

99/V11



## Producer Research Support

### Adopting Improved Prime Lamb Production Production and Marketing Systems

Western Plains Prime Lamb Group



#### The project

The Western Plains Prime Lamb Group formed in order for members to objectively examine existing management and marketing practices, improve industry and product knowledge, and adopt more customer focused practices, to increase profitability.

#### Objectives

1. increase group member use of live lamb assessment and processor feedback to market prime lambs, from around 50 percent to 80 percent;
2. increase use of objective marketing methods, with payment on specification, from 15,000 – 16,000 to around 25,000 annually;
3. improve understanding of prime lamb industry issues for 20 group members, by increasing direct interaction with processors, wholesalers and retailers;
4. fifty percent of group members to participate in a benchmarking exercise;
5. increase confidence of group members using LAMBPLAN, so that 80 percent of them regularly use LAMBPLAN to select terminal sires;
6. provide direct experience developing VIASCAN carcass assessment for prime lamb; and
7. compare the performance of group member lambs against the lambs of others in a feedlot finishing situation.

#### What was done

The main part of the project was a LAMBPLAN trial, using VIASCAN carcass assessment to measure and analyse the results. This was intended to encourage members to develop an understanding of VIASCAN carcass assessment for the prime lamb industry.

The second part of the trial involved group members comparing the performance of their own lambs against the lambs of others in a feedlot-finishing situation. Group participation in activities was exceptional.

#### Paddock to Plate Tour

A two-day, Paddock to Plate tour to Melbourne provided group members with an insight into prime lamb production and marketing after lambs leave the farm.

The different types of skins, and their uses, were explained to producers. The skin exporting company identified how damage and defects impact the final product. It also explained how producers can produce a consistently high quality product, and form a direct alliance with skin processors.

The Western Plains Prime Lamb Group gained valuable experience and knowledge in lamb production and marketing. The main elements of this project were a Paddock to Plate tour, a benchmarking exercise, a LAMBPLAN demonstration trial and a feedlot finishing demonstration.

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## Key points

- Group members are competent in live lamb assessment, and confident in marketing lambs to customer specifications.
- On farm management practices have been approved to ensure long term enterprise profitability.
- Group members are confident of the benefits of using LAMBPLAN for terminal sire selection.
- Project participants have learned to evaluate the costs and returns of feedlot finishing and implement feedlot finishing; therefore increasing confidence taking out forward contracts.

The group visited Melbourne's Crown complex, to understand how lamb is used for catering to the vastly different restaurants within the complex. This highlighted to producers that consistency and precise specifications are needed when dealing with the specialty market.

Major meat suppliers to Crown, explained the quality and cut proportions they consider when selecting lamb cuts.

The group also visited high-end, niche supermarkets and independent butchers to understand more about developing high quality product ranges for consumers to prepare and cook at home.

### Benchmarking Exercise

Only eight group members participated in the comparative benchmarking exercise, BizCheck, which was conducted through EDGENetwork in the second year of the project. It involved workshops, financial and physical data collection and input, and a follow-up workshop and discussion. Participants were encouraged to identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats to their farming operations.

### LAMBPLAN Demonstration Trial

A mob of 300 ewes on a member's property were split, and the two groups joined to terminal sires (provided by another member) with high and low selection index values, respectively. The sire groups had similar EBVs for growth and fat, but the Eye Muscle Depth (EMD) EBV between each sire group varied. The lambs were identified and then run together from marking until finishing. Lambs were monitored through the finishing process, and feedback information obtained at slaughter. A group evaluation workshop was held to discuss the benefits of LAMBPLAN.

Lambs were assessed using VIASCAN carcass assessment. They were split into their high and low muscle groups and assessed separately. The results were presented, in conjunction with the conventional carcass feedback, at an evaluation workshop.

### Feedlot Finishing Demonstration

The aim of this demonstration was to take lambs to export carcass weights of more than 22kg for marketing during autumn.

Ten members submitted 20 lambs each into a common feedlot. The 10 ewes and 10 wethers were placed on different feeding programs. The trial was intended to compare the difference in lamb performance between lambs under feedlot conditions, and those finished conventionally. Lambs going into the feedlot were required to be between 37 and 39kg.

Feed consumption within was monitored within the feedlot, to build group member confidence finishing lambs on their own enterprises. The group also attended a presentation about grain feeding and finishing at the feedlot.



### **MLA also recommends** **Sheep Genetics Australia**

Sheep Genetics Australia (SGA) is the national genetic evaluation service for the Australian sheep industry. It is built around the world's most comprehensive sheep genetics database, and will deliver genetic information on a fee-for-service basis.

Tel 02 6773 2493 or  
[www.sheepgenetics.org.au](http://www.sheepgenetics.org.au)

### **EDGENetwork**

EDGENetwork offers practical field-based workshops to improve productivity and profitability for the long-term.

Workshops cover breeding, nutrition, grazing management, marketing and selling.

Call MLA on 1800 993 343 or  
[www.edgenetwork.com.au](http://www.edgenetwork.com.au)

### **Meat & Livestock Australia**

Level 1, 165 Walker Street  
North Sydney NSW 2060  
Tel 02 9463 9333  
Fax 02 9463 9393  
Free Phone 1800 023 100 (Australia only)  
[www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au)

### **Adopting Improved Prime Lamb Production and Marketing Systems**

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## **What happened?**

Members submitted lambs for sale direct to a processor four times throughout the trial. Lambs were targeted to processor specifications and assessed by breeders and group members prior to delivery. Group members were encouraged to follow lambs through the slaughter process, and collect carcase information and feedback from the abattoir. By the fourth assessment, group members were achieving consistent weights and reaching processor specifications.

The time spent together during the Paddock to Plate tour (including some bus travel time) was used to reflect on what participants experienced, and reinforce the messages delivered during each visit. Producers were enthusiastic about sharing experiences and using the new information to improve their own operations.

Although not all lambs were scanned during the LAMBPLAN trial, the VIASCAN results obtained indicated a 2kg live weight gain in the high muscled group and 0.8kg dressed weight increase in the high muscled group. There also appeared to be a 3 percent increase in lean meat yield per index point of EMD increase.

## **Discussion**

Most of the group's planned activities have been completed. The group have demonstrated significant increases in both individual and group knowledge.