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“The work they do is to a rigorous scientific standard. In spending time with them, I’ve learnt a lot about Olmo, such as discovering plant species I had no idea existed on our property, which has been so rewarding.”

Next steps at Olmo

Susan is now keen to see how the project interprets the data from Olmo with the support of tools and experts.

“I’m keen to understand how our approach to farm management stacks up against others, learn from other producers and, ultimately, make better and more informed decisions at Olmo.”

Play a part

For other producers who are thinking of participating in the Farming for the Future research, Susan’s advice is to get involved – see project contact below.

“Most producers are passionate about the land, and this project is an opportunity to understand where there are better, easier and more profitable ways of managing land than the high-input system we have slipped into.

“In doing so, we can ensure that our children take over sustainable farming businesses with high levels of natural capital that will support them well into the future.” ■

LESSONS LEARNT

- ✓ Understanding a farm’s natural capital enables producers to make more informed decisions about how to best manage their land.
- ✓ Rigorous, scientific data will be beneficial as carbon credit revenue streams open up to producers.
- ✓ Farming for the Future is an opportunity to understand where there are better, easier and more profitable ways to manage land.



Farming for the Future is a research and change program which aims to provide the business case that producers need to incorporate natural capital as part of the foundation of their farming businesses, and to activate the supply chain to encourage and reward that shift. MLA is a key partner of Farming for the Future. Learn more about the project at farmingforthefuture.org.au

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✓ Nala Agribusiness’ Lachlan Sutton works with producers across the rangelands to help implement eID technology.

How eID helps refine your flock’s performance

While the traceability benefits of electronic identification (eID) are well known, the technology’s ability to deliver more effective fertility data to guide flock management decisions hasn’t been as recognised – but that’s set to change.

Ahead of eID becoming mandatory in Australia from January 2025, NSW rangelands producers are putting the technology through its paces in an MLA Producer Demonstration Site (PDS).

The PDS coordinator, Lachlan Sutton from Nala Agribusiness, said although the project was in its early stages, it’s provided insights into how eID technology could capture and store individual animal data to inform management practices and optimise productivity.

“We already see the benefits of eID for productivity and traceability, especially in a time of high biosecurity risks,” Lachlan said.

“We have some high-performing producers, and we thought this research could take them to the next level, pushing their use of eID to further their data-leveraging capability.”

Individual measurements

Unlike traditional mob-based scanning – which only identifies group performance – eID allows for individual animals to be monitored throughout their life for specific traits.

Producers involved in this PDS are recording individual measurements for:

- body condition score
- conception rates
- maternal traits, such as wet and dry (during lamb marking)
- correlations of grazing pressures
- conception of new lambs, with a focus on shedding breeds.

This long-term fertility data can be collected and stored for later use, creating a basis for breeding plans to maximise production and quality.

Other relevant performance data can be used to inform management strategies, including culling poor performers and retaining high performers – ultimately increasing a flock’s efficiency.

“It highlights where the gaps are in our production system,” Lachlan said.

“The sheer amount we can understand using the technology and databases makes it easier to put together management strategies without sacrificing potential performance.

“But more than that, it’s a tool that can help to fix physical issues producers are having, not just push productivity.”

There are other benefits of eID, including labour efficiency, with infrastructure such as electronic gates and autodrafters to scan and sort sheep reducing time and labour requirements.

Breaking down adoption barriers

While there are some challenges to adopting eID – especially in extensive enterprises – Lachlan encouraged producers not to dismiss the benefits and capabilities it can bring to their business.

“Sometimes understanding the system can be challenging, and the scale of operations and distances can cause logistical difficulties, but so much of the technology is applicable to this area and can make producers’ lives so much simpler,” he said.

The data producers collect on their livestock is paramount to the success of their enterprise, as every trait has the potential to change the potential of the future flock, with long-term fertility as a critical trait.

“Recording, analysing and understanding this information, however, can be a difficult task with traditional means,” Lachlan said.

“By taking the steps to utilise available technology, your process can be simplified, your information can be clear, and your valuable data will not be lost.”

Using the data

The wealth of information which can be collected through eID can be used in breeding and fertility programs, resulting in a superior flock that suits your profit drivers and production needs.

“The data we collect is intuitive, but there is a massive amount of it, and making the right decisions based on that data is critical,” Lachlan said. ■

SEASONAL ACTION PLAN

📌 Understand the core profit drivers of your business, including performance traits you wish to increase and maintain. Learn more at genetics.mla.com.au

📌 Research what eID equipment best suits your enterprises and production goals.

📌 Draw on advisors – including agents, vets and genetic providers – to assist with decision making.

Tips for adopting eID

The process for implementing eID doesn’t have to be complex. Lachlan has some simple tips to start the journey.

“First, don’t over-complicate the start – focus on your core profit drivers so you can work on maximising what is important to you,” he said.

“Second, leverage what you’ve got around you. You can make a lot of informed decisions without spending a lot of money on your technology.”

Technology

Using eID requires:

- a wand reader to scan and read the information within the tags
- scales to correctly weigh sheep
- autodrafter to draft the flock automatically, based on specific weights or other recorded traits
- computer to record and view sheep trait information
- data management system with correct software, secure storage and internet connectivity to safely handle data.

Lachlan said many of these items could be found at reasonable prices. More information on brands and technology is available at your local farm supplies store.

Regional input

Another tip from Lachlan is to not go at it alone – rather, recognise and utilise the businesses, workers and specialists in the rangeland areas to ease your workload and maximise how data is used.

“Whether it’s stud breeders, agents, consultants or vets, there are so many people that can help you crunch numbers and offer quick insights,” Lachlan said. ■



What info can eID collect?

eID tags can hold vast amounts of information which can be used to fine-tune breeding programs including:

- 📶 body condition score
- 📶 conception type
- 📶 conception timing
- 📶 lamb/s reared
- 📶 growth rates
- 📶 fleece weight
- 📶 veterinary treatment
- 📶 joining groups.

