed legume, leucaena.

"The valley's 100ha of purple pigeon grass is hardy and provides lots of roughage, which cattle need when they're consuming a lot of protein," he said.

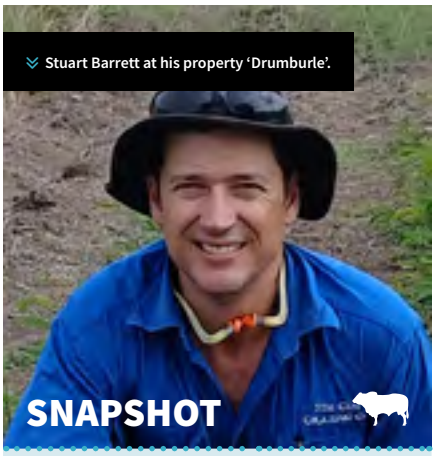
NB2 gave him confidence to plant 38ha of leucaena in February last year.

"If I hadn't done the program, I wouldn't have had the information required to make this strategic decision which will improve our weight gains and productivity."

He planted rows of leucaena every 10m like hedgerows, as an economical way of putting protein into the pastures. In January – after nearly a year to give the leucaena time to establish – cattle were let in to start grazing it.

"Combining the purple pigeon grass with the leucaena encourages them to eat enough roughage," Stuart said.

"The leucaena is like eating ice cream off a tree so they're going to want some roughage to go along with this rich diet."



Stuart Barrett at his property 'Drumburle'.

SNAPSHOT

STUART AND KATIE BARRETT –
'Drumburle',
Biloela, Queensland

AREA
7,200ha

ENTERPRISE
1,200 Droughtmaster/ Droughtmaster x Wagyu cattle

PASTURES
Forest and softwood country: native black speargrass, forest bluegrass, Seca stylo, buffel, green panic, purple pigeon grass and leucaena

SOILS
Ranges from cracking clay to granite

RAINFALL
600mm

By combining these species, Stuart turned an undesirable species into something that works well as a pasture mix.

Jumping ahead with genetics

Stuart has made a further profitable adjustment since being involved in NB2, by introducing Wagyu genetics into his Droughtmaster herd.

He drew on the genetic knowledge of a consultant, who provided him with the information and confidence to implement a cross-breeding strategy within a portion of Drumburle's herd.

The Barretts select high-marbling Wagyu bulls to cross with Droughtmaster cows.

"We were starting to get discounts on the feeder grid from the higher *Bos indicus* content, so crossing the Droughtmasters with Wagyu bulls will help reduce these. The Wagyu genetics also improved our fertility, temperament and intramuscular fat and marbling," Stuart said.

Reaping the rewards

This strategy has improved joining rates among Stuart's yearling heifers – the first round of progeny from the Wagyu bulls joined two years ago. While his previous rate would have been four Droughtmaster bulls to cover 150 females, he reduced this to three Wagyu bulls to 150 breeders.

"We're a modest family size operation and are affected by cost of production increases – it's difficult to increase production while you're still being conservative with the environment," Stuart said.

These environmental considerations include refraining from overgrazing and being conservative with their long-term decision making around stocking rates and seasonal variability.

"We're trying to get a premium through increasing the Wagyu content. Next year we will have F2 calves on the ground and we'll start seeing better eating quality."

Better together

The Fitzroy NB2 group plans to keep meeting beyond the funding period of the program, which concluded at the end of June 2024.

"We want to take turns hosting group activities and get-togethers where we invite businesses and subject matter experts," Stuart said.

The social aspect is also a drawcard and fills a gap experienced by many farming families in the area.

"I needed fresh ideas and the access to experts and fellow producers really helped when I was taking over the business from my father.

"Sometimes getting involved in these projects can lead to a bit of trepidation, but by the end of it, I was refocused, re-energised and am more motivated to go and actually try new things." ■

TOOLBOX

- MLA's Northern Breeding Business (NB2): **mla.com.au/NB2**
- Build your skills at MLA's The Toolbox: **mla.com.au/elearning**
- Scan this QR code for info on the Queensland Department of Primary Industry's Grazing Resilience and Sustainable Solutions (GRASS) program:
- Use the Australian Feedbase Monitor to improve grazing management, forage budgeting and ground cover: **mla.com.au/afm**

Stuart and Katie Barrett have gained valuable insights into grazing management through their participation in MLA's Northern Breeding Business program.

Stuart and Katie Barrett **stu@5thgengrazingco.com.au**
Tony Parker **tparker@mla.com.au**

Xander Bennett, ISC Communications Officer, takes a producer through new dashboard concepts for the uplifted NLIS database at Angus EXPO 2025.

The NLIS is changing

The National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) database is evolving to better meet the needs of its users.

The NLIS Database Uplift Project is a major project to improve Australia's livestock traceability platform. The project, which kicked off in July 2023, is administered by Integrity Systems Company (ISC) and supported by a $22.5 million Australian Government funding grant.

The uplifted NLIS is expected to be completed by June 2026, ensuring Australia has a fit-for-purpose and user-friendly traceability platform to track all livestock movements.

Improved functionality

Ensuring the uplifted NLIS is easy to use and has a fresh, modern look have been key project objectives. New concept designs for the user dashboard have been produced and the number of steps required to complete many common NLIS actions have been reduced.

Over the past few months, the ISC team has been on the move and sharing new concepts for the uplifted NLIS with producers and processors – giving them an opportunity to test the new dashboards for themselves.

Want to know more?

- Visit the ISC website: **integritysystems.com.au/nlisuplift**
- Check out the ISC Events page to see where the team will be heading next: **integritysystems.com.au/events**
- Read about the key improvements users can expect to see in the uplifted NLIS database: **integritysystems.com.au/nlisfeatures**
- Contact the project team at **nlisuplift@integritysystems.com.au** to ask questions, provide feedback or subscribe to the *NLIS Database Uplift Update* newsletter.

A black and white approach to animal welfare

With a family tradition of breeding champion Angus cattle that stretches back more than a century, caring for cattle is in Sam White's blood.

Enhance your animal welfare outcomes

Integrity Systems Company (ISC) has launched a new Animal Welfare Management Plan (AWMP) tool as part of the Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) accreditation process.

Developed in consultation with industry, the new tool is designed to enable producers to demonstrate their compliance with the Australian Animal Welfare Standards through a series of questions tailored around their on-farm operations.

Producers can access the tool during their accreditation or reaccreditation process via self-assessment. It is also available on demand via the record-keeping section.

Access the tool at **integritysystems.com.au/awmp**

As LPA-accredited producers, Sam and his wife Kirsty are continuing that tradition on 'Bald Blair', the family's Angus stud and commercial cattle enterprise in the New England tablelands of NSW.

"The herd at Bald Blair has served our family for generations, so good stockmanship is important to us," Sam said.

"That doesn't just mean providing them with the basics like feed and water, but also seeing that they enjoy a comfortable life for the time they're on our property."

Paddocks across the family's four properties are well-watered with troughs and dams, and they monitor their feedbase constantly to ensure supply is never compromised.

In addition, the Whites have a stock management plan in place, ensuring their stud and commercial cattle are monitored throughout the year, with weekly stock checks and regular yarding for pregnancy testing, weaning, joining and calf marking.

Shade and shelter

Since Sam returned to Bald Blair in 1990, the goal has been to plant around 1,000 trees annually (conditions permitting) as part of a revegetation program.

"In 2019, with changes in the climate, we saw our animals seeking shelter from the sun and heat more than at any other time since we've been here," Sam said.

The trees look good, but it soon became clear that the benefits weren't just aesthetic.

"It was interesting to see that the animals who found shade and shelter under the tree cover performed much better than those who hadn't."

Socialising calves

The Whites yard their calves for around a week during weaning – during this time, young cattle are exposed to dogs, horses, bikes and lots of people.

"That early time spent in the yard is the best time in an animal's life to actually have a real influence on its behaviour – it's also your best chance to identify and fix an animal with temperament issues, or remove it," Sam said.

"That early exposure establishes good social habits before an animal even reaches the paddock and they'll be more relaxed as a result."

Low-stress stock handling

The Whites are adamant about employing low-stress stock handling on Bald Blair and believe force isn't necessary to handle animals.

"Everybody seems to think low-stress stock handling is just walking around with your hands in your pockets and your head down, and it's not," Sam said.

"It's all about movement and position. If you learn to position yourself correctly, the animals will see you in the same way they see a dog and you'll be able to move anything."

Sam and Kirsty White of 'Bald Blair'.

SNAPSHOT

SAM AND KIRSTY WHITE –
'Bald Blair',
Guyra, NSW

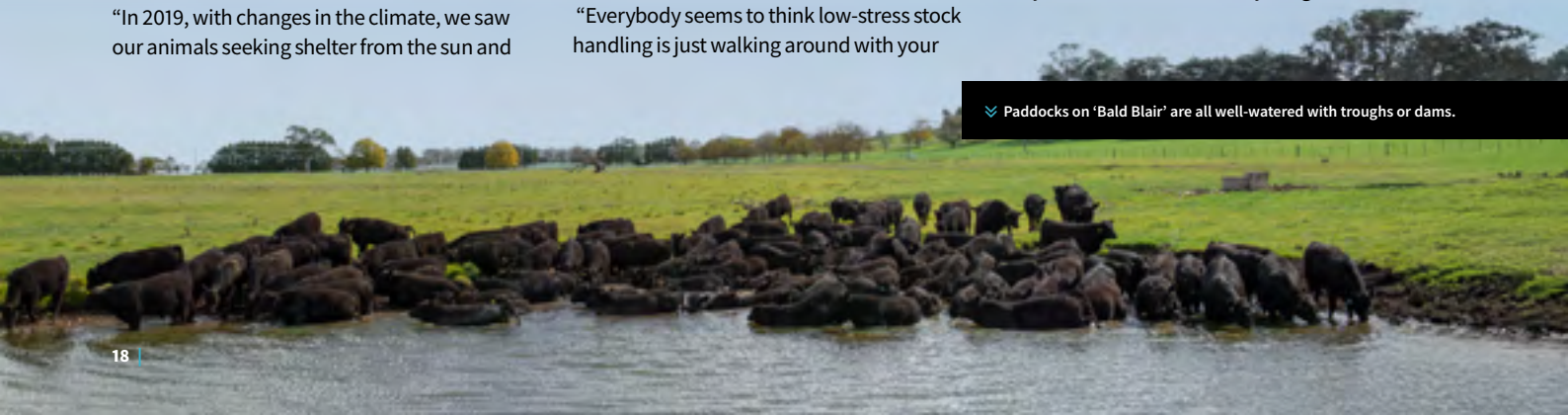
AREA
2,200ha across four properties

ENTERPRISE
Angus cattle (400 stud cows and 400 commercial cows), 1,000 ewes

PASTURES
Predominantly perennial pastures, including phalaris and fescue

SOILS
Red and black basalt

RAINFALL
850mm



Paddocks on 'Bald Blair' are all well-watered with troughs or dams.

Reducing pain and mismothering

The Whites also run a sheepmeat enterprise. They said the introduction of Numnuts (a ring applicator with a pain relief delivery mechanism, developed in collaboration with MLA) has been a game-changer for their lamb marking.

"It only adds five seconds to the marking process, but it means the pain for the lamb only lasts a few minutes and they'll immediately seek out their mother once they're put back in with them," Sam said.

"The animals are much more settled as a result, and we've seen massive benefit from the reduction in mismothering happening post-marking."

Sam said reducing the stress and physical impact on the animals was really important to both him and Kirsty.

Ensuring consistency

In addition to their immediate family, the Whites employ two full-time staff members and two to four contractors at any one time.

To ensure uniformity in how their animals are cared for on-farm, the Whites have documented everything to remove any confusion across their workforce.

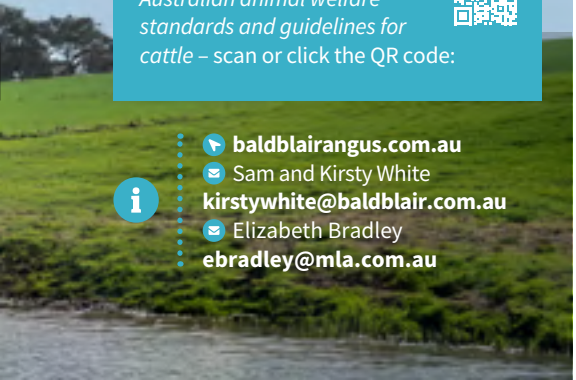
"We've got a cattle care page on our website for our team which outlines all our requirements, including things like our checklist for lamb marking, how we want our livestock handled, how we do our preg testing, how we do our artificial insemination – it's all there," Sam said.

The Whites also go through the *Cattle welfare code of practice* with their staff and ensure they all have a copy to refer back to.

Their staff are also asked to sign a statement on animal welfare, acknowledging they have a duty of care for the welfare of livestock at Bald Blair and its associated properties, based on the *Australian animal welfare standards and guidelines for cattle*. ■

TOOLBOX

- Read more about the LPA's new animal welfare management tool: **integritysystems.com.au/awmp**
- Learn more about your new LPA audit requirements: **integritysystems.com.au/lpa-req**
- Familiarise yourself with the *Australian animal welfare standards and guidelines for cattle* – scan or click the QR code:



baldblairangus.com.au
Sam and Kirsty White **kirstywhite@baldblair.com.au**
Elizabeth Bradley **ebradley@mla.com.au**

Jack with his colleagues and uncle at family farm 'Oxton Park'. (From left to right) Oxton Park's longstanding sheep classer Chris Bowman with Brad Cavanagh, Jack O'Connor and Paul O'Connor. Image: Jack O'Connor

People at centre of success

NSW red meat producer Jack O'Connor is the Australian winner of the 2025 Zanda McDonald Award – he shares the trans-Tasman award with New Zealander, Maegen Blom, from the aquaculture industry.

Jack sees the award as a shared achievement and is keen to give credit to his tight-knit farming family who run their multigenerational cropping, wool and prime lamb farm, 'Oxton Park', at Harden, NSW.

It was a desire to continue his family's legacy that drew him back to the farm in 2018 to take up the role of general manager. Family was also the motivation to apply for the award – wanting to set a good example for his son Freddie was what pushed Jack over the line to apply just a few days before the deadline.

People front and centre

Hailing from a family business where people and relationships come first, it's no wonder Jack sees success in agribusiness as the right combination of people and timing.

"Our business is no different – we're passionate about building the right team – it's really diverse and is made up of a range of people with unique strengths and passions," he said.

"Everyone is very respectful of each other's areas of expertise. We still have hard conversations, and we welcome them, but fundamentally it's built upon trust and that's very important.

"We don't just share the good stuff – we like to encourage everyone to share their mistakes because that's where we believe the biggest learnings come from."

One of the family's strategies for success is to surround themselves with the right people. This includes partnering with advisors and ensuring they hire staff not only for their skills but also for the right attitudes.

A work-life balance is also vital, and Jack encourages his staff to make the most of community life.

"In the Harden community, there are so many great sporting clubs and groups – it brings people together. There are outreach groups such as an active farmers group who meet one morning a week. Mental health is so important – it's not just about the things we produce," Jack said.

Where it all began

Jack's family encouraged him to explore his options and develop a career away from the family farm – which included studying at university, a stint with MLA's Markets team, and working for a not-for-profit in Uganda where he helped develop farming businesses that supported local primary schools to be financially sustainable. ■

Scan or click this QR code to learn more about Jack's plans for the personalised development package and mentoring trip which comes with the award.

zandamcdonaldaward.com
mla.com.au/career-hub
Jack O'Connor **jack@oxtonpark.com.au**
Joshua Whelan **jwhelan@mla.com.au**

Combined LAMBPLAN propels terminal/maternal genetic gain

Australia's sheep industry is readying itself for this year's release of a new version of the world-leading LAMBPLAN genetic evaluation, which is set to drive genetic gain and on-farm production like never before.

The cutting-edge multibreed genetic evaluation is delivered by MLA's Sheep Genetics and was developed by the research team at the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU) – a joint venture of the University of New England and the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

It will enable Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) for terminal and maternal sheep to be compared within a single LAMBPLAN evaluation.

By combining the maternal and terminal LAMBPLAN evaluations into a single evaluation, producers will be able to more accurately compare traits across the breeds which were previously separated by historic alignment of breeds to either terminal (growth/eating quality traits) or maternal breeding objectives (self-replacing traits).

The rate of genetic progress is no longer limited by which comparisons between breeds can be made.

AGBU researcher Dr Sam Walkom said there has been a rise in popularity over the past decade of more composite breeds, where the breed of the animal itself is less important than how well its progeny perform across a range of characteristics.

"Many breeders are now trying to produce really good ewes who have fast-growing lambs of good eating quality," Sam said.

"By combining the maternal and terminal breeds into a single evaluation, breeders will be able to select genetics from across all the breeds and access the complete suite of ASBVs that are important in their production system. The new combined analysis will also enable breeds to remain pure, if desired, whilst utilising data more efficiently, ultimately improving the acuracy of ASBVs."

Benefits to breeding objectives

A key benefit of the new evaluation is its ability to inform breeding plans which are more accurate, timely and tailored to each enterprise's unique objectives.

"We decided to combine the two LAMBPLAN evaluations because of three major factors. Firstly, there were breeds that desired a shift to the other evaluation as the suite of traits available better reflected their breeding objectives.

"Secondly, there was a significant overlap of animals across the two evaluations and these animals have been receiving two sets of ASBVs for the same traits which could not be compared. A single analysis removes potential confusion. This also means that the evaluation is making the most of all available information.

"Finally, a combined analysis will enable breeders to access the complete suite of traits including lambing ease and the component reproduction traits, including conception, litter size and ewe rearing ability," Sam said.

Breeders can now benchmark across maternal and terminal breeds to find and identify animals that best meet their breeding objectives.

"Previously you couldn't compare animals from one group with the other, but by bringing them all together we're enabling commercial breeders to access data on how animals perform for traits that they traditionally have not been able to access," Sam said.

Baseline measurements

The new routine LAMBPLAN evaluation software takes around a week to churn through the pedigree, genomic and performance data and produce breeding values for more than 4.4 million animals each fortnight. According to current indicators, more than 200,000 new animals are added to LAMBPLAN annually.

Sam said the development of the analysis has been a team effort at AGBU, in collaboration with MLA/Sheep Genetics and industry, with a focus on setting industry up for long-term, lasting gains. The team would especially like to acknowledge the legacy the late Andrew Swan will leave behind within the national genetic evaluation and the broader Australian sheep industry. ■

TOOLBOX

- Set your breeding objective – visit MLA's Genetics hub: **genetics.mla.com.au**
- LAMBPLAN: **sheepgenetics.org.au/lambplan**
- BredWell FedWell workshop: **mla.com.au/bwfw**
- Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit: **agbu.une.edu.au**

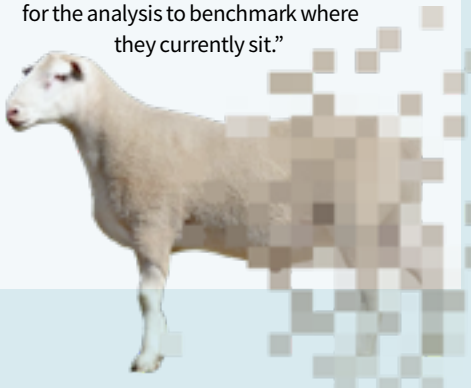
Tips on how to access LAMBPLAN data

Peta Bradley, MLA's Manager – Sheep Genetics, has tips for producers wishing to make the most of the data once it becomes available.

"Any producer can access results from the Sheep Genetics website for publicly reported animals. The new combined LAMBPLAN research analysis will be available on the Sheep Genetics website alongside the routine maternal and terminal analyses for this coming sale season," she said.

"Over the next 12 months, as further research and development is completed, new traits will become available. In 2026, the new combined analysis will become the main product for producers to use.

"It's really important when looking at the combined analysis to ensure producers are using the latest set of percentile bands for the analysis to benchmark where they currently sit."



Samuel Walkom **swalkom@une.edu.au** Peta Bradley **pbradley@mla.com.au**

Some plant species naturally reduce methane when digested by ruminants.

Pick of the pastures with new methane test

A new test is being developed to make it easier for producers to choose low-methane pastures without compromising livestock performance.

Enteric methane emissions from ruminant livestock account for approximately 11% of Australia's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions[1]. While methane is more potent than carbon dioxide, its shorter atmospheric lifespan means that reductions in emissions can deliver relatively quick benefits for climate mitigation, usually within 12 years[2].

For several decades, researchers have been aware that different pasture species can influence methane output. This new MLA-supported project will help identify low-methane options and to contribute to Australia's net zero emissions.

Richard Meyer, Feed Chemist at the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), is leading the development of a new near infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) test to rapidly assess the methane output potential of pasture species.

It builds on previous research into methane efficiency in cattle and sheep, and aims to integrate pasture selection into industry-wide emissions reduction strategies.

"NIRS is already widely used to analyse feed quality," Richard said.

"By refining our calibrations, we can now predict methane output from pastures in a way that is faster and cheaper than traditional methods, such as using specialist metabolic chambers or in vitro fermentation techniques."

Screening for low-methane species

Methane emissions from livestock have been a focus of research for decades, but practical solutions for extensive grazing systems have been limited.

While methane-reducing feed additives are being explored for feedlot systems, pasture-based solutions offer a more accessible strategy for producers operating in extensive grazing environments, which represent around 95% of Australian production systems.

As part of the red meat industry contributing to Australia's net zero ambitions, pasture-based methane reduction strategies could play a critical role in achieving emissions reductions without adding complexity to farm management for producers.

So far, Richard's team have analysed more than 500 pasture samples (of a planned 1,000), with some species significantly reducing methane output.

"We know that some plant species naturally reduce methane when digested by ruminants," Richard said.

"Our work is now focused on identifying which species are both practical for livestock systems and effective in reducing emissions, and on creating a tool which accurately predicts methane production when these species are consumed by sheep and cattle.

"This will be a valuable tool for producers wanting to estimate their on-farm emissions or identify pasture options that align with their sustainability goals."

The new NIRS testing method will allow seed producers and pasture trial networks to screen forages at scale and provide producers with data-driven pasture recommendations.

Getting the balance right

One of the key concerns in methane mitigation strategies is whether selecting low-methane pastures might impact livestock health and productivity.

Richard Meyer **richard.meyer@dpi.nsw.gov.au** Ross Mann **rmann@mla.com.au**

Technical Officer Sabrina Meurs from NSW DPIRD preparing samples.

Scan or click the QR code to watch a video about low-methane pasture trials:

Richard's team is working with other NSW DPIRD researchers to investigate pasture mixes that maintain or enhance production outcomes, while lowering emissions.

"Our goal isn't just to reduce methane, it's also to find solutions that keep livestock performing well," he said.

"In many cases, better pasture management leads to higher productivity, which in turn reduces methane intensity per kilogram of red meat produced, because of quicker turn-off times."

The analysis of the methane content of pasture samples by NIRS is expected to be available for wider industry use by around June 2026. The team is working to refine its accuracy, with the aim of making it accessible to other testing laboratories, commercial feed suppliers and livestock producers following completion of the project. ■

[1] https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/livestock-emissions-framework-feed-technologies-factsheet.pdf
[2] https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/methane/?intent=121

TOOLBOX

Access more information, including webinars, at **dpi.nsw.gov.au/dpi/climate/Low-emissions-agriculture**

National livestock methane program: **mla.com.au/nlmp**

Ag-tech builds drought resilience

As a TEKFARM advisor, Keerah Steele visits producers on-farm to help introduce ag-tech into their business production.

For beef cattle producer Bill Bjurstrom, managing two properties located 350km apart in North Queensland comes with its challenges.

However, implementing new on-farm technology through the TEKFARM project has made management a whole lot easier.

Managed by Farmers2Founders and supported by MLA, TEKFARM provides producers with ag-tech solutions tailored to their geographical and production system needs, with a particular focus on building drought resilience.

Bridging the gap

TEKFARM Advisor and Technical Adoption Officer at Gulf Savannah NRM, Keerah Steele, has worked closely with Bill since he joined the project last year. She said the aim of TEKFARM was to bridge the gap between tech companies and producers.

"Ag-tech has evolved significantly over the past 10 years, but the level of adoption on-farm hasn't grown at the same rate," she said.

"This project is about understanding what the adoption barriers are for producers and how we can overcome them for the individual, before making those steps to incorporate technology into production in a way that improves their business capacity.

"With Bill, we started by completing a business overview to understand his production goals, what day-to-day processes look like, where he's investing his money and what on-farm constraints he's dealing with.

"From there, we looked at what technology might aid the business and how we can work to integrate it to improve production."

Gaining more than expected

Bill and his staff manage a breeding herd of grey Brahmans near Georgetown, with their progeny and a trade herd run on his Julia Creek property. When a neighbour recommended drones as a tool to reduce the time spent driving around his properties, Bill joined the TEKFARM project to learn more.

He introduced SkyKelpie drones (read more next page) and is discovering more benefits than he anticipated.

As well as reducing vehicle wear and tear from frequent cattle and fence checks, the drones have given Bill the opportunity to check things he often wouldn't have time for. They also allowed access to areas he couldn't get to during poor weather.

Using drones to assist with mustering has delivered other benefits, especially during the hotter months.

Bill Bjurstrom has received a great return on his investment in an Optiweigh unit.

"In the early morning before a muster, I'll send a drone out with the infrared vision on to see where the cattle are, to start moving them towards water," Bill said.

"I wasn't sure how they'd respond at first, but I just started off slow and the cattle have been calm and responsive.

SNAPSHOT

BILL BJURSTROM –
'Euraba Station',
Julia Creek, Queensland

AREA
27,000ha

ENTERPRISE
650 grey Brahman breeders, 2,900 steers

PASTURES
Native Mitchell and Flinders grass

SOILS
Cracking black soil

RAINFALL
465mm

"This has been great for animal welfare because it gets them moving before sunrise while it's still cool, giving them a few less hours in the heat. It's also improved staff wellbeing, as it means they don't have to start their workday before daylight."

Return on investment

Beyond streamlining drone adoption, TEKFARM has helped Bill better target markets, with the introduction of Optiweigh. He has started using the in-paddock scales to monitor sale cattle, with plans to expand the tool as he builds confidence using it.

"Weight gain is a profit driver of business, so understanding how your cattle's weight can be impacted is essential to the longevity of your enterprise," Bill said.

"By tracking weights before yarding, we have a much clearer picture of how many head are in sale range, allowing us to book trucks earlier and reduce handling in the lead -up to sales.

"Our first sale after introducing Optiweigh was in January, and that process was much more efficient than our previous one. I'm feeling quite confident about the upcoming sales knowing I've got the tools to save myself some time, money and stress."

Strategic supplementation

Bill also plans to use Optiweigh to track the growth of his cattle from their second round of weaning, to gain insights into supplementation needs.

"Tracking and documenting our cattle's weight gain gives us a better picture of whether the supplementation we're providing is adequately meeting their nutritional needs.

"It not only identifies whether there is a need to increase or reduce supplementation – it also helps us understand the return on investment for different supplements. It's ultimately a decision-making tool."

The power of the tools

More than 70 producers – plus a growing number of advisors – are now involved in TEKFARM and, like Bill, are having wins with ag-tech.

One of Keerah's favourite examples is of a producer who had just installed a tank monitor when he received an alert that water was low.

"This surprised him as he'd checked the water levels in person only that morning," Keerah said.

"When he went to confirm the alert, he discovered a massive leak. He was able to fix it immediately, saving 400 head of cattle – cattle that might have gone without water for another two days if he hadn't been alerted.

"It's stories like this that highlight how useful technology can be. It's saving our producers from a lot of stress and financial strain, and it's saving animals' lives." ■

TOOLBOX

Learn more about TEKFARM or chat to the team: **farmers2founders.com/tekfarm**

Check out SkyKelpie drones: **skykelpie.com**

Learn more about Optiweigh: **optiweigh.com.au**

Bill Bjurstrom
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Keerah Steele
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Mustering reaches new heights

In the three years since Luke Chaplain founded SkyKelpie, with support from MLA and Queensland's Department of Primary Industries, his customer base has grown to account for more than 100,000 head of livestock.

The evolution of on-farm drone use continues to surprise the fourth-generation beef producer.

Some producers now use drones to manage pests or check on troughs and fence lines remotely. Others are employing the technology to address ongoing skills shortages.

"Some of our clients have adopted the technology because they've struggled to find labour and drones have filled that gap in their mustering or other operations – particularly in remote or rugged terrains," Luke said.

The technology also delivers safety benefits, reducing the risks inherent to low-level helicopter mustering and minimising time spent in dangerous terrain.

Luke said producers won't generally need a licence to operate drones on their own land. However, to fly a drone out of their line of sight over longer distances, they will need a licence which requires training and an examination.

SkyKelpie Aerial Stockmanship Masterclass

This year, Luke will launch the first online course of its kind to provide livestock handlers with essential skills for drone mustering and stockmanship. The masterclass will teach flying techniques, stockmanship fundamentals, herd psychology and regulations.

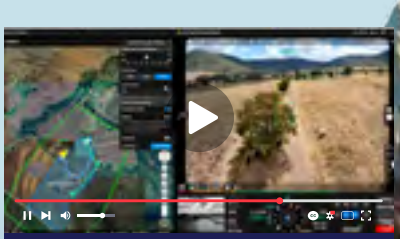
Learn more at **skykelpie.com/course**

SkyKelpie Scholarship

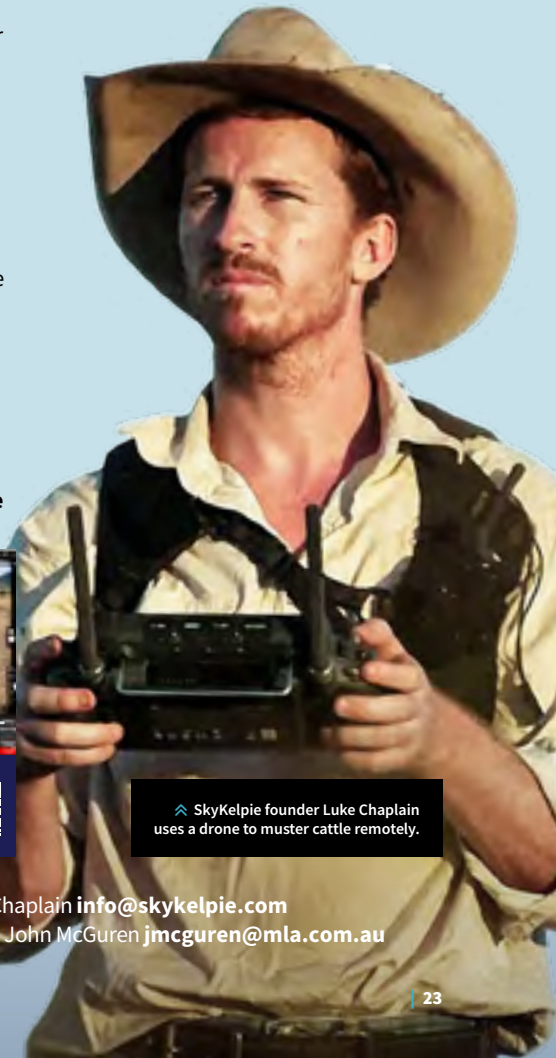
In January 2025, the inaugural SkyKelpie Scholarship was awarded to Luke O'Sullivan, a North Queensland producer who was left a quadriplegic following a car accident.

Valued at $5,000, the scholarship will help Luke to work on his family's cattle property by providing a CASA-accredited drone licence, access to the SkyKelpie Aerial Stockmanship Masterclass, the new SkyKelpie Simulator and a 12-month mentorship with the SkyKelpie team.

Each year, the SkyKelpie Scholarship will partner with a different organisation and in 2025 it collaborated with Ability Agriculture to help drive inclusivity in the agricultural industry. ■



Scan or click the QR code to watch a video demonstrating remote mustering at evokeAG 2025:



SkyKelpie founder Luke Chaplain uses a drone to muster cattle remotely.

skykelpie.com Luke Chaplain **info@skykelpie.com**
mla.com.au/digital-ag John McGuren **jmcguren@mla.com.au**

MLA-supported research has found pneumonia in sheep can be triggered by a stress-causing event, such as nutritional constraints, prolonged mustering or handling, or extreme weather.

Pneumonia, and how it's impacting our sheep

In response to a rise in reported pneumonia cases from western Victorian sheep producers, MLA has funded a project to find solutions.

The research aims to determine the prevalence of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (one of the bacteria known to cause respiratory disease in sheep), potential links between infected properties, and factors that may make animals more predisposed to infection.

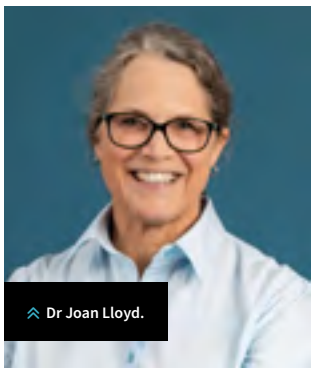
To date, project leads Dr Steve Cotton (Dynamic Ag) and Dr Joan Lloyd (Joan Lloyd Consulting), have conducted a producer survey, completed carcase and on-farm nasal swab testing, and drafted a literature review.

Here, they share their insights and what it means on-farm.

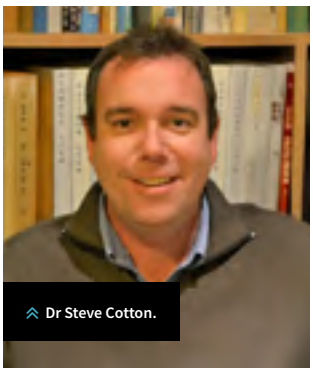
Producer findings

When it comes to better understanding the prevalence of pneumonia caused by *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* in grazing sheep across Victoria, Steve said it wasn't about testing every animal on-farm. Rather, it was about testing as many farms as they could.

"Our goal was to understand prevalence across the state and if there are any key common denominators between the properties reporting an outbreak," he said.



Dr Joan Lloyd.



Dr Steve Cotton.

"Initially it was difficult to decipher the results as they varied between regions, seasons and flock size.

"However, one linking factor we identified between every property reporting a pneumonia outbreak was the occurrence of a stress-causing event."

According to Steve, a stress causing event can include – but is not limited to – the following:

- nutritional constraints in pastures or inadequate quality and quantity of supplementary feed being offered
- prolonged periods of rainfall, flooding or extreme heat
- social stress in feedlot containment yards
- general husbandry procedures that require long musters (e.g. dogs barking and being off feed) and/or prolonged handling periods (e.g. shearing, crutching, marking and weaning).

"Last year was a challenging year for many southern producers, as significant rainfall deficiencies impacted grazing land management and made for a difficult lambing period," he said.

"If it was enough to cause stress for producers, then it really isn't surprising their animals' stress levels were on the rise too.

"While producers can't control the weather, there are processes that many have put in place to reduce the risk of stress in animals," Steve said.

"Ensuring animals are receiving adequate nutrition and water supply, optimising mob size through lambing or in containment areas and feedlots, and considering the number of times animals are mustered and yarded during normal management practices are key to keeping stress level to a minimum."

Processor findings

Beyond the farm gate, Joan took the lead in completing an abattoir-based component of the project to further understand the prevalence of *Mycoplasma ovipneumonia* in slaughter age lambs.

"During the 2024 winter period, 776 samples were randomly collected from the lungs of Victorian and South Australian-grown lambs," Joan said.

"These samples were obtained from 52 lots of lambs at three different Victorian abattoirs over the course of five visits."

Of the 52 abattoir lots, Joan said 49 (94.23%) had at least one sample test positive for *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*. Within infected lots, prevalence ranged from 6.67% to 99.93%.

"Infection with *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* predisposes sheep to secondary lung infections with other bacteria such as *Mannheimia haemolytica* and *Pasteurella multocida* that normally live in the nose and throat of sheep without causing any harm," Joan said.

"Once in the lungs, these bacteria grow and secrete toxins that cause inflammation and damage the lung tissue.

"This damaged lung tissue was something we saw in some of the lamb carcases we looked at in abattoirs."

However, Joan said damaged lungs were not their greatest point of concern when it came to processing the carcases of lambs with pneumonia. The real concern was pleurisy.

"Pleurisy refers to inflammation of the tissue that surrounds the lungs and line the chest cavity," Joan said.

"It slows down the processing lines in abattoirs as carcases with pleurisy require extra trimming.

"It can also impact the value of certain meat cuts."

She said previous Australian research estimated one in five of sheep that develop pneumonia from *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* infection will develop pleurisy.

Detecting infected sheep

All breeds of Australian sheep are susceptible to *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* infection. Ewes and rams are both susceptible to becoming chronic carriers, and infection passes from ewe to lamb soon after birth.

Detecting clinical signs in infected animals can sometimes be difficult for producers.

"As prey animals, sheep have evolved to be very good at masking their weaknesses," Joan said.

"So, they will often appear well despite testing positive for *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*."

According to Steve and Joan, outward signs of pneumonia in ewes and rams can include:

- coughing
- wheezing
- runny eyes and nose
- laboured breathing after exertion
- unexplained weight loss
- sudden death.

"Lambs can begin showing signs of infection from one-two months of age," Steve said.

"Additional signs of infection in the younger animals can be swollen knee joints, cloudy eyes and difficulty suckling.

> **"Producers know their animals well enough to pick up when something isn't right, so it's really about making sure to act as soon as the signs of infection are spotted."**

"Lambs that experience repeated coughing can also experience prolapse of the rectum."

Steve said in mild cases, visual symptoms may not be noticeable.

"These infections are called subclinical and are often characterised by slower than expected growth rates – particularly in lambs that are being grass fed," he said.

What to do

If producers notice signs of infection, Joan said it is important to reach out for help so their sheep can receive appropriate treatment.

"Our project is revealing that infection with *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* is widespread in sheep in southern Australia, so it can help some producers to understand that they are not alone when their sheep develop pneumonia," she said.

"Producers know their animals well enough to pick up when something isn't right, so it's really about making sure to act as soon as the signs of infection are spotted," she said.

"By reaching out for help from their veterinarian, they will have responded to the situation perfectly and are taking the right action to provide their animals with the treatment they need to recover." ■

mla.com.au/animal-wellbeing Steve Cotton **s.cotton@dynamicag.com.au**
Joan Lloyd **info@joanlloydconsulting.com** Sharon Dundon **sdundon@mla.com.au**

Calving boost for first-time heifers

SA's Limestone Coast region was fertile ground for a group of 19 beef businesses as they uncovered ways to improve their breeders' reproduction rates and optimise performance between first-time heifer joining through to second calving.

The group, which collectively managed more than 18,000 breeding cows, took part in the three-year MacKillop Farm Management Group and University of Adelaide co-funded MLA Producer Demonstration Site (PDS), 'Reproductive health and management practices for beef heifers'.

They were keen to address a range of challenges impacting their herds' reproductive success, including worm burdens, disease and the lack of adequately-tailored nutrition for class and reproductive status. Discussions and problem solving focused on how to hone decision-making around joining periods, body condition monitoring, calving times, supplementary feeding, fertility testing and harnessing genetics.

Results speak for themselves

Despite each producer having unique circumstances and goals, strong results were achieved across the group as a result of implementing the strategies identified in the PDS (see below).

Stand-out results included:

- Heifer conception rates increased from baseline levels of 80% in 2019 to 84% in the 2021-drop of heifers.
- Re-conception rates of the 2020-drop heifers (as second calvers) increased from 88% (baseline) to 92% in 2021.
- Heifer mortality reduced from 2.7% in 2019 to 0.6% in 2021.
- Heifers needing assistance at calving reduced from 13% in 2019 to 4% in 2021.

Stronger together

The project's results and insights into maximising heifer fertility in large part came about thanks to the participants' spirit of collaboration and willingness to dive into the data and share their knowledge and experience.

The group undertook 12 interactive, technical sessions at each property, where they had access to researchers, veterinarians, livestock advisors and their fellow participants' experience. By the end of the project, they reported a 19% increase in knowledge and a 13% improvement in their confidence to manage their breeding herd for improved health and reproduction. Overall, the producer satisfaction rating for this PDS sat at a solid 91%.

PDS participant and project facilitator, livestock consultant Elke Hocking (see article opposite), said having access to both experts and the group's combined, on-the-ground know-how made all the difference.

"The variation in management systems within the group was extensive with a range of calving times, different breeds, different animal health plans and different target markets," she said.

"It was great to be able to learn from other producers and consider which things would be most suitable to adopt within our own production system." ■

> **"It was great to be able to learn from other producers and consider which things would be most suitable to adopt within our own production system."**

Top tips for heifer reproductive success

- To achieve 85% conception rate in six-week heifer joinings, aim for pre-joining liveweights of 60% of mature cow weight.
- To optimise re-conception, ensure heifers reach a target liveweight of 85–90% of the mature cow reference weight leading into their first calving.
- A body condition score (BCS) of three, combined with high quality feed on offer through joining, will also contribute to re-conception success.
- Check bulls for fertility, reproductive diseases and physical injuries prior to joining to improve conception rates.
- Invest in fixed-time artificial insemination for a condensed calving window and selection of high-quality genetics to produce replacement heifers.
- Select bulls with low gestation and high calving ease estimated breeding values (EBVs) to reduce the incidence of calving problems.
- Consider Days to Calving EBV – lower values are associated with getting heifers in calf early and returning to oestrous sooner after calving.
- Match nutrition to heifers' growth phases, stage in the fertility cycle and seasonal feed availability.

Supplementary feeding cattle involved in the PDS - see case study opposite.

TOOLBOX

- Learn more about this PDS: **mla.com.au/pds-beef-heifers**
- Scan or click the QR code to access a webinar and podcast on the PDS:
- Access PDS resources – including the e-news, the PDS search tool and how to get involved: **mla.com.au/pds**
- Grazing land management hub: **mla.com.au/grazing**
- Understand estimated breeding values (EBVs): **mla.com.au/temperate**
- Access the stocking rate calculator, feedbase planning and budgeting tool and feed demand calculator with your myMLA account: **etools.mla.com.au/hub**
- Visit MLA's Feedbase hub for tips on providing optimal nutrition for reproductive success: **mla.com.au/feedbase-hub**

Six steps for fertile heifers

South-east SA cattle producers Elke and Peter Hocking's involvement in MLA's three-year Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) program helped them hone their management strategies to achieve optimum reproductive performance.

Here are six key steps the Hockings took to getting the best out of their Conmurra breeding herd.

1 Time calving right

Elke and Peter operate a split calving schedule with heifers calving in autumn and cows calving in July/August. This allows heifers plenty of time to recover between their first calving and their second joining in October.

Elke purchases March/April-drop heifer replacements from her father on Kangaroo Island. This approach ensures optimal pre-joining weights are achieved for a June/July joining.

2 Tailor nutrition

Elke calculates her herd's mature cow reference weight to set accurate target weights for heifers.

"We conduct body condition scoring and measure heifers' liveweight throughout the year, to keep them at the ideal weight according to their stage in the reproductive cycle," Elke said.

Pregnant and lactating livestock are managed according to their nutritional requirements and supplemented with hay if pasture is not available, as was required throughout 2024.

3 Monitor to measure

Regular body condition scoring and pasture assessment (quality and quantity of available feed) ensures the herd's nutritional needs are met. Elke said practicing these skills during the PDS was invaluable, to ensure targeted and cost-effective supplementation.

One of Elke's go-to resources for fodder budgeting is MLA's Feedbase planning and budgeting tool, which includes a comprehensive list of the nutritional requirements and pasture intake of different classes of livestock.

"Last year, drought conditions meant we had no substantial pasture growth until late August, so high rates of supplementary feed were necessary," Elke said.

She said another great resource to guide nutritional requirements was Agriculture Victoria's beef cattle drought feeding guide.

4 Conduct foetal ageing

Peter and Elke pregnancy test at six weeks after joining to identify dries – these are finished for the grassfed market. Foetal ageing identifies 'earlies' and 'lates' which can be managed according to their nutritional requirements.

They use an electronic identification (eID) stick reader – the alert function makes splitting up the herd according to calving time quick and easy.

With a tight calving window for each group, managing earlies/lates separately saves time checking calving cows and enables targeted pre-calving health treatments.

"To ensure newborn calves receive adequate immunity from colostrum post-calving, vaccinations four to six weeks pre-calving are most effective," Elke said.

During the 2024 drought, Peter and Elke prioritised better quality hay to cows in the first cycle, while the lates stayed on lower quality straw until closer to calving in August when feed started to improve.

"We more than made back our investment in foetal ageing with this strategy," Elke said.

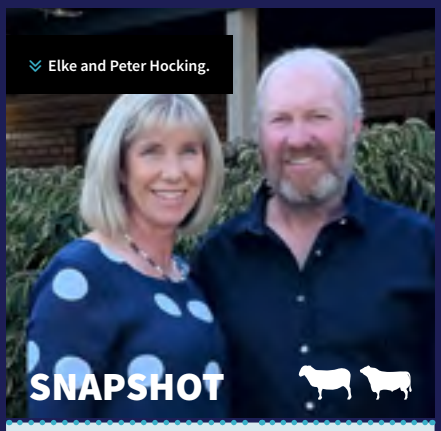
5 Fertility test bulls

Since participating in the PDS, Peter and Elke use a veterinarian to fertility test bulls six weeks before joining. With a 20–30% bull failure rate, this eliminates surprises at pregnancy scanning and allows time to get a replacement bull.

Nutrition, age and injury can impact bull fertility, so examining sperm motility and morphology, as well as doing physical checks for structural damage, are key.

6 Be flexible

Dry conditions meant calving cows dropped to a body condition score of two last year. This meant they would take longer to return to oestrous post-calving, so Elke delayed joining by two weeks.



Elke and Peter Hocking.

SNAPSHOT

ELKE AND PETER HOCKING – 'Scotglade Pastoral', Conmurra, SA

AREA
1,280ha

ENTERPRISE
310 breeders, 400–600 weaner cattle, 2,800 first-cross ewes joined to White Suffolk rams

PASTURES
Phalaris, sub-clover and annual grasses

SOILS
Sand over clay through to black flats

RAINFALL
600mm

"Fortunately, the feed on offer improved dramatically in spring and with a rising plane of nutrition throughout joining in October/November, we achieved 97% conception rates across our adult cows," Elke said.

"During the same period, our steers were growing at 2–2.8kg per head per day which was an indication of the quality of feed at the time of joining."

Following tougher conditions last year, most of their purchased 2024-drop heifers are generally lighter than normal and will require supplementary feeding to ensure adequate weights are reached by joining, or alternatively delaying heifer joining to match in with their cows.

"While it's good to have a relatively stable system, it's important to be flexible with timings and adapt to the season accordingly," Elke said.

Learn more about the 'Reproductive health and management practices for beef heifers' PDS on previous page.

Elke Hocking **elkehocking@gmail.com** Alana McEwan **amcewan@mla.com.au**

‘Pardoo Station’ manager Jeff McInnerney with weaner heifers.

Eye on the market drives Pardoo’s productivity

The WA-based beef business ‘Pardoo Station’ is on track for significant productivity benefits through enhancements to its strategic breeding practices and astute market optimisation initiatives.

Pardoo Station, managed by Jeff Mcinnerney, is located 200km north of Port Hedland and 450km south of Broome – it spans more than 200,000ha along the coastline. It’s part of the Pardoo Wagyu business aggregation – owned by Bruce Cheung – which also includes ‘Fairfield’ and ‘Leopold’ stations.

The station's pastures include Rhodes and panic grass hay which are grown under irrigation pivots. Chicory is also cultivated, and there are plans to add sorghum to the rotation. The property features a mix of sandplains and dunes, with acacia shrublands and spinifex.

Herd composition

Pardoo Station is primarily focused on breeding Wagyu and Wagyu-cross cattle, with a current headcount of 2,400 cattle grazing on the rangelands and another 2,800 head on feed, many of which are awaiting pregnancy tests after artificial insemination (AI).

After recently being awarded freehold status, Pardoo’s owners applied for a 10,000 head feedlot, where their Wagyu and Wagyu cross cattle will be backgrounded before they are trucked to finishing feedlots.

The breeding plan includes predominately Droughtmaster and Brahman cattle crossed with Wagyu to produce a northern Wagyu-cross breed. In the feedlot, purebred Wagyu cattle gain an average of 0.8kg per day, while first-cross cattle gain around 1.1kg/day. Liveweight is monitored using the Optiweigh system, and feed is adjusted to determine the most effective ration for weight gain.

Breeding management

Breeding practices include AI for first-calf heifers – any identified as dry following pregnancy testing are then moved to a northern station and sold.

AI conception rates at Pardoo Station have been as low as 40% and up to 65% – overall conception rates reached 78% after covering bulls were introduced after AI. First calf heifers receive supplementation, and cows are managed to maintain a body condition score of 3 to 3.5 for breeding and AI programs.

Vaccination practices include a 5-in-1 vaccine for steers, a 7-in-1 for heifers, and a botulism vaccine for all cattle. Bovi-Shield® is also part of the vaccination regimen for all pure breed weaners. Tri-Solfen® is used for pain relief during procedures such as branding, dehorning and castrating. See Table 1.

SNAPSHOT

‘PARDOO STATION’ (MANAGED BY JEFF MCINNERNEY) –
Pilbara, WA

AREA
203,142ha

ENTERPRISE
2,400 Wagyu and Wagyu-cross cattle (grassfed), 2,800 cattle on feed (Wagyu and Wagyu-cross)

PASTURES
Spinifex, irrigated pastures

SOILS
Sandplains and dunes

RAINFALL
300mm

Silage being loaded to feed out to weaners.

Table 1: **Pardoo Station’s vaccination schedule**

Vaccination	Class	Frequency
Longrange® Botulinum Vaccine	All cattle	Yearly
Bovi-Shield® Mh-One	All PB Weaners	At weaning
Ultravac® 7in1	All females	Yearly
Ultravac® 5 in 1	Steers	Yearly
Vibrovax®	Joiner heifers	Pre-joining

Under Jeff's management, Pardoo Station is poised for a bright future in the cattle industry with strategic breeding practices and market optimisation efforts.

Weaner management

There are two rounds of mustering at Pardoo Station, one in June/July and the second in September. The station employs a controlled mating cycle with an 80-day joining period from April to June, aiming for calving in January and weaning in August.

Weaning management involves an 8–10-day yard education period which uses dogs and horses in yard and paddock education. Calves are then moved with horses to further acclimate them. Calves are weaned between 110kg–200kg, averaging around 135kg.

They are segregated by weight, with smaller weaners under 150kg and larger ones above 150kg.

Larger weaners are fed a mix of silage and imported grains, consisting of barley, lupins and maize. Milne weaner pellets and hay grown onsite are fed to the smaller weaners to boost nutrition. The target calf mortality rate is less than 10%.

Post-weaning, weaners stay in feedlot-type yards. Males are aimed to be shipped at weights of 320kg–340kg in July and September, while F1 females are joined at 280kg in February. Dry F1 females remain on feed until reaching the target heifer weight of 300kg–340kg for live export. Pregnant heifers are sent to a co-operative station further north in the Kimberley after AI testing, and purebreds, if not pregnant, go south into a long-fed program.

The station targets both domestic and export markets such as the Indonesian market.

Pardoo Station is European Union (EU) market certified, though they must truck cattle from WA to the east coast for long feeding as there are currently no EU-certified feedlots in WA.

Team and technology

Labour at Pardoo Station includes a crew of around 20 staff, divided into feedlot, cattle crew, pivot management and fencing contractors.

The station operates irrigation pivots, though some have yet to be restored after a cyclone in 2023.

Technology is readily used at Pardoo – in addition to the Optiweigh system for feed optimisation trials, DIT Agritech water supplementation is used on some bores.

Outlook

Future opportunities at Pardoo include continued optimisation of feed rations to enhance weight gain and expansion of market opportunities, especially focusing on the Indonesian market and new EU certifications.

Currently, the business purchases up to 400t of grain/year at a cost of around $2.9 million, which is expected to decrease to around $1 million under their new feed program.

The enterprise has an end goal of developing its feed program to include growing barley and white sorghum for silage, reducing the requirement to purchase outside grain to zero, at which time they will have internal growing costs only.

Under Jeff's management, Pardoo Station is poised for a bright future in the cattle industry with strategic breeding practices and market optimisation efforts.

Jeff offers some words of wisdom for other producers.

"Trust your experiences. I've been out of the farming game for a while, but I used to do it quite a bit and I don't hesitate to ask the experts when I don't know." ■

Rhodes grass, ready to bale at 'Pardoo Station'.

Scan or click the QR code to watch a webinar about grazing irrigated pastures in Northern Australia:

TOOLBOX

Read *Weaner management in northern beef herds*: **mla.com.au/weaner-management**

Optiweigh: **optiweigh.com.au**

Weaner steers at 'Pardoo Station'.

Sarah Hassall **shassall@mla.com.au** Jeff Mcinnerney **jeff.mcinnerney@pardoowagyu.com**

Genetic gains ride on reference flock

MLA's Genomic Reference Flock has been a hotbed of activity since it was set up in 2012 to drive genetic progress across Australia's sheep industry.

Currently based at two breeding sites – Katanning Research Station, WA, and the University of New England (UNE) 'Kirby' farm, NSW – it churns out performance records and genotypes for about 2,000 lambs every year.

The publishing of eating quality (IMF) and carcase trait Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) has only been made possible due to the ability to capture carcase data on the progeny from key industry sires. Seedstock producers – representing different breeds – provide these sires for the Genomic Reference Flock, so their progeny can be managed under the same conditions.

The flock provides the underlying genomic reference for hard-to-measure traits within the national genetic evaluations: LAMBPLAN and MERINOSELECT.

Dr Sam Walkom, Senior Research Fellow at the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit at UNE, is keen to see more producers make the most out of their genetic investments and nominate sires to be represented in the Genomic Reference Flock. The research team is continually looking to capture the genetic diversity of the industry and has a particular interest in increasing the representation of maternal genetics within the refererence population.

Plating up better eating quality

The beauty of the Genomic Reference Flock is the access it provides to study post-slaughter carcase traits of progeny sourced from a diverse range of Australian seedstock rams. This enables producers and breeders to source animals that meet their breeding objectives, irrespective of their breed or production system.

The research teams at the project farms record a wide range of pre- and post-slaughter traits. They aim to get the data into the national LAMBPLAN and MERINOSELECT evaluations promptly, so the data can inform key ASBVs. This enables breeders to evaluate the rams' genetic potential across a range of traits and make selection decisions to improve their flocks. Having a genomic reference for eating quality has also enabled the development of indexes for eating quality, aiding selection decisions.

Sustainability is another key focus of the research, which is providing the data needed to establish ASBVs for feed-use efficiency, methane and potentially body composition (see genetic research snapshot on next page). ■

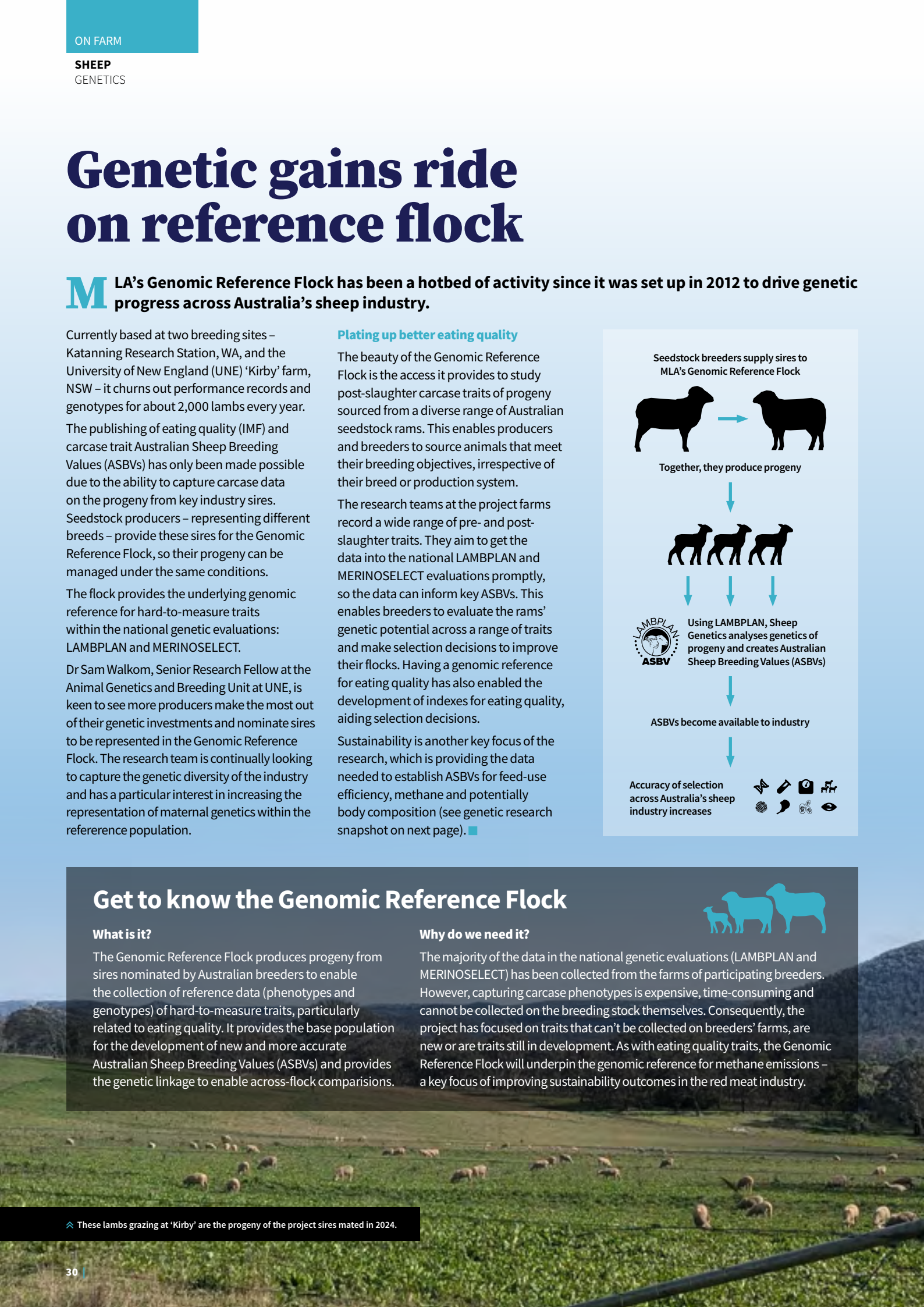
Get to know the Genomic Reference Flock

What is it?

The Genomic Reference Flock produces progeny from sires nominated by Australian breeders to enable the collection of reference data (phenotypes and genotypes) of hard-to-measure traits, particularly related to eating quality. It provides the base population for the development of new and more accurate Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) and provides the genetic linkage to enable across-flock comparisions.

Why do we need it?

The majority of the data in the national genetic evaluations (LAMBPLAN and MERINOSELECT) has been collected from the farms of participating breeders. However, capturing carcase phenotypes is expensive, time-consuming and cannot be collected on the breeding stock themselves. Consequently, the project has focused on traits that can't be collected on breeders' farms, are new or are traits still in development. As with eating quality traits, the Genomic Reference Flock will underpin the genomic reference for methane emissions – a key focus of improving sustainability outcomes in the red meat industry.



These lambs grazing at 'Kirby' are the progeny of the project sires mated in 2024.

University of New England research farm staff Raymond Osborne (manager) and Zoe Brown with reference flock ewes during the 2025 artificial insemination mating at 'Kirby'.

Genetic research snapshot

Here's a closer look at three projects focused on developing the reference population needed for genomic predictions in the Australian sheep industry and how they are delivering value for sheep producers.

Further development of a reference population for genomic prediction

Jan 2019–Dec 2026

With 2,400–3,000 lambs added annually to the Genomic Reference Flock and measured for on-farm production, carcase and eating quality traits, this levy-funded project is developing the flock to improve genomic predictions for the Australian sheep industry.

Value to producers:

- more accurate genomic predictions for eating quality traits, lean meat yield, worm egg counts, reproduction efficiency and parasite resistance
- an increase in genetic gain for hard-to-improve traits
- at least triple the use of genetic testing by breeders
- better predictive tools to drive increased genomic selection and increased use of flock profiling
- genetic gains to improve on-farm productivity and ultimately profitability.

National sheep genomic reference flock

Dec 2024–Dec 2028

This project builds on related research by continuing to develop the Genomic Reference Flock, with 115 sires mated to project ewes in 2025, and another round of 115 sires mated in 2026. This project is funded through MLA Donor Company and supported by UNE, Murdoch University, WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and Sheep Genetics.

Value to producers:

- measurement of hard-to-measure, high-value traits – particularly slaughter traits including carcase composition and eating quality
- on-farm recording of worm egg counts, parasite resistance, weight measurements throughout life, and ultrasound-measured fat and muscle depth
- development of new and more accurate ASBVs
- provision of lambs for sustainability-focused research projects looking at methane and feed intake traits.

Adding sustainability traits to the MLA Resource Flock

Nov 2020–Nov 2024

This levy-funded project collected sustainability traits from the Genomic Reference Flock and provided the datasets to establish ASBVs for feed conversion efficiency, methane and potentially body composition. Approximately 1,500 lambs from 100 sires (over two years) were measured to develop a more accurate and easier to use feed conversion efficiency (FCE) ASBV.

Value to producers:

- contributes to the growing dataset that will enable the delivery of sustainability-focused ASBVs
- improved FCE will increase profitability, as sheep will require less feed to produce more meat
- flow-on benefits include increased stocking rates and a reduction in supplementary feed use
- cost savings as feed is the largest cost in a grazing enterprise with maintenance of breeding ewes being the highest cost
- it will pass the baton to an upcoming global methane project – expanding the potential for further genetic gain worldwide.

sheepgenetics.org.au Dr Sam Walkom **swalkom@une.edu.au** Peta Bradley **pbradley@mla.com.au**

Nature or nurture?

Repronomics research holds the key

Dr David Johnston has a goal for every bull sold across Australia to be backed by an estimated breeding value (EBV).

As Principal Scientist at the University of New England's Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU), he sees this as how the beef industry's genetic analysis powerhouse – BREEDPLAN – can reach its peak potential and deliver the game-changing genetic gains it was built for.

This is where repronomics research comes into play.

Playing the long game

Repronomics research has been ticking away for almost 15 years, to improve reproduction in the northern beef herd.

To date, genetic data from 12,000 calves – sired by 400 bulls from key tropical breeds – has been recorded and analysed for 20–30 traits.

The latest MLA-supported project aims to extend the focus to enable northern cattle producers to leverage both within-breed and, importantly, across-breed genomic selection for a large number of production, reproduction and welfare traits.

This functionality will be added to BREEDPLAN in the coming years.

"We want producers to be able to compare EBVs across breeds because currently, a +20 for 200-day weight in a Brahman is not comparable with a +20 in a Santa Gertrudis," David said.

Female reproduction hurdles

Honing female reproduction has been a challenge – particularly for northern cattle producers with large, widely dispersed herds.

The days to calving EBV has been the go-to trait for many breeders. Despite being a useful tool, its low heritability, combined with lower levels of recording, has spurred researchers to look further afield into other reproduction traits to help accelerate genetic gain among tropical breeds.

Researchers decided it was time to shift the focus.

Quicker gains

There are two female reproductive traits closely linked to a cow's ability to maintain the sought-after yearly calving cycle and lifetime reproductive performance:

- heifer age of puberty (the age when the first corpus luteum is observed via ultrasound scanning) and
- lactation anoestrous interval (the time after calving until first-calf cows resume cycling).

"Heifer age of puberty, in particular, is highly heritable, which makes it easier to accelerate reproductive improvements in a herd," David said.

"The shorter the lactation anoestrous interval, the more likely the cow will get back in calf within 80 days of calving – which is essential to establish and maintain an annual calving system."

Targeting bulls

David recollects times past when many sales catalogues would list bulls without EBVs.

"These days, several sales mandate the provision of genetic information on sale animals. If genotyped with a high-density DNA chip, the profile can be put into the BREEDPLAN genomic evaluations to generate EBVs on these sale bulls. This gives producers greater access to the genetics they're introducing into their herds," David said.

In preparation for the upcoming spring bull sales, David expects to see a sharp increase in the number of bull tissue samples sent away for DNA analysis. This information will be fed back into BREEDPLAN and be ready in time for those keen to develop more targeted breeding strategies over the coming year.

Accuracy reduces risks

Repronomics research continues to deliver increased accuracy in many traits – for example Brahman days to calving EBV accuracy has improved by 23%.

Dr David Johnston presenting on repronomics project results at a BeefUp forum in Mundubbera, Queensland.

Three steps to get set for bull sales

1. Collect catalogues and make a list of bulls whose EBVs:
   - match your breeding goals, environment and market
   - take into account any specific challenges or feedback from abattoirs.
2. When inspecting bulls, consider:
   - temperament
   - structure
   - semen results
   - polled gene
   - inbreeding (how related to previous purchases).
3. Scan or click this QR code to read MLA's handy guide, 'How to shop for a high-performing sire'.

David encourages producers to make use of these tools for genetic gain and avoid buying bulls based on visual inspection alone.

"Without an EBV you're taking a chance that you'll get a good bull. If you buy a genetically undesirable bull, it could take years to breed his genes out of your herd," he said.

"EBVs remove a lot of this risk and hopefully you'll buy a bull with the right combination of traits for your environment and market. It's about being able to predict the genetic merit and ultimately increase profitability."

Nature and nurture

Visual inspection can't identify many of the traits associated with profitability such as calving ease or female reproduction. Growth traits should be genetically selected, as visual inspection only gives potential buyers part of the bigger picture of an animal's potential.

"You might be able to see growth or muscling, but they could also be significantly influenced by the environment, such as high levels of feeding," David said.

"Producers should focus on genetics and management strategies in tandem. If you don't provide an adequate environment, you won't see the benefits of the genetics you've purchased.

"Nutrition, weaning, supplementation and health treatments all contribute to an animal's expression of its genetics. In many cases, for marbling genetics to be fully realised, the animal will need to be sent to a feedlot." ■

TOOLBOX

- Check out the *Genetics quick guide* included in this edition of *Feedback* or visit MLA's Genetics hub: **genetics.mla.com.au**
- Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit: **agbu.une.edu.au**

Click or scan these QR codes to learn more about repronomics research:

- Article – *Repronomics II – Building and delivering effective genomic selection for northern Australian cattle*:
- Webinar – *The role of reference populations in genetic evaluation for Australian beef cattle*:

Repronomics research

Accelerating genetic gain across the red meat industry

Enabling genetic improvement of reproduction in tropical beef cattle

- record and analyse highly accurate female reproduction traits of 'age at puberty' and 'lactation anoestrous interval'
- deliver better capability to select for and genetically improve female reproduction traits
- deliver more accurate EBVs to source superior genetics.

Building and delivering effective genomic selection for northern Australian cattle

- build capacity to take advantage of genetic selection, particularly for improving female reproduction rates
- double the animals with high quality phenotypes and genotypes
- increase accuracy of early female reproduction traits.

Northern Beef Information Nucleus (Spyglass)

- collect data on additional traits (i.e. weight, carcase, meat quality and structural soundness data) from Brahman and Droughtmaster steer progeny from Spyglass Research Station, Charters Towers
- health, resilience and feed efficiency EBVs.

Northern Beef Information Nucleus (Brian Pastures)

- collect and analyse data on weight, carcase, meat quality, structural soundness data and immune competence at weaning from the Brahman, Droughtmaster and Santa Gertrudis steer progeny from Brian Pastures Research Station, Gayndah.

Industry-driven reference population for northern multi-breed genomic selection

- collect high-quality reference population data to enable ongoing and effective across-breed genomic selection in northern Australia
- intensively record a large array of production, reproduction and welfare traits on the latest genetics of leading industry seedstock herds across relevant breeds
- develop the use of within- and across-breed differences to drive genetic change in tropical beef breeds.

Dr David Johnston **djohnston@une.com.au** Clara Bradford **cbradford@mla.com.au**

Producers from around the Warrumbungles met on-farm to learn more about supplementation.

Tips to get the most out of grain and grass

When skies break after a dry period, there is no better feeling than returning the grain feeder to the shed for the last time, after weeks, months, or even years of hand-feeding livestock. In the Central West of NSW, a group of producers have found a way to utilise their feeding investments, even when the grass is green.

In the 'Grain on grass' Producer Demonstration Site (PDS), the Warrumbungle Mixed Farm Producer Group (WMFPG) used their otherwise-dormant feeding equipment and on-farm grain stores to supplementary feed their pasture- and crop-fed cattle and lambs.

The objective was to use a small amount of low-value grain to turn off stock quicker, increasing carrying capacity without increasing the cost of forage production.

By November 2024, producers aimed to increase live weight gain/head/day (by 20%) and carrying capacity (by 3.5%), while decreasing grazing days (by 13%).

Finding the right ration

Central West Local Land Services (LLS) Team Leader Neroli Brennan said prior to grain feeding, forage and grain feed tests were a crucial process for all demonstration sites.

"These tests are highly recommended to get an understanding of the quality of feed, to ensure the animal's nutritional requirements are being met," Neroli said.

When feed testing, producers can work with their local livestock advisor to assess the current seasonal conditions and make practical decisions to meet their livestock production goals.

Once the quality of feed – both grain and pastures – was established, an appropriate ration could be developed.

On one PDS host property, cattle grazing on lucerne achieved an increase in liveweight of 48%, supplemented with a ration including grain (85%), hay (10%) and concentrate (5%), at a total cost of $2.15/kg of supplement.

Herd health

Before beginning supplementary feeding, Senior Land Services Officer Patricia O'Keeffe said there are several factors to consider when it comes to preparing the animal.

"When feeding anything new, it is highly recommended producers introduce it to the animals slowly to allow their rumens to adapt," she said.

"This is particularly so with grain to avoid the risk of acidosis occurring, which has signs such as diarrhoea, reduced appetite, depressed appearance, and animals looking 'tucked up' due to abdominal pain."

Once stock have been introduced to the feed, continuing frequent feeding is important to ensure the grain does not need to be reintroduced.

"When introducing the grain, it would be advisable to feed the grain every day. Once you are feeding the full ration, this could still be fed daily or could be reduced to once every second or third day," Patricia said.

"Whatever the frequency, care needs to be taken to avoid grain poisoning if there is too long in between the animals eating the grain."

Another tip is to condition score livestock to assess the performance and ration needs of the animal, as well as help to determine if there are any 'bullies' and 'shy feeders' who are missing out on the additional feed.

Calculating costs

While the purpose of the PDS was to use grain on-hand and utilise capital investments to improve productivity, supplementary feeding still comes at a cost.

Like many aspects of livestock production, producers found grain supplementation on grazing crops and tropical pastures is effective in increasing weight gain, but only worthwhile when seasonal and market conditions are right.

For certain production targets, the price may be justified, such as critical joining weight for heifers, or to conserve pastures. ■

Read the story opposite to meet one of the producers involved in this PDS.

TOOLBOX

Click or scan these QR codes to learn more about supplement feeding:

Fact sheet – *Cattle nutrition following emergencies – best practice in the immediate/short-term*:

The important role of supplementary feeding:

Claudia Hinrichsen **claudia.hinrichsen@lls.nsw.gov.au** Alana McEwan **amcewan@mla.com.au**

Silver linings:
practice changes from surprise findings

Things didn't go exactly as planned for Elliot Shannon when he participated in the recent 'Grain on grass' Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) – but that turned out to be exactly what he needed.

Elliot joined the PDS (see story opposite) to explore the merit of supplementary feeding cattle. The PDS set out to demonstrate the optimal conditions and times to supplement feed, as well as the best rations, so producers could utilise what would otherwise be dormant feeding infrastructure.

Elliot is based at Bugaldie on NSW's Western Plains, where dry conditions meant he had to adjust how the PDS would be delivered on his property.

"The control mob was supposed to be in a paddock without supplements, while the PDS mob have similar pastures with oats being supplement fed," Elliot said.

"Because the feed tests came back low, it wasn't ethical to withhold supplements from the control mob – the cattle would have gone backwards in condition."

Elliot and the PDS facilitators determined he would supplement feed the control mob to maintain condition by trail feeding (1kg/head/day), while the PDS mob were being fed 5–6kg/head/day in self-feeders.

The feed tests helped to determine the ration of good quality oats, which Elliot already had available on-farm from a previous crop. He would introduce slowly to avoid health risks from a new feed source.

Big change, few differences

After six weeks, Elliot found that while he was happy with the gain in live weight, both mobs had performed similarly. The trial mob gained around 0.78kg/head/day, less than 100g more than the control mob.

He attributes the similar performance – despite significant differences in supplement amount – to the behaviour of his cattle around the self-feeder.

"The trial cattle hadn't been grain fed prior to this. While there was plenty of room for all the cattle to get to the feeders, the shy feeders only fed when they are not being bullied," Elliot said.

"Even then, they followed the rest of the mob to the dam, rather than taking the opportunity to feed on the supplement."

The cattle being trail-fed didn't seem to have the same challenges, and all had equal access to the supplement.

"The growth was still satisfactory, particularly when the paddock nutrition wasn't up to scratch," Elliot said.

Realising his cattle performed well through trail feeding – and on a lower ration – was a welcome revelation which, despite requiring more labour, negated investment in more self-feeders.

The results, while surprising, prompted Elliot to invest in better trail feeding equipment.

Comparing the cost

Supplement feeding, whether for long or short periods, requires additional cost for feed, labour and equipment. As a result, producers often implement the practice when conditions are critical.

The PDS aimed to offset – or justify – these costs, by using grain on-hand and utilising equipment which was otherwise sitting in the shed.

"That's how this PDS started. A lot of people around here have capital investment in feeders from the drought just sitting there, so it's good to be able to use what you have without investing more," Elliot said.

"Often the cost of wasted feed through trail feeding isn't worth it when you're feeding for years at a time in a drought, but in scenarios where I'm supplementing short-term to increase animal performance, it's definitely worthwhile.

"Trail feeding also gives me an opportunity to monitor the cattle and their performance more consistently, whereas with the self-feeder, I could get away with four or so days in between visits to top up the feed," he said.

"The PDS has definitely given me the confidence that trail feeding can work in my business. It's a good tool to have." ■

SNAPSHOT

ELLIOT SHANNON –
'Tiona', Bugaldie, NSW

AREA
1,485ha

ENTERPRISE
Cattle breeding and trading, cropping

PASTURES
Lucerne, tropical grasses and native grasses

SOILS
Sandy clay loam

RAINFALL
650–700mm

TOOLBOX

- Scan or click the QR code to learn more about this PDS:
- Join a PDS: **mla.com.au/pds**

Producer Elliot Shannon on his Bugaldie property.

Tips to stop stock thieves in their tracks

NSW Police State Rural Crime Coordinator, Detective Chief Inspector Cameron Whiteside APM, has a simple message for any producer who's been the victim of stock theft.

"Report. Report. Report."

One of the biggest challenges his team faces in dealing with on-farm theft is a reluctance by many producers to make a police report.

It's one of the reasons the NSW Rural Crime Prevention Team (RCPT) has been working hard since 2018 to gain the confidence of country communities through improved engagement and a demonstrated understanding of rural industries.

"Many of my team members are producers themselves, or they've worked in the industry in jobs such as shearing or wool-classing, so they've got industry knowledge," he said.

Det Ch Insp Whiteside's

top five security tips

1. Ensure NLIS PIC reconciliations are regularly undertaken.
2. Tag all sheep and cattle with NLIS species-specific devices and maintain accurate records for the devices.
3. Check the condition of fencing and gates on a regular basis.
4. Where possible, keep gates locked.
5. Keep a record of any hunters with permission to hunt on your property.

"We're not there to tell producers how to run their business but we can support them and help them reduce their vulnerability to theft in simple, actionable ways."

His team's work seems to be improving perceptions of NSW Police in country areas, with producers telling the 2021 Farm Crime Survey that an encounter with the RCPT left them feeling 'significantly more positive about policing overall'.

Don't delay reporting

Delays in reporting present one of the biggest challenges to policing – making it harder for investigators to collect reliable eyewitness accounts and forensic evidence. With stock theft, delayed reporting risks the animals being on the other side of the country (or on a plate) by the time a police investigation is opened.

Producers' reluctance to report a theft can be due to several factors, including a level of disbelief that someone would steal from them or fears of retaliation from the offender.

"It could also be the case that their record keeping isn't up to date – they mightn't have tagged their animals or recorded their stock transfers on the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS). If that's the case, identifying what animals have been taken can be a real issue but we'll do our best to support victims of rural crime."

To overcome this issue, Det Ch Insp Whiteside suggested producers conduct regular Property Identification Code (PIC) reconciliations on the NLIS to ensure they were prepared should they ever need to report stolen stock.

Whatever the reason for hesitating, his advice remains the same: don't delay reporting – even if you think the animal has simply strayed, you should still report it to the police as soon as possible.

Heightened risk

Rates of stock theft tend to follow market price trends, with higher cattle and sheep prices often leading to higher rates of theft. Conversely, when feed becomes scarcer during drought, thefts drop because the cost of feeding stolen livestock rises.

For example, in the 12 months to July 2024 the incidence of stock theft reported to NSW Police declined by 28% compared to the 12 months prior. During the same period, average market prices had also declined, with cattle prices down 27% (average price based on 'cow' value) and sheep prices dropping 39% (average price based on 'ewe' value).

Risk versus reward

"When you consider the risk versus reward of stealing livestock, the reward is much higher than the risk," Det Ch Insp Whiteside said.

"We need to reverse that equation and start making it much harder for the criminals."

In his experience, a stock thief is just like any other in that they'll always look for the easiest target.

He suggests making your property a harder target by considering a few simple and actionable security measures, including:

- **GPS tagging:** GPS tags (in addition to an NLIS tag) can be a game-changer for stock crimes. For example, during a GPS device trial at the University of New England, the RCPT participated in a mock stock theft and was able to recover the tagged stock within 25 minutes.
- **CCTV coverage**: Cameras can be a real deterrent. With many affordable systems on the market and internet coverage now accessible in many rural areas, it's worth investigating the options and your local farm field days can be a good opportunity do this.

> **"Checking the paperwork is a simple way to immediately identify if something isn't right and collect evidence about any potential crime. Those trained officers now have the skills necessary to understand what's required."**

- **Gate signage:** Place 'private property' and 'no trespassing' signs on gates and fences to encourage all visitors to seek approval before coming onto your property.

"Your property will never be 100% crime-proof but if you're aware of the risks, you can reduce them," he said.

Think like a criminal

When identifying where you could improve your property's security, sometimes it helps to think like a thief.

"Consider the basics – where you might enter the property, what time would you do it, and what property you've got that might be worth stealing," Det Ch Insp Whiteside said.

While livestock might be your primary concern, thieves might just as easily be targeting your firearms, fuel or machinery.

"Make sure your firearms are securely locked away and consider simple measures such as having a clear line of sight to things like your fuel tank."

Det Ch Insp Whiteside also suggests considering the location of your infrastructure.

"Your yards might be close to the highway or road, which is great for access when you're loading your stock, but it's also very convenient for thieves," he said.

"It's also worth bearing in mind that a full moon can present a good opportunity for thieves, making it relatively easy for them to walk stock to their vehicle without the risk of headlights or torches alerting anyone to their presence."

Rural crime training

With 53 Rural Crime Investigators to cover an area the size of Texas, the RCPT has worked to expand NSW Police's capacity and capability by providing rural crime-related training (including online and face-to-face) to many regional-based police officers.

"In 2022, we relaunched Operation Stock Check which saw us train police, particularly Highway Patrol, in what to look for when pulling over stock vehicles, with the focus being on understanding what paperwork the transporters are required to carry and identifying animal welfare and fit-to-load issues."

Stock thieves are unlikely to have the electronic or paper National Vendor Declaration (NVD) required to transport animals, so that should instantly raise alarm bells. It's also a good reminder to producers that they need to make sure their paperwork is complete and correct before dispatching a consignment.

"Checking the paperwork is a simple way to immediately identify if something isn't right and collect evidence about any potential crime. Those trained officers now have the skills necessary to understand what's required."

The training helped officers who might have been born and bred in the city to engage more effectively with rural communities and identify when something was out of place.

Following the success of Operation Stock Check, most Australian jurisdictions have now adopted those approaches in some form. ■

Scan or click the QR code to watch the *How to do a PIC Reconciliation on the NLIS* webinar:

Reporting stock theft

- Call '000' in an emergency
- Call or walk into your local police station
- Call the Police Assistance Line on 131 444
- Call Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000

Scan or click the QR code to access the *NSW Police Stock Theft Report template*, which provides an indication of the information police will need when starting a stock theft investigation:

Detective Chief Inspector Cameron Whiteside (far right) speaks with a Tocal Agricultural College Trainer and Queensland Police Stock Squad Officer at a RCPT training day.

TOOLBOX

- Learn how to record your livestock movements: **integritysystems.com.au/buying-selling-moving**
- Review animal identification requirements: **integritysystems.com.au/animalid**
- Read the *Tackling Rural Crime Handbook* for tips on securing your property and guidance on how to report a theft – scan or click the QR code:

Producers discover grass is greener with goats

When Brian and Keeleigh Allport first introduced goats to their cattle and sheep enterprise in 2018, it was part of an on-farm drought mitigation strategy to help better manage their vegetation.

"Basically, the cattle would go in and knock down the taller shrubs and weeds in paddocks that had been locked up, then the goats would go through and clear it," Brian said.

From that modest start, the Allports have gone on to establish one of Australia's premium goatmeat enterprises.

A new direction

Grassland Goats was established in 2019, primarily as a market for those bush goats they'd used on-farm. However, the Allports also saw an opportunity to spread their financial risk.

"To begin with, we were sending around 30 goats per week into the domestic market. These days, we're regularly doing 400–500 a week, but that could rise to 1,000 goats a week during the Islamic festivals," Keeleigh said.

To meet demand, the business has anywhere from 15,000–20,000 goats on hand at any time, including breeders, kids and backgrounders – mostly drawn from bush and rangeland goat blends crossed with Boer and Kalahari breeds.

On the rare occasion supply runs short, they rely on approved suppliers from western Queensland and NSW for additional rangeland and crossbred goat stock.

These animals are backgrounded for four weeks then processed through the Allports' vertically-integrated supply chain.

A multi-breed operation

While goatmeat is now their primary revenue driver, the Allports continue to run a cattle breeding and backgrounding business, with about 400 Santa Gertrudis and Angus/Hereford-cross cattle.

"Beef cattle have always been our passion and I don't think we'll ever be able to give that up completely," Brian said.

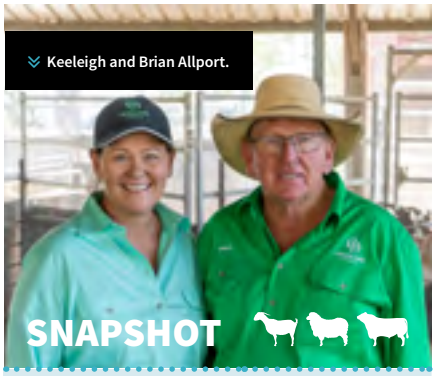
The business also runs between 1,000 to 2,000 sheep at any time, and processes about 100 lambs each week.

"Our lambs are primarily sourced from our own breeding stock. When demand requires, we'll rely on saleyards and hold those lambs for processing the following week or background them to fit into our system."

Vertically-integrated supply chain

The Allports own and operate virtually every aspect of their supply chain from on-farm production to customer fulfillment.

"We are in control of everything from growing our feed to owning our livestock transport and the cold storage trucks used to deliver the meat," Keeleigh said.



Keeleigh and Brian Allport.

SNAPSHOT

BRIAN AND KEELEIGH ALLPORT – 'Grassland Goats', Gore, Queensland

AREA
9,300ha

ENTERPRISE
15,000–20,000 goats, 400 Santa Gertrudis and Angus/Hereford-cross cattle, up to 2,000 sheep

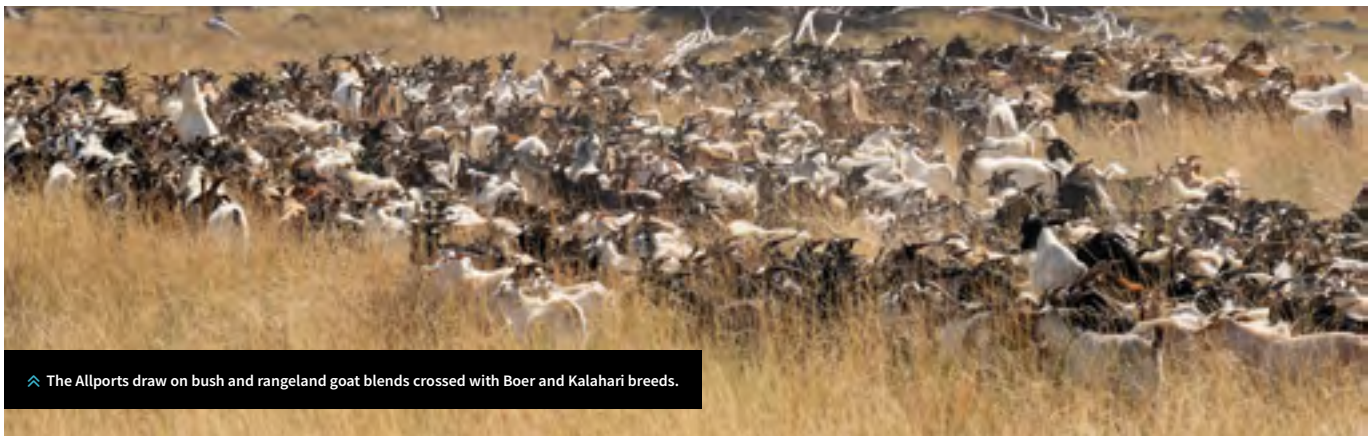
PASTURES
Mixed native grasses

SOILS
Traprock country running onto fertile creek flats

RAINFALL
710mm

"The only aspect of the supply chain we don't own is the abattoir – we use a third-party service kill and have our own staff on-site in the chiller and packing rooms."

The Allports employ their own halal slaughterer to ensure the meat is blessed and prepared in accordance with Islamic requirements. They also have quality



The Allports draw on bush and rangeland goat blends crossed with Boer and Kalahari breeds.

assurance on-site to check for any defects and make sure each carcase is tagged.

"We even have our own people there to pack the meat and handle customer order fulfillment so we're sure the right product is allocated to the right customer."

Traceability that's always spot-on

The Allports' electronic National Vendor Declaration (eNVD) journey started many years ago when they moved on from the paper books to become early adopters of the web-based eNVD which enabled them to print out copies for their transporter.

These days, their consignments are completely paperless.

"Looking back, the NVD books were really inconvenient and costly. There was always the chance that we'd run out of forms at the last minute, or we'd forget to take them down to the yards on the day we were loading the stock," Brian said.

They say the one big advantage of moving to fully digital consignments is the ability to adjust their delivery numbers when necessary.

"We try to count the animals, but loading goats isn't easy and there's always some that'll rush through. Once they're processed at the abattoir we can then go back and easily correct those numbers."

That's delivering a more accurate data collection for Grassland Goats' reporting and making sure their traceability records are spot on.

The technology has also made it possible for producers such as the Allports to complete eNVDs from anywhere.

"With the eNVD, you're basically carrying your consignment in your pocket," Keeleigh said.

"You can do it from anywhere – and when I say anywhere, I mean anywhere."

The couple had been working on an agricultural traceability project with the Export Council of Australia and were invited to attend a traceability symposium in Los Angeles, US, last year.

"While we were in California, travelling through Yosemite National Park, Brian was able to complete the eNVD while our team was on the ground loading trucks back at our Gore property," Keeleigh said.

Watch a video to learn more about Grassland Goats' experience with the eNVD – scan or click the QR code:

TOOLBOX

Learn more about using the eNVD: **integritysystems.com.au/nvd**

Visit MLA's Goats Hub: **mla.com.au/goats-hub**

"Why would you go back to the paper forms when you can do that?

"Looking back, I can't believe we resisted making the shift to the eNVD because of our connectivity issues, but I'll tell you what, we'd never go back now." ■

grasslandgoats.com.au Keeleigh Allport **admin@grasslandgoats.com.au** Demi Lollback **dlollback@integritysystems.com.au**

Global record for Aussie goatmeat

Australia has cemented its position as the world's leading goatmeat exporter.

MLA recently released the *2025 Global snapshot: goatmeat*. It revealed that in 2024, Australian goatmeat production surged 47% year-on-year to 54,017 tonnes carcase weight, the highest volume ever recorded.

Exports climbed 53% to a record 51,489t shipped weight in 2024, with export value rising 50% to $354 million. This is 40% higher than the previous high set in 2022.

Australia accounts for 55% of global goatmeat exports by volume, far ahead of competitors such as Kenya and Ethiopia, which represent 22% and 13% respectively of the global export market.

Key markets include:

- **US:** Australia's largest market, receiving more than 27,500t in 2024, a 90% year-on-year increase. Demand continues to grow in ethnically-diverse cities, particularly in the east and west coasts of the US.
- **South Korea:** imports rose 44% to a record 8,639t. Australian goatmeat is highly valued for its health benefits, especially during the traditional summer Sambok period.
- **China:** despite a dip from 2023 peaks, China remains the third-largest market with more than 5,100t imported in 2024. Trading dynamics are expected to support future growth.
- **The Caribbean:** Trinidad and Tobago imported more than 2,000t, making it Australia's fifth-largest market.

Growth drivers

Australia's growth has been driven by favourable seasonal conditions in key production areas – leading to a rapid increase in flock size – as well as expanded processing capacity. Goat slaughter in Australia rose by 41% to 3.4 million head in 2024.

According to MLA's Managing Director, Michael Crowley, Australia's goatmeat production has boomed in recent years, hand-in-hand with soaring overseas demand.

"Our goatmeat is highly regarded for its quality and sustainability credentials which are resonating strongly with buyers and consumers worldwide," he said.

"The increased supply, together with the expansion of goat-specific processing plants, has improved the availability and consistency of Australian goat meat, boosting buyers' confidence to grow imports of Australian goatmeat."

In comparison to other proteins, goatmeat is less prevalent in Australian meals, with around 5% of all goatmeat produced remaining in Australia last year. However, there has been a long, steady upward trend in the average number of goatmeat serves over the years.

Increasing awareness of goatmeat is a goal of MLA's domestic consumer campaigns, including in the successful Sydney and and Melbourne Goat Trails, which profile restaurants showcasing the versatility of goatmeat in various cuisines. ■

TOOLBOX

Scan or click the QR code to read the latest *Global snapshot*:

Scan or click the QR code to watch the Melbourne Goat Trail:

Saltbush, legumes part of productivity recipe

Producers in WA's Eastern Wheatbelt face some of the state's toughest agricultural conditions, including low and variable rainfall, but an MLA project has shed light on productivity solutions.

A run of poor seasons can result in feed shortages in the region, posing significant challenges. Climate variability is amplifying these risks, while soil constraints such as acidity and salinity are making profitable grain production increasingly tough.

To overcome these challenges, producers involved in the Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group (MADFIG) could see potential in moving towards livestock production on their lower-yielding paddocks. However, concerns remained over managing the summer–autumn feed gap, and their confidence was impacted by the loss of live sheep export markets in the future.

MADFIG coordinated an MLA-funded Producer Demonstration Site (PDS)to trial solutions.

The PDS explored the potential of combining saltbush and legume pasture systems to improve feed reliability, increase stocking rates and enhance land use. It also highlighted the benefits of edible shelter provided by saltbush, which helps protect lambs from harsh weather and predators.

The PDS involved six producers, who implemented different approaches to establishing and managing saltbush-based grazing systems. By integrating forage shrubs with pasture legumes, the project demonstrated how these systems might provide a consistent and high-quality feed source, while utilising previously unproductive land and reducing further degradation.

Weed management

Glenice Batchelor, Executive Officer of MADFIG, said the demonstration sites highlighted key learnings around establishment, weed control and grazing management.

"One of the biggest challenges growers faced was ensuring good establishment of the saltbush and legumes while managing weeds effectively – especially the increasing impact of Matricaria species," she said.

"Another concern has been forage supply – some growers needed to adjust their grazing strategies to maximise feed availability throughout the year."

The PDS reinforced that establishment timing and paddock preparation are critical to success.

Both saltbush and legume seed must be planted early enough to take advantage of winter moisture, and legumes require careful management to ensure strong competition against insects and weeds.

Weed control strategies, such as maintaining buffer zones for easier spraying access, have proven important for maximising pasture productivity.

However, once established, saltbush is a standout option to provide a reliable source of nutrition during the dry months when traditional pastures offer little value. Combined with legumes such as spineless medics and bladder clover, these systems can enhance feed quality and help maintain sheep condition without heavy reliance on supplementary feeding.

"We've seen real benefits in terms of sheep performance, soil protection and long-term sustainability," Glenice said.

"Producers who plan ahead and get the establishment right will have a valuable feed source that supports their enterprise, protects their soils long term and supports on-farm biodiversity." ■

Anameka™ saltbush planted at the Nokaning PDS in early autumn of 2022 were grazed over 2023–24.

Glenice Batchelor **eo@madfig.com.au** Alana McEwan **amcewan@mla.com.au**

Three steps to success

For producers considering saltbush and legume systems, the following steps can help to ensure success:

1 Plan ahead

Order seedlings the season before, source high-quality seed and prepare paddocks in advance to ensure optimal establishment conditions.

2 Manage weeds and insects early

Leave spray tracks or buffer zones for effective weed control and minimise competition for seedlings.

3 Adopt a flexible grazing strategy

Establishing perennials such as saltbush provides a 'standing haystack' of feed that can be used strategically during dry periods or as needed throughout the year.

TOOLBOX

Learn more about the PDS program, sign up for PDS e-news and access resources including the PDS search tool to find sites by relevant topic or region: **mla.com.au/pds**

A pinch of saltbush boosts sheep, soil health

WA producer Cam Gethin is turning salt-affected paddocks into a reliable feed source by integrating saltbush and legumes – boosting sheep performance, reducing supplementary feeding and improving land use.

Like many producers in WA's Eastern Wheatbelt, Cam has battled with unproductive, salt-affected land that is unsuitable for cropping. With the rising cost of supplementary feeding, he was eager to explore an alternative way to keep his sheep operation viable.

As part of an MLA-funded Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) – see story opposite – Cam trialled integrating forage shrubs and legumes into his farming system.

He planted 10,000 Anameka™ saltbush plants across 10ha, undersown with spineless medics and rose clover, to create a self-sustaining feedbase capable of filling the summer and autumn feed gap.

"We've got land that's increasingly difficult to crop, but this project helped us find a way to make use of it while improving the resilience of our sheep enterprise," Cam said.

The saltbush provided a durable, drought-resistant feed source, while the legumes helped improve soil fertility and offered additional grazing options.

"We had a lucky break with 120mm of summer rain, and that helped to establish the pasture mix. The sheep held condition well and I didn't have to feed them as often as I usually would," Cam said.

Beating weeds

One of the biggest challenges Cam faced was weed competition in the first year.

"Wild oats took off in some sections and that became a fire risk," he said. "Now, I leave boom spray tracks for easier weed control."

Grazing management has also been a key learning.

"Sheep will strip saltbush right down to sticks, but it bounces back in three months. I've learned to time grazing carefully to avoid overgrazing during the establishment phase."

Cam now sees perennial shrubs as an essential part of his feedbase.

"It's like having a shed full of hay standing in the paddock. I know it's there if I need it," he said.

This confidence allows him to carry more sheep through the summer and autumn, knowing there is a buffer if seasonal conditions are tough.

"Beyond feed security, the saltbush paddock provides edible shelter, which has been great for lamb survival."

WA producer Cam Gethin.

SNAPSHOT

CAM AND MEG GETHIN –
Hines Hill, WA

AREA
4,500ha

ENTERPRISE
Mixed farming – sheep and cropping

PASTURES
Saltbush, spineless medic, bladder clover, rose clover

SOILS
Saline and non-saline cropping paddocks

RAINFALL
320mm

LESSONS LEARNT

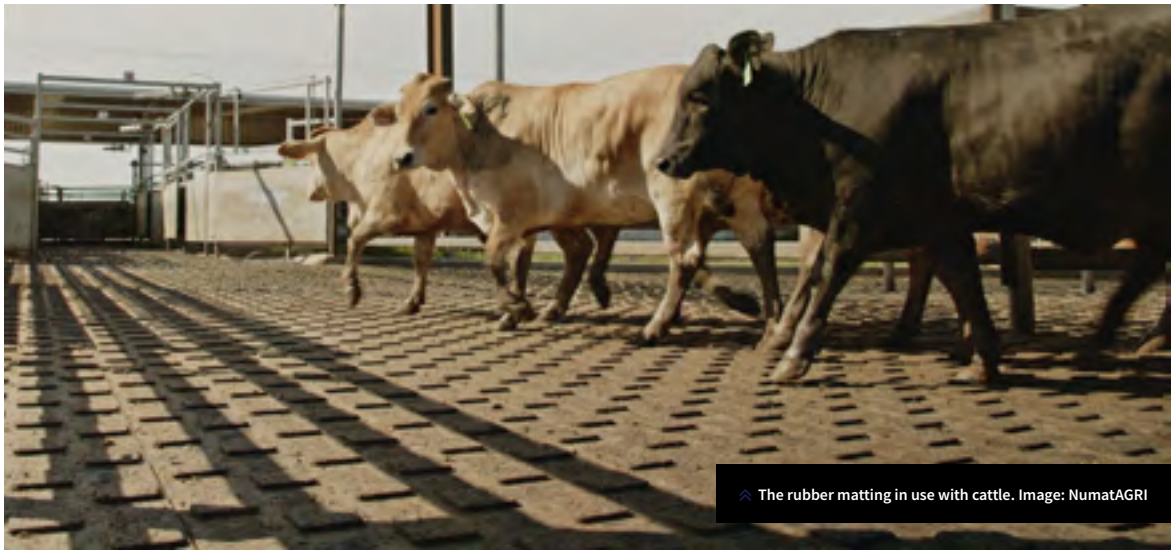
- Plan for weed control: leave space for boom spraying and manage weeds early.
- Get planting right: early establishment and good winter moisture are critical.
- Grazing management matters: allow saltbush time to recover between grazings.
- Think long-term: perennial pastures provide resilience and reduce reliance on supplementary feeding.

TOOLBOX

- Scan or click this QR code to listen to Cam share his lessons learnt on a podcast about the PDS:
- Scan or click this QR code for more information on establishing and grazing saltbush-based foraging systems:

WA producer Cam Gethin is turning salt-affected paddocks into a reliable feed source by integrating saltbush and legumes.

Cam Gethin **camgethin@hotmail.com** Alana McEwan **amcewan@mla.com.au**



The rubber matting in use with cattle. Image: NumatAGRI

Getting a grip on livestock safety

The livestock export industry has successfully trialled rubber matting as an innovative solution to improve animal welfare.

The project, which included the first-ever research trials of the product involving sheep, successfully eliminated slips and major falls in pre-export facilities as well as on board a ship.

Agri-consultant Carl Archer, from provider NumatAGRI, sees a lot of benefit for the sheep industry, as this aspect of the trials generated significant interest among producers.

Numat rubber mats are already widely used in equine facilities and on dairy farms and cattle feedlots across Australia.

"These trials have confirmed they aren't just for cattle — they're also highly effective in sheep facilities," Carl said.

"By reducing the risk of slips and falls, the mats provide a valuable improvement for animal welfare across various livestock industries."

The project is part of the Livestock Export Program's (LEP) open innovation approach to research. By leveraging solutions from other industries, this explores how existing technologies can be adapted to meet the needs of the livestock export sector. The LEP is a collaboration between MLA and LiveCorp.

In the latest trials, seven different rubber matting concepts were installed in WA, including in ramps and corridors at pre-export quarantine facilities, as well as on a livestock export ship.

Benefits of rubber matting

The matting provides superior grip compared to current materials such as wood shavings, stamped concrete and steel mesh, enhancing animal welfare during transit and when moving through yards.

The results showed that all mat types effectively prevented slips and major falls in both cattle and sheep.

For sheep, all mat types eliminated falls entirely, with five of the seven types also preventing slipping incidents, while the remaining two reduced slips by 96%. A single mat type was tested for cattle, successfully eliminating falls and reducing slips by 99%.

Several key factors beyond slips and falls were also evaluated – and the results were promising. These included:

- ease of installation and cleaning, emphasising the need for quick set-up and removal to maintain hygiene standards
- stability, as preventing the mats from shifting over time will ensure consistent performance.

The success of the Australian-based trials has gained international interest, with the mats being further trialled in Indonesia on a discharge ramp at Lampung port, inside a cattle truck and at a feedlot loading ramp.

A step forward for welfare and efficiency

By adopting technologies proven in other industries, the livestock export industry continues to demonstrate its commitment to innovation and animal welfare.

The success of these rubber matting trials is a testament to the value of cross-sector collaboration and could pave the way for wider adoption of these solutions across livestock and red meat industries. ■

> **"By reducing the risk of slips and falls, the mats provide a valuable improvement for animal welfare across various livestock industries."**

mla.com.au/livestock-export **livecorp.com.au/researchanddevelopment**
Peter Dundon **pdundon@mla.com.au**

Meeting new European market requirements

Starting 31 December 2025, the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) will take effect. The new requirements will apply to all beef, beef products and leather/hides exported to the European Union.

In May, Australia was classified as a low-risk country under the EUDR, meaning it will enjoy a simplified process for collecting and reporting information to the EU compared to countries deemed 'standard risk' or 'high risk'.

However, under this simplified due diligence process, Australian producers and exporters will still need to provide geolocation data and other information on land use so that EU importers can conduct their assessment.

LPA makes data sharing simple

The Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) program has created a new mapping tool which enables LPA-accredited producers to easily share their geolocation data via the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

This means exporters will be able to access the data required and ensures continued access to European markets for Australian producers, while also contributing to best practice land management.

Elizabeth Bradley, Integrity Systems Company's Manager of Quality, Policy and Compliance, explained how the new LPA tool supports producers to meet their responsibilities under the new EUDR requirements.

"The new mapping tool (via LPA) allows producers who are part of the EU supply chain to opt-in and share their geolocation data securely through the NLIS," Elizabeth said.

"This geolocation data can then be shared with the European importer without sharing any Property Identification Codes (PICs) – ensuring the privacy of our producers is protected and that they remain in control of their data at all times."

Elizabeth also emphasised that the geolocation-sharing feature does not access land degradation or deforestation data – that responsibility sits with the European importer, who needs to submit (as part of their import documentation) a Due Diligence Statement based on information provided by the Australian exporter.

Accessing the tool

LPA-accredited producers can share their geolocation data by logging into their LPA account via myMLA, and navigating to the Programs page.

Scan or click the QR code to learn how to link your integrity systems accounts to your myMLA profile.

Obtaining lifetime geolocation data

To maintain EU market access, whole-of-life geolocation data is required so EU importers can verify the deforestation status of any land associated with an animal.

Processors and feedlots can access an animal's full geolocation history by searching its electronic identification number in the NLIS database.

"Once the search is complete, further checks can be conducted as part of the arrangements with the importer, and the deforestation check can then be passed through with the documentation," Elizabeth said.

"It's effectively filling a data gap to ensure the export of cattle and cattle products to the EU can continue."

Assurance of land management

Elizabeth said these new regulations could serve as a foundation for incorporating land management assurance into the LPA program.

"I think this is an opportunity for us to explore with industry and set some national expectations around how we provide assurance for things such as land management and deforestation, etc."

Improved collection and reporting of data could also support the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework's priority areas of balanced tree and grass cover, and market access.

"The more information we have, the more the livestock industry will be able to promote sustainability across the board," Elizabeth said.

"That enhanced data collection will ensure that where we have high-value market requirements, wherever they may be, we'll be able to easily fulfil them.

"This means the data collected to ensure EU market requirements are met will help bolster the whole assurance framework in the future." ■

A simple mapping tool (via LPA) allows producers who are part of the EU supply chain to opt-in and share their geolocation data.

TOOLBOX

Learn more about the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework: **sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au**

Read more about the European Union Deforestation Regulation and the geolocation sharing tool – scan or click the QR code:

Subscribe to Integrity Matters: **integritysystems.com.au/IM**

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IN MARKET *growing demand*

How hungry are consumers for sustainable red meat?

Australian red meat producers are committed to sustainable on-farm and supply chain practices – but what does this mean to consumers around the world who devoured more than $11.5 billion of our beef last year alone?

Australia exports about three-quarters of the beef we produce to more than 100 countries. On a global scale, we account for less than 5% of the world's beef and buffalo meat supply.

Despite being a small fish in a big pond, Australia's beef industry has been among the most dominant players in global beef trade. Australia is now ranked as the second-largest beef exporter in the world after hitting new exporting records in 2024.

MLA's Global Market Insights team identifies global demand drivers to help Australian beef exporters stay ahead of the game – here are some insights about the sustainability 'driver'.

What's driving consumer behaviour today?

According to Miho Kondo, MLA's Global Market Insights Manager, it's important for Australian producers and processors to understand behaviours and perceptions associated with red meat purchasing to ensure the interest and needs of global consumers are being captured.

"With more than two-thirds of our red meat products being consumed by overseas markets, we need to stay on top of what's happening across our shores, such as where consumer interests are heading and how they are prioritising their purchases," Miho said.

"Among many important trends and demand drivers, sustainability is closely monitored. Our research has found that almost half (46%) of our global consumers listed sustainability as a factor that influences them when shopping for red meat."

A similar proportion (44%) said they were unclear about what 'sustainable red meat' actually is.

"It's important to understand that for most consumers, sustainability is just one factor in their decision-making process," Miho said.

"When we look at consumers who did have some understanding of what sustainability means, we're able to uncover why it's one of the influencing factors, and what our industry can do to satisfy that consumer need."

Different markets, different expectations

MLA Market Insights Managers Amy Chow (Australia, North America, EU and UK markets) and Vivian Harris (Greater China and Middle East markets) looked at the Global Consumer Tracker survey to understand how sustainability connects with red meat in consumers' minds, across different markets.

In the US – an established market for Australian beef – most consumers linked sustainability with animal health and welfare, with a focus on animal cruelty and the use of antibiotics and added hormones in animals.

US consumers associate these same factors with 'natural' and 'healthy' products – despite cost-of-living pressures, they are willing to spend more on these attributes.

"Consumers in the US want to feel less guilty about eating red meat," Amy said. "They want assurance they're not supporting animal cruelty and want to ensure their family's wellbeing with naturally good products."

In the Middle East, red meat plays a particularly important role in family and religious life, but the region is quite dependent on imports. Vivian said food security is a leading need for consumers there.

"When we look at consumers who did have some understanding of what sustainability means, we're able to uncover why it's one of the influencing factors, and what our industry can do to satisfy that consumer need."

"With their experience of imports challenged by COVID-19 supply chain disruptions, consumers in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates connect sustainability with having guaranteed access to fresh meat that has been produced in accordance with high animal welfare standards – tying in with halal requirements for meat," Vivian said.

Chinese consumers have yet another different understanding of sustainable red meat. Consumers have a strong need to trust the safety standards of their food products – which was amplified following the global pandemic.

For affluent urban consumers in China, sustainable red meat is understood to relate to practices such as raising animals with clean air, water and soil, resulting in safe and natural meat with no harmful additives.

Meeting market demands

Regardless of how consumers perceive sustainability, Miho said talking to consumers in relevant, appealing ways that highlight Australian red meat's advantages will help Australia compete in global markets.

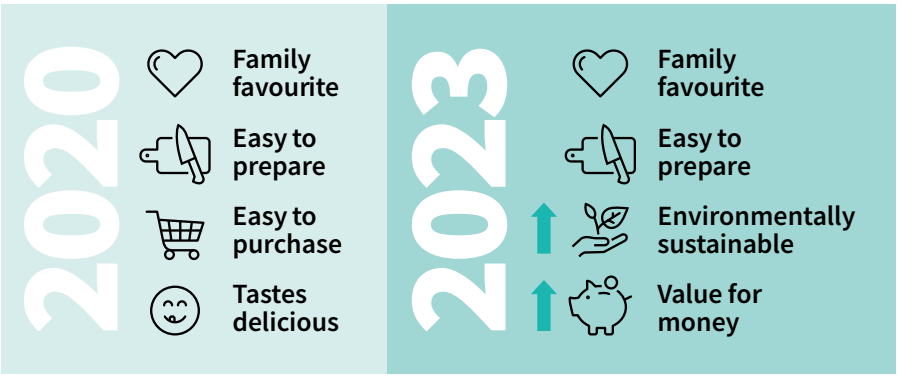
"Consumers are always thinking 'what's in it for me', particularly in the current economic environment," Miho said.

"Despite regional differences in red meat product priorities, there is an underlying theme of wanting a product that aligns with the safety of animals, the planet and consumers.

"Australia's paddock-to-plate traceability and product integrity systems are strong credentials that build trust in Australia's food safety and sustainability claims. They're also an effective tool to communicate the commitment of the Australian red meat industry.

"Regardless of the regional differences, when Australian producers, processors and brands point out our credentials, quality and commitments, customers and consumers see them as strong points of difference – putting us where we need to be to stay competitive in our global markets." ■

Figure 1: Enjoyment and convenience are the top drivers of everyday protein purchasing but environment sustainability has risen in importance across markets.



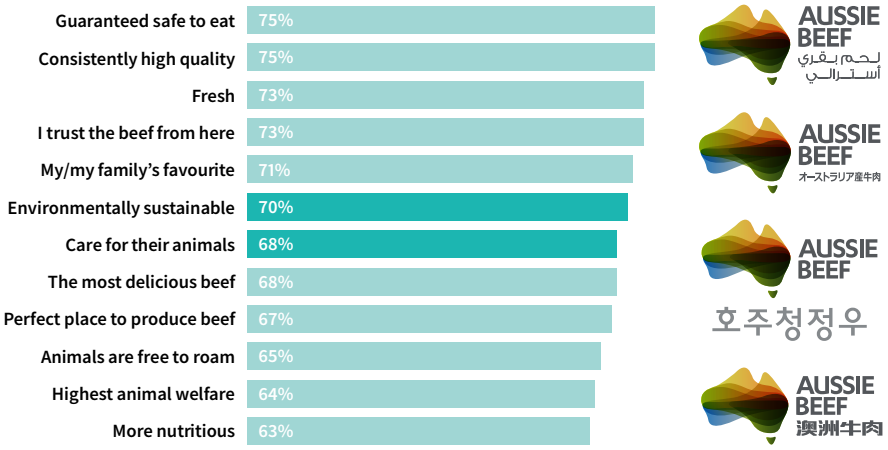
Source: MLA Global Consumer Tracker 2020 and 2023. Data derived using correlation analysis. Markets include USA, Saudi Arabia, UAE, China, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Figure 2: Australia is already ahead of competitors on association with environmental sustainability in most consumers' minds when it comes to Aussie beef.

Order	Surveyed country					
	China	South Korea	UAE	Indonesia	Vietnam	Japan
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
Other countries mentioned	Argentinian, Uruguayan	Canadian	Brazilian, New Zealandan, American	American	Local, New Zealandan, Canadian	Canadian

Source: MLA Global Consumer Tracker 2023 and 2024.

Figure 3: In consumers' minds, Aussie Beef stands for safety, quality, freshness and trust. Sustainability and good animal welfare are also notable associations.



Source: MLA Global Consumer Tracker 2023 and 2024. Average of six markets: USA, UAE, China, South Korea, Japan and Indonesia.

TOOLBOX

- Visit the Aussie Meat Trade Hub for the latest strategic consumer and market insights, trade data and interactive tools: **aussiemeattradehub.com.au**
- MLA's global market data and insights: **mla.com.au/overseas-markets**

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Miho Kondo **mkondo@mla.com.au**

Good meat, backed by great numbers

MLA's Australian Good Meat program is designed to engage with the public to maintain trust and support in the industry's environmental sustainability, animal welfare, and the role of red meat in a healthy diet.

Since the digital and social program relaunched in 2021, Australian Good Meat has reached millions of Australians.

Here are just some of the ways Australian Good Meat has been telling red meat's story and achieving results to maintain social capital – ensuring the community has trust in and support for the industry to underpin the long-term prosperity of the Australian red meat industry. (Scan or click the QR codes to find out more.)

Social stats:

92 million cumulative reach

5 million engagements

198 million impressions

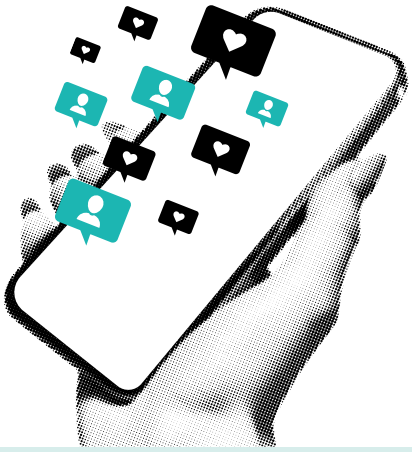
3.4 million YouTube video views

50 million video views

Website stats:

588,000 users/active users

964,000 page views



508 Red Meat Ambassadors

The Red Meat Ambassador training provides professional development in community engagement, communication through media and social media, and building trust with consumers.

200 producer videos

Videos continue to be created as part of the 'Face of the industry' series, where producers share their story and showcase the industry. The series has gained more than **two million views.**

212K social views

TV presenter Kimberley Busteed joined Australian Good Meat to develop the 'My neighbours out back' series, connecting the community with the producers of their food. **Eight videos** were filmed across **three farms.**

52k booklets printed

Red Meat, Green Facts (RMGF) answers the environmental sustainability, health and animal welfare questions from the public and provides a resource of quality information for producers and industry to use. The booklet is supported by the RMGF website, which has been visited nearly **70,000 times.**

80 content pieces created

Selected influencers were given a hands-on farm experience, allowing them to authentically discuss the environmental and animal care on-farm through videos, posts and other content pieces that achieved a reach of **2.8 million** and more than **900,000 video views.**

6.2M people reached

Young people are a key demographic to reach to maintain social capital. In its first media partnership in 2022, Australian Good Meat collaborated with LADbible to reach their audience, which is made up of 73% of Australians aged 18–34. At the time, it was the world's biggest social publisher, known for their young audience.

60 social media influencers

Australian Good Meat partnered with a range of influencers to reach new audiences across the Australian public. The partnerships resulted in the creation of more than **500 pieces of content,** which gained **14 million** impressions across their online platforms.

11 illuminating animations

Short and long-form animations have been designed to educate about sustainable red meat production, the red meat industry's carbon neutral initiatives, the role of cattle and the natural carbon cycle, how the red meat industry can be part of the climate solution and plant-based meat. The animations have been viewed **450,000 times.**

30M social impressions

Australian Good Meat partnered with influencers, the Fairbairn Brothers, in a series taking the once-rural boys back to the farm, following their YouTube series called 'Fairbairn in the city'. The series received **7.8 million views.**

87% good–excellent knowledge

More than **10,000 people** were surveyed after engaging with the Australian Good Meat exhibits at the Sydney Royal Easter Show and the Brisbane Ekka – they rated their knowledge of the red meat industry after visiting the exhibit.

90k primary school students engaged

The Australian Good Meat Education program has delivered **150 teaching resources** spanning Foundations to Year 12, with nearly **20,000 downloads.**

goodmeat.com.au Heidi Brunker **hbrunker@mla.com.au** Sam Jamieson **sjamieson@mla.com.au**

What makes a champion steer?

With agricultural show season in full swing, a led steer and carcase competition insider shares his thoughts on what many judges look for in a champion steer.


Livestock consultant and experienced show judge, Jeff House.

Jeff House is a livestock consultant with more than a decade's experience judging led steer and carcase competitions for many of Australia's major metropolitan and regional shows.

Striking a balance

Jeff approaches any led steer competition with the knowledge that those animals are set to be processed within a day or two of judging – as long as they are fit and healthy, he's less concerned with structural soundness at this stage.

"I'm effectively trying to look under that animal's hide and assess whether it's got the right balance of fat cover and muscularity to deliver a really high-yielding carcase that meets the specifications for the class," he said.

Fat and muscle

Jeff said it's important for both exhibitors and judges to be aware of the fat specifications set by the competion, depending on the live weight of the cattle or the target carcase specifications for each class.

His first assessment begins when cattle walk into the ring, getting a broad overview of fat coverage and give each a fat score. He looks at the animal from the front to see what sort of fat development there is in the brisket, before moving along the underline to the flank.

"I'll then look at the animal from behind to observe fat coverage over the pin bones and around the tailhead," he said. "These areas don't tend to have a lot of muscle development, which makes it easier to assess the animal's fat coverage."

Once the fat coverage has been assessed, Jeff looks for the right amount of muscling.

"I'll consider things like the width through the hind quarter and whether it's flat or if there's some visible bulging there," Jeff said. "I'll then look down through the stifle joint to assess its thickness because that will also indicate muscling.

"A wide back is also a good sign the animal has a big eye muscle area, indicating plenty of meat along the backline and running in behind the shoulder of that animal."

Judging a carcase

In general, points are awarded for carcase attributes in line with the set market specifications of the competition.

How this is assessed can vary from one competition to another, but Jeff would usually allocate points based on meeting market specifications, saleable meat yield and meat quality.

Traits assessed include:

Fat depth: Measured at the P8 (rump) site, as well as the rib fat thickness at the carcase quartering site. Points are allocated based on the fat depth specifications set for the class.

Fat colour: This should be on the whiter side – judges often use the AUS-MEAT chips from 0 (white) to 9 (yellow).

Meat colour: Meat colour is assessed using the AUS-MEAT meat colour standards (1a to 7), with bright pink to cherry red (1B or 1C) likely to score higher.

Muscle Score: An assessment of the overall thickness and volume of meat in the carcase.

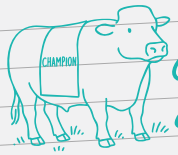
Rib Eye Area: Measured using a grid to determine the area of the eye muscle at the quartering site of the carcase. Points are allocated based on rib eye area relative to the weight of the carcase.

Meat quality: In some competitions, points are awarded based on the MSA Index, while other competitions allocate points to traits that contribute to the MSA Index such as pH, weight for maturity, marbling and fat distribution.

Marbling: The optimum marbling score will vary depending on the target market specifications set for the competition.

Fat distribution: Judges will assess the evenness of fat coverage over the carcase, and whether all the primal cuts are adequately covered.

When it comes to breeding steers that will perform – not just in the showring – Jeff said it comes down to understanding the requirements of the market you're targeting and breeding to meet those demands. ■



Champion checklist

- ☑ Attend a BredWell FedWell event to help design a breeding and feeding plan that meets your objectives: **mla.com.au/bwfw**
- ☑ Streamline showtime – and other – livestock movements with electronic National Vendor Declarations (eNVD): **integritysystems.com.au/nvd**
- ☑ Understand what's needed when you're heading to a show, to meet the integrity requirements for your state or territory: **integritysystems.com.au/show**
- ☑ Learn about live animal grading – scan or click the QR code to learn more:
- ☑ Find out more about MSA carcase grading: **mla.com.au/msa**
- ☑ Use the MLA Beef Specs Calculator: **mla.com.au/beef-specs**

Jeff House **jeff.house@iinet.net.au** Demi Lollback **dlollback@integritysystems.com.au**

Italian beef pot roast

Ward off the winter chill with the ultimate comfort food: roast beef. Italian flavours provide a delicious spin on this family favourite – for more mouth-watering beef recipes visit **australianbeef.com.au**

Serves **6** Prep time **5 minutes** Cooking time **50 minutes**

INGREDIENTS

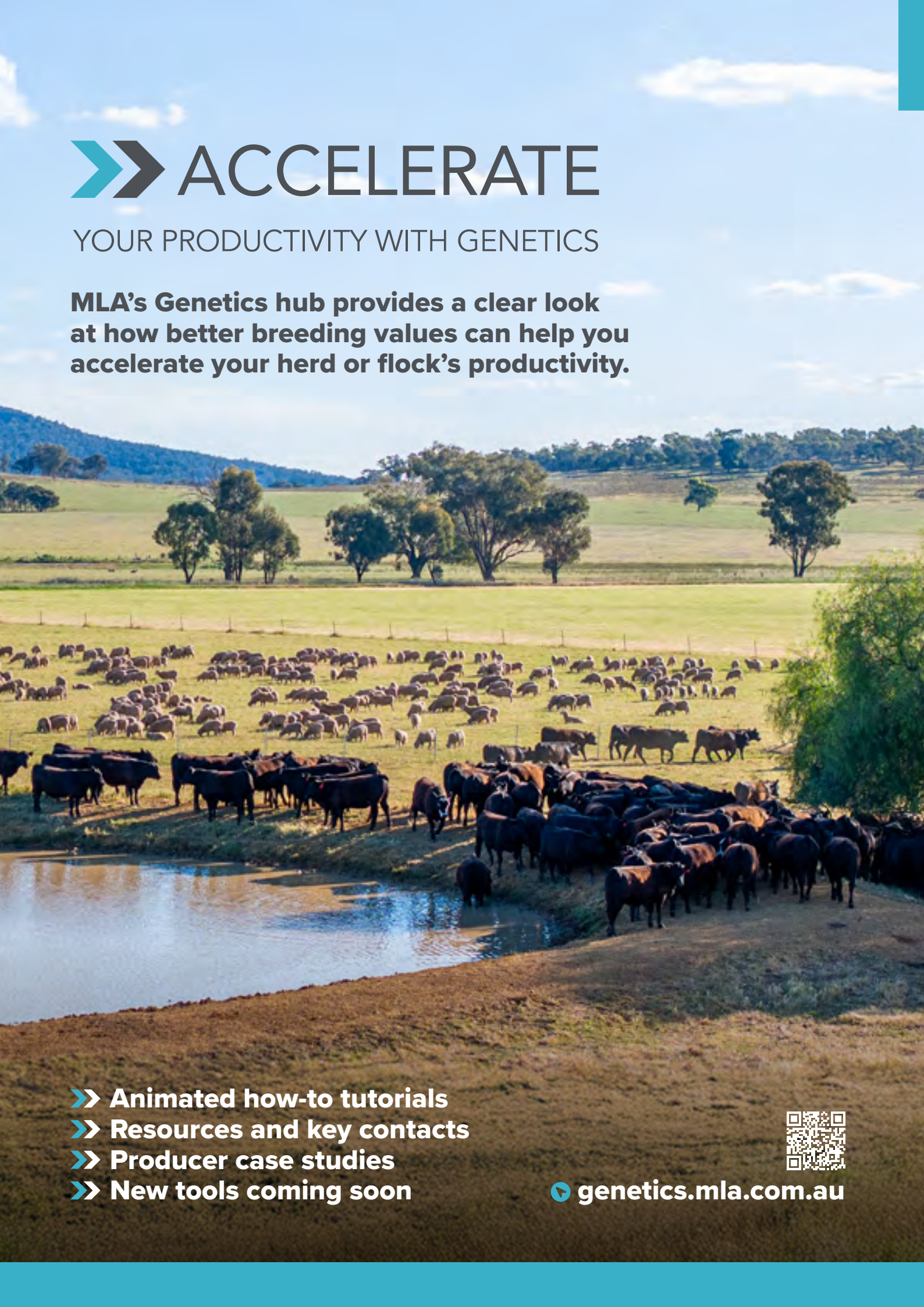
1.2kg piece of beef rump, fat trimmed
1 cup (200g) pearl barley
2 cups (500ml) salt-reduced beef stock
2 x 400g can baby Roma tomatoes
½ cup black olives, pitted
2 garlic cloves, crushed
3 sprigs rosemary, finely chopped
400g can cannellini beans
Steamed broccolini and parsley to serve
Salt to season

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 200°C (180°C fan-forced). Place the barley, stock, tomatoes, olives, garlic and rosemary in a heavy ovenproof casserole dish. Stir and season.
2. Season the beef and spray with olive oil. Place onto the barley mixture. Cover with the lid and cook for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and cook a further 15–20 minutes for medium or done to your liking. Add the beans for the last 5 minutes of cooking. Remove from oven, cover with foil and rest for 15 minutes.
3. Slice beef and serve with barley mixture, broccolini and sprinkle with parsley.

TIPS

- Beef blade would also work for this recipe. Use a large sharp knife to trim excess fat from beef.
- For accuracy of doneness use a meat thermometer Rare 60°C. Medium-rare 60–65°C. Medium 65–70°C. Medium-well done 70°C. Well done 75°C.
- Add half a cup (125ml) red wine and swap out half a cup of stock for extra depth of flavour.


ACCELERATE
YOUR PRODUCTIVITY WITH GENETICS
MLA's Genetics hub provides a clear look at how better breeding values can help you accelerate your herd or flock's productivity.
Animated how-to tutorials
Resources and key contacts
Producer case studies
New tools coming soon
genetics.mla.com.au