



final report

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This report covers the third year of More Beef From Pastures coordination in Tasmania. More Beef From Pastures (MBFP) is a national MLA program delivered in Tasmania within the Red Meat Targets (RMT) framework. MBFP's objective is to deliver access to practical tools and information to producers in the form of a "Producer Manual" and to develop human and enterprise capacity by coordinating and delivering activities that support the appropriate use of the manual.

Key operational objectives:

The operational objectives for MBFP include: developing producer awareness of the MBFP manual; encouraging producers to obtain and use a copy of the manual (in either hardcopy or CD format); and engaging producers in activities that illustrate how the various tools and information can be used and applied on farm, to improve the productivity and profitability of beef enterprises.

MBFP In Tasmania

In Tasmania the operation of the MBFP program has included local coordination, representation on a national coordinating group, participation in the delivery of activities aimed at producers and agribusiness, media promotion of the program and manual, working with producer advocates for the program, and participating in the programs strategic development.

Key Activities.

Producer Forums: In the 2006/07 period since the last report, MBFP has been directly promoted and supported in 26 forums and activities across the state. These have included broad awareness at events like Agfest, right down to in depth presentations and discussions to beef groups and training course participants.

This includes participation at the 2006 MBFP expo and 2 smaller supporting events which were not able to be included in last years report, which was furnished in advance of the end of the financial year.

In total these activities have engaged a total of 970 participants, or 743 participants for the financial year when the three events at the end of June 06 are excluded.

Six of these events have involved producer advocates and have focussed on the practical application of the MBFP manual, using producers Fred Perry, Charles Cay, Rod Manning and Rob Tole. Each discussed the management of feed demand, herd fertility, pasture growth and grazing, managing risk and cost of production. These discussions have been an excellent platform for illustrating the practical application of the manuals principles.

The producer manual and key tools like the Cost of Production calculator and Feed Demand calculator were promoted and illustrated substantially at these events.

MBFP has been the key contributor to 11 major field days and beef group meetings. These have provided a focus on cost of production, grazing systems, production per ha, and meeting targets.

MBFP presentations have been made at 6 training course activities, providing in depth discussions on herd management, feed budgeting and pasture growth.

In addition MBFP was promoted and illustrated at a further 7 events as a partner or invited speaker.

These activities have been delivered across the state, including activities in Stanley, Montague, Pipers River, Deloraine, Hagley, Winnaleah, Waterhouse, King Island, Carrick, Cressy, Nunamara, Buckland, Rosegarland, Kindred, and Runnymede

Manual distribution: There has still been demand for the CDs provided at dedicated MBFP events, and we have continued to promote the hardcopy of the manual. Feedback has always been positive regarding this resource. It's noted that all available manuals were sold at the latest Expo (7).

Publicity. In addition to field-based activities, MBFP has been promoted in Tasmania by local advertising of events and frequent reference in articles published in Tasregions (DPIW), Primary Focus (TFGA), The Advocate, and King Island Courier.

Coordination. The local coordinator has participated in all quarterly MBFP and national coordinators meetings, contributing 14 days of time.

Activity reports have been provided at each of these meetings, and the coordinator has contributed to the development of a MBFP strategic plan and ongoing activities like the expo's.

To date the local coordinators participation has comprised approximately 0.4 of a FTE for the delivery of the program within Tasmania.

Current Evaluation.

Anecdotal feedback has been very positive. In general the response to advocates has been strong, with some people indicating that they have changed the focus of their enterprises (dairy grazers to beef), or their herd and grazing management as a result. One apology to a day left a message indicating he was sorry to miss out, but that he had changed his whole system as a result of the last day.

Repeated promotion of the Cost of Production tool has increased awareness of the value of this information, with producers indicating that they have measured it and estimated their productivity for the first time. One participant took the time to fax back an evaluation form (because they loved the day) and indicated that having measured productivity they were keen to meet the challenge of some-one doing better and had engaged a consultant to do so

This evaluation of impact is ad hoc and subjective but as yet there is no other mechanism in the program to replace it at the coordinator level.

Event evaluations have been excellent, with producers regarding our days as professional (90% 4 & 5 on a scale of 1 – 5), and of value (80%) and indicating a willingness to use information at home (90%).

Additionally as a local initiative we ask whether information has been used or change made as a result of attending past program events. We've only recently commenced collecting this information, but the results are interesting.

At one large field day (100 participants) only 30% of respondents indicated change (gross margin, planning, stocking rate, more intensive pasture management), 12% said no, and 60% didn't respond.

However, at three smaller event days (20 participants each) in regions we have serviced more regularly, positive responses indicating change had been made as a result of past attendance were, 54%, 64%, and 72%. Further data collection and analysis will be exceedingly interesting to monitor and use in the development of our approach.

Activity Plans.

This will of course be guided by the strategic direction that the group agrees to.

However current plans include greater effort directed at working with receptive agronomists and consultants with regard to awareness and farmer use of the tools. Some have expressed interest and there is potential to capitalise on some developing relationships agronomists and consultants.

There is scope to have informal regional updates for advisors as a starting point. We also have plans to scope the development of a concept of productivity groups convened by these agents.

Within our department we have commenced a series of informative morning teas, spreading the word amongst our colleagues. There may be scope to develop the pasture in the pub/café scientific concept of convening with a purpose.

Workshops that deal with measuring Cost of Production and the Feed demand calculator are being offered to follow up the Expo.

New tools need to be developed and used as an ongoing hook, perhaps bringing focus to tactical feed-budgeting and nutrient management. The development of standard operating procedure will also help guide new tool requirements.

Specific procedures will be addressed in the selection of species and tactical stock control on a series of days highlighting some recent results from our Red Meat Targets program.

On King Island we'll hold a field day on nutrient management and the results of a MBFP pilot focussing on the effective development of the coastal dunes.

MBFP will also be taken to cropping groups as a component of sessions dealing with winter wheat grazing and livestock gross margin assessment.

It is further envisaged that continued use will be made of advocates like Fred Perry, Charles Cay and Rod Manning, in dealing with in-depth application of broad areas of the manual, including managing growth and utilisation, setting directions and herd health. Again this would have the purpose of bringing greater focus to manuals many untapped procedure. We would also like the scope to use other producer champions on a more event specific basis and use more consultant expertise where it can be accessed.

Developing some form of mutual support network is an appealing prospect, though this needs to properly developed by the group.

Awareness too will be an ongoing activity, with efforts made to promote the manual in some different ways, in yards at sales, in key message advertising, with buyers and agents.

Currently we see perhaps the best return in physically returning to area where we've promoted our wares, and consolidating a relationship, as alluded to in the evaluation results. What we could do better revolves significantly around taking a far closer look at the feedback we've collected and the ideas suggested by participants.

Future Vision.

Our vision for the future is to have MBFP consolidate as a key industry development program, that services a network of engaged producers in a dynamic and interactive manner. This may be achieved by maintaining activity and contact with producers, developing an continuing culture of practical application of information and tools to support decision making. A key component should also be a continued sharing of advocate and participant experiences to mutually support enterprise development.

Achieving this will require a strong development ethos within the MBFP team where the skills knowledge and experience of the local coordinators and MLA team are combined to develop new tools and activities for the program, but also to map a strategic path of engagement and on-farm impact for the program.

This will very likely involve a similar range of activities to those already undertaken, with a changing balance of investment in activity type, as well as the development of new and more innovative approaches.

Increased engagement with effective agribusiness collaborators needs to be developed, realistic goals for supporting on-farm change set and the mechanisms for this explored and evaluated against the level of investment required and likelihood of success. Traditional beliefs that increased effort in enabling 1:1 support increases the level of adoption and industry impact need to be evaluated against the cost benefit of more clearly defined alternative approaches, in both a structured and critical manner.

In Summary: The program has achieved in excess of 2200 participant interactions in Tasmania over the 3 years of operation. This activity has stimulated both interest and demand for regional activities, and has seen the development of a benchmarking group, on farm trials and the beginnings of some positive reports of change. There is plenty of scope to do more, but MBFP in Tasmania has met its milestones.