mla Your levies at work // May 2013

Feedback

Serving it up

A note from the MD...

The hot and dry seasonal conditions widespread across grazing areas since mid-way through last year have started to have an impact on producer confidence and the outlook for the season ahead. The majority of Australia's northern pastoral areas did not receive summer rain and the prolonged dry conditions over much of southern Australia have led to increased turn-off rates. We have seen a significant increase in livestock turn-off in the first four months of 2013, leading to increased processing rates and subduing prices.

While the high Australian dollar is eroding some of the marketing gains generated out of growth export markets such as China, the encouraging news is that beef export volumes continue to grow. We will continue to invest in marketing activities to grow demand in our overseas markets, as well as defend market share in Australia in the face of competition from cheaper protein sources. Pages 6-7 provide an insight into the Australian market for protein, and the opportunities to grow demand for beef by targeting the latest consumer trends.

Also in this *Feedback* you will find a 'project dashboard' accompanying reports on major industry R&D projects MLA has invested in. In this edition they relate to EverGraze and the Beef CRC. As requested by members, the dashboard includes project timelines and how they are funded.

I welcome your comments at **managingdirector@mla.com.au**

Scott Hansen
MLA Managing Director

Contents

Cover: Simon McNamara, Executive Chef at Sydney's Canterbury Leagues Club. Image by Paul Jones Photography.

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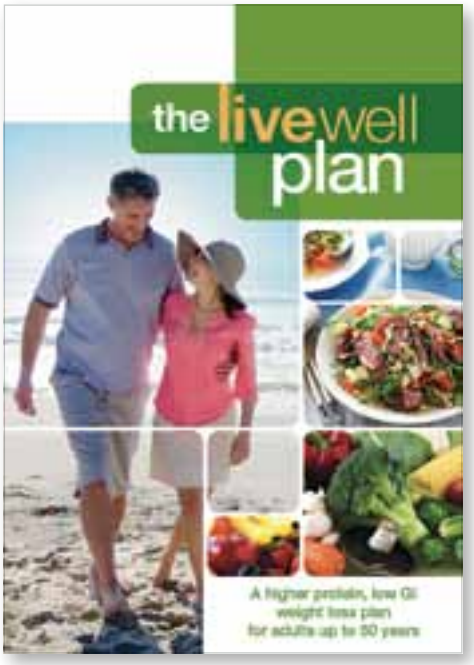


Helping Australians to "live well"

A new healthy eating plan helps adult Australians manage their weight.

The Live Well Plan, a brochure produced by MLA's nutrition team, shows adults who need to lose weight what to eat while still enjoying favourites like spaghetti bolognaise and roast lamb.

10,000

healthcare professionals will receive *The Live Well Plan*

63%

of adult Australians classified as obese in 2011-12, according to the latest Australian Health Survey (ABS).

Launched in April, *The Live Well Plan* is based on a higher protein, low Glycemic Index diet, which has been shown to be effective for achieving weight loss and improving risk factors such as lowering blood pressure and triglycerides (fat in the blood). Some of this evidence has come from studies funded by the MLA Human Nutrition Research program.

The eating plan recommends beef and lamb three to four times per week as recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Instead of a strict eating plan which research indicates consumers are unlikely to follow in the long term, this more flexible eating plan focuses on meal portion sizes. Meal suggestions are based on familiar main meal choices such as spaghetti bolognaise, lamb roast and steak and vegetables which were identified as popular meals in research commissioned by MLA on Australian's main meal choices and practices.

The information in the resource was independently reviewed by a number of organisations, including the Dietitians Association of Australia, the Heart Foundation and the Primary Food Alliance.

The Primary Food Alliance is an informal collaboration of non-commercial organisations representing primary foods recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines which aims to bridge the gap between agriculture and health to facilitate healthy and balanced eating. Members of the Primary Food Alliance include Dairy Australia, Egg Nutrition Council, Grains and Legumes Nutrition Council, Horticulture Australia and MLA.

To launch the resource, MLA sponsored a symposium hosted by the Dietitians Association of Australia titled *Dietary Strategies for Improving Metabolic Health*. Over 300 healthcare professionals attended the symposium and online webinar. A recording of the webinar will continue to be viewed by healthcare professionals and be promoted to overseas markets such as Malaysia.

MLA will disseminate *The Live Well Plan* via practice nurses responsible for conducting health checks in middle aged patients as well as to dietitians, GPs and consumers. These healthcare professionals require patient education resources for their middle aged patients who need to change their diet and lifestyle in order to reduce their risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes.

To obtain a copy of *The Live Well Plan*, T: 1800 550 018 or go to **www.themainmeal.com.au** to download a PDF version.

Targeting students

A new teacher resource is bringing solid facts about Australia's cattle and sheep industries' environmental performance into classrooms. The Target 100 Study Guides for high school teachers were developed by MLA, in conjunction with *Cosmos* magazine.

The guides are linked to the Target 100 program, which promotes the industry's focus on sustainability, and are part of MLA's broader education work with school students.

MLA Community Engagement Communications Manager, Anna Bradley, said the Target 100 Study Guides will help educate Australian high school students on the cattle and sheep industries' focus on sustainability.

"The guides also profile researchers who are working in the industry, and farmers who are doing their bit for sustainability," she said.

Three Target 100 Study Guides are planned. The first, covering water efficiency, was released in March, with 2,000 copies distributed to schools across Australia.

"The 'Using Water Wisely Study Guide' explores the measures the industry is taking to be more water efficient, as well as the science behind the development of these measures and their on-farm impact," Anna said.

130,000

high school students targeted with the new environmental guide

The Guide also includes results from life cycle assessments that show how much water is used to produce a kilogram of beef or lamb.

The two guides still in development cover biodiversity and reducing emissions. The biodiversity guide will explain how livestock farming is maintaining and, in many cases, enhancing biodiversity on farms. The third guide will explain how the Australian livestock industry is working to further reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.

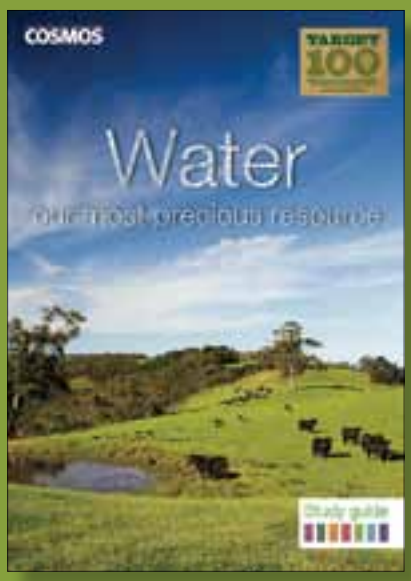
"We expect 130,000 students will use material from the Target 100 Study Guides," Anna said.

"The primary objective of the guides is to provide balanced information about the industry and to build further trust in it.

"We also hope that some students will be inspired by what they learn and seek careers in the industry."

Fast facts

- Target 100 Study Guides will educate secondary school students about the Australian livestock industry's work on sustainability.
- The guides will cover water efficiency, biodiversity and reducing carbon emissions in the cattle and sheep industries.
- Around 2,000 copies of the water efficiency guide have already been distributed to schools across Australia, with a reach of up to 130,000 students.



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www.target100.com.au/Tips-resources

Dog data needed

83,000

working dogs on Australian farms, according to the Australian Companion Animal Council.

Producers are being asked to help gather data for a research project to identify DNA markers for valuable traits in working dogs.

All working dog users are encouraged to take part in The Farm Dog Survey, including those with single or multiple working dogs; cattle and sheep dog triallers; saleyard employees; and small or large scale breeders.

The survey is part of a research project at the University of Sydney's Faculty of Veterinary Science to analyse ways of improving breeding, training and performance success in working dogs. The project is supported by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, MLA and the Working Kelpie Council of Australia.

The survey aims to gather information about working dogs, such as how they live and work, and what traits are most valued by farmers.

By participating, producers will be helping researchers to find ways to minimise time and resources wasted on breeding and training unsuccessful working dogs.

Fill in the survey online at **www.mla.com.au/workingdogsurvey** or telephone 0467 347 283 to request a reply-paid paper copy. The survey closes on 5 June.

www.sydney.edu.au/vetscience/research/animal_behaviour/farmdog/index.shtml

Bid to extend Sheep CRC

MLA has agreed to support the bid for the extension of the Sheep CRC when it reaches the end of the initial seven-year funding agreement in June 2014.

The MLA board has supported the CRC's submission to the Australian Government in June to extend its operation for another five years including a proposal for $7.2 million in MLA funding.

MLA Managing Director Scott Hansen said the opportunities created by extending the Sheep CRC made it a good investment for the sheep industry.

"The Sheep CRC extension bid presented a compelling case for MLA support, with three key research areas promising to deliver strong returns on industry's investment," he said.

"Research programs outlined in the bid will focus on improving meat yield and quality, advanced genetic improvement technology and enhanced monitoring systems for productivity and wellbeing.

"Delivering on this promise will ultimately lead to more differentiated lamb and sheepmeat brands and products, faster rates of genetic gain and a greater ability to adapt to market opportunities and improved flock productivity and survival rates."

Scott said the extension bid also aligned itself with several of MLA's key focus areas, such as improving efficiency in reproduction and labour and improving compliance to market specifications.

Want to learn more about the Sheep CRC's research outcomes? Go to **www.sheepcrc.org.au**

Want to beef up your business?

Take part in one of MLA's daily Innovation workshops at the Pacific Beef Expo for new ideas and skills to help build a better beef business.

Focusing on the key profit drivers in your beef business, MLA's series of one hour Innovation workshops will deliver practical information and tools that can make a difference to your bottom line.

These include:

Does MSA make the grade?

MSA is making its mark at retail – learn what makes MSA beef different and how you can tap into MSA premiums.

Make better beef business decisions

Test the health of your beef business by benchmarking it against other enterprises. Hear about the latest financial and business management tools to improve business efficiency and assist with investment decision making.

Producing cattle for the EU market

Australian beef producers have the opportunity to supply cattle for the European Union market, provided they meet the market's requirements around traceability and HGP-free status. Hear from a panel of experts on how you can meet these specs.

When: 20, 21 and 22 June 2013

Where: Pavilion 1, Primex Field Days, Bruxner Highway, Casino NSW

Cost: Free

Register by Monday 17 June to receive FREE ENTRY into the Primex Field Days

Register: **www.mla.com.au/pacificbeefworkshops** or 1800 675 717 (option 4)

Growing beef demand

Steaking a claim on home soil

Australians love beef. By world standards we consume more than most countries – grilling, roasting, stir-frying and slow-cooking our way through an average of 730,000 tonnes a year, worth $6.4 billion.

Lachlan Bowtell
MLA Regional Manager – Australia

Andrew Cox
Group Marketing Manager – Consumer Programs

So, why go to the trouble of marketing Australian beef to Australians? Isn't it like selling ice to Eskimos?

Beef is constantly under pressure from cheaper and alternate proteins, the changing social and demographic trends and the challenges associated with a fragmented media and reaching consumers with marketing messages.

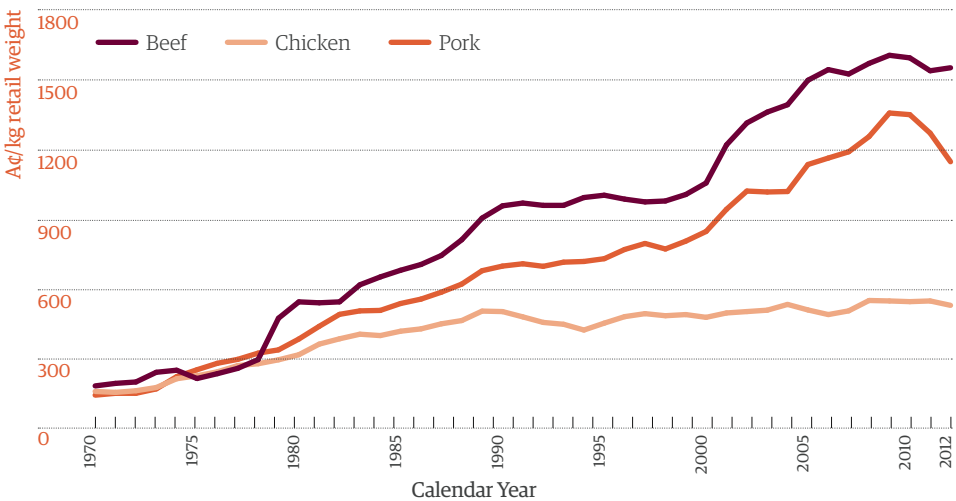
Spoilt for choice

Australians now have more protein choices than ever, so we need be aggressive to maintain beef's share, especially from lower-priced proteins.

Over the past decade, chicken has become cheaper. In 2012 chicken retail prices averaged $5.30/kg while beef was $15.59/kg. Seafood has become more popular, with fresh tuna and salmon gaining significant shelf space in major retailers. Sales of kangaroo meat, marketed as a healthy alternative, have risen, while pork has increased promotional expenditure. 'Quorn' imitation meat (made from mycoprotein – a member of the fungi family) has been launched in Australia and aims to be a global, $1 billion brand by 2022.

We continue to remind Australians about the things they love most about beef – its strong association with desirability and satisfaction, and how it teams so well with the seasons, from summer barbecues to hearty winter meals.

Figure1 **Australian retail meat prices**



Source: ABARES

Beef retail price per kilogram
1970: $1.81
2012: $15.59

Poultry retail price per kilogram
1970: $1.57
2012: $5.30

Pork retail price per kilogram
1970: $1.41
2012: $11.52

Source: ABARES

Info on demand

Today, news and information is available 24/7 in many forms: social media, websites, blogs, video, TV, radio. As the fragmentation of the media continues, consumers can pick and choose what they watch and when they watch it – and they can skip the ads.

It's essential we are responsive to these changing trends. We cannot simply screen a television commercial during the Sunday night movie and be certain that it reaches a vast audience. We need to better harness new media – such as increasing our online presence and finding unique ways to engage with the community.

The changing face of Australia

An ageing population, more consumers of Asian heritage, more SINKs and DINKs (single/dual income no-kids households), the rise in 'foodies' and more men cooking – these changing demographic and social trends present challenges and new opportunities in the way Australian beef is marketed in Australia.

The changing shape of Australian households means a one-size fits all approach to marketing is a thing of the past. No longer do we just market to mum-and-dad families with two kids. We tailor strategies to target growing consumer segments.

Beefing up demand

MLA is focused on increasing Australian consumers' demand for beef and is working to defend beef's position in the protein market – because Australia is our single largest market.

Trend: Cheaper proteins

Challenges: Beef's market share is being challenged by cheaper proteins.

MLA actions: Position beef as a tasty, versatile option for the family. At point of sale, consumers are offered a range of information, such as the popular *Entice* magazine.

Foodservice operators are under increased pressure to offer high-quality, low-cost meals. This is being addressed through a secondary cuts program, *Beef Masterpieces*.

Trend: Fragmented media

Challenges: There's increasing difficulty reaching consumers using traditional marketing techniques. Audiences can skip TV ads or fast forward through them. There is greater access to many sources of information instantly through facebook, twitter and influential food bloggers, who are seen as the new authorities on food.

MLA actions: Multi-media campaigns with an emphasis on online communications such as facebook and YouTube combined with the relaunch of **www.themainmeal.com.au** help give consumers a wider range of meal options. Encourage consumers to 'share' and 'like' links and ad videos, eg the Nothing beats Beef facebook page has 86,000 friends and YouTube regularly attracts up to one million views of MLA's latest advertisement.

In 1970, chicken was
13% cheaper than beef
In 2012, it was
66% cheaper

Trend: Ageing population

Challenges: Demand is for smaller meal portions.

MLA actions: Developing smaller cut sizes and promoting the health benefits of eating red meat to suit the lifestyles of ageing Australians.

Trend: Rise in 'foodies'

Challenges: They have a thirst for information: where beef comes from, how to prepare it and new cooking methods.

MLA actions: Ensure quality through Meat Standards Australia (MSA) and provide unique branded products (premium lines, grassfed, veal, offal, secondary cuts, etc) at retail and foodservice through messages that promote provenance and the unique attributes of beef brands and products. Magazines such as *Rare Medium* for chefs and *Meat & Co* communicate these messages.

Trend: More single/no-kids households

Challenges: Marketing used to target married housewives as they made the meal decisions. Now, there are more single women than married women, so we have to be creative in how we market red meat to this segment.

MLA actions: It's all about serving meals that are well balanced, healthy and easy to prepare for the time-poor or smaller family unit. We are broadening our marketing material to ensure we don't alienate younger couples with no kids. We also work with retailers and encourage them to create products that appeal to this group.

Trend: Australians with Asian backgrounds and 'Asianisation' of cuisine styles

Challenges: Traditionally Asian-style dishes contain seafood, pork and chicken over beef.

MLA actions: Asian style dishes are being featured prominently in our marketing. For example the upcoming edition of *Entice* magazine features a Vietnamese style roast beef dish. We are also working with Asian cuisine experts such as Oriental Merchants and Ayam foods to share insights and help grow sales of Asian style beef and lamb dishes.

Trend: More men in the kitchen

Challenges: Men are preparing almost half of all household main meals. They are more actively engaged in searching for information on how to cook and so provide an eager audience for new meal ideas and recipes.

MLA actions: Promote more blokey styles like slow cook BBQ and feature relatively unknown cuts they can use to be the hero of the barbecue. The recent 'Throw another steak on the barbie' campaign featuring Merrick Watts appealed to men (and also resonated with women).

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In profile

Snapshot

Col and Julie McMicking, Tarwin Lower, Vic.

Property: 276ha

Enterprise: Beef cattle and lamb producers and butcher shop owners, Ashburton Meats

Livestock: About 500 steers, finishes 1,000 lambs annually when achievable

Pasture: Predominantly perennial ryegrass, white clover, sub-clover, cocksfoot

Soil: Sandy loam, areas peat in lower parts

Rainfall: 900mm

Col McMicking // *Fine Meat Purveyor*

South Gippsland cattle producers Col and Julie McMicking invested in a butcher shop in 2007. They branded their beef *Gippsland Pure Beef* and resolved to meet customer needs with a paddock to plate experience.

At their property at Tarwin Lower, which backs on to Bass Strait, the McMickings run mostly British breeds for the feeder steer and bullock markets and for their business, Ashburton Meats.

Col and Julie supply more than 150 carcases each year to their butcher shop with the gaps filled by MSA registered producers. Their preferred specifications are 220–250kg, hot standard carcase weight (HSCW), with 5–10mm of fat at the rib, not the P8 site. Around 90% of their cattle reach their quality specifications.

As an MLA Red Meat Networking Club member, Col plays a valuable role as a passionate ambassador for red meat. He loves to help customers select cuts, and promotes the health benefits of grassfed beef.

What are your customers looking for?
In the Ashburton area, different age groups have different wants. The 18 to 30 year-olds are nearly non-existent, young parents in the 30 to 45 age bracket like minute-modern ideas and older customers, well attuned to their meat and three vegetables, prefer traditional meat cuts. So, we cater for both groups and say "if you can't see it – ask for it, it will be here". We can supply whatever is requested.

How important is quality?
It's paramount. Any meat that goes into the shop must meet the MSA criteria to underpin the eating quality.

What do you think of MLA's 'foodie' magazines, *MEAT & CO* and *Entice*, as marketing tools?
They are great tools and do have an impact on our business. We promote and use them to give new ideas and recipes to customers. While they may not necessarily increase sales, they certainly help determine people's shopping choices. They might come in looking for chicken, but leave with beef for a casserole to try a new recipe. I'm a big believer in measuring success by asking our customers – did it eat really well?

As *MEAT & CO* and *Entice* fly out the door, it's indicative of people's interest in new ideas for meat dishes. To reach a much wider audience and spread the positive grassroot stories, I'd like to see the metropolitan daily papers run more beef and lamb features.

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Read the 'How MSA beef is graded' Tips&Tools: **www.mla.com.au/msa**

Market access

Smoothing the way for livestock exports

International relationships forged over the past 30 years have helped smooth the implementation of Australia's new livestock export regulatory framework.

Since the Federal Government introduced the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) in August 2011, MLA has played a supporting role in helping importers and exporters understand their responsibilities under the system.

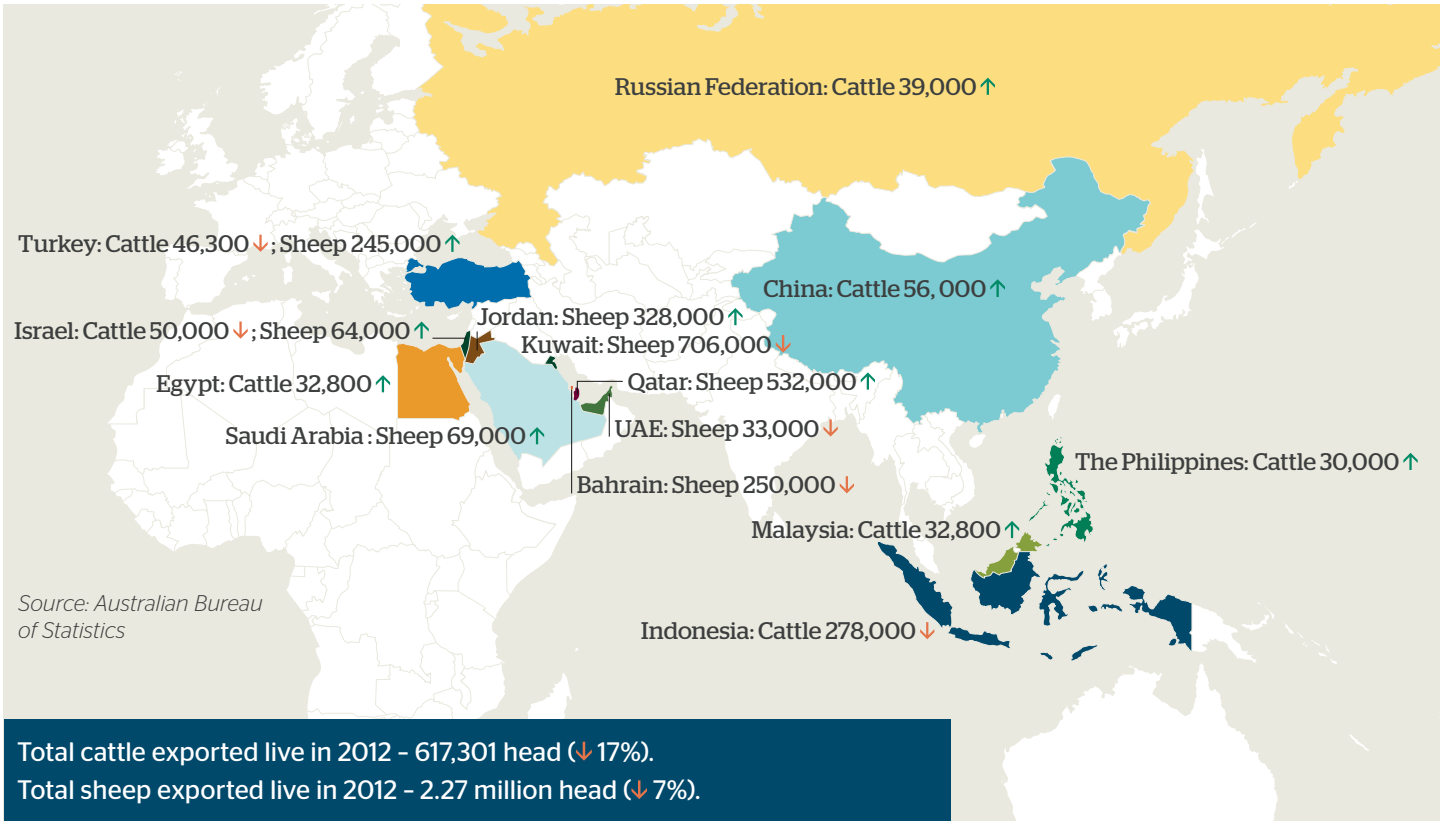
MLA staff have visited more than 90 facilities in Indonesia, as well as abattoirs, feedlots, transport operators and port facilities in Malaysia, Japan, Oman, Qatar, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Mauritius, Jordan, Russia, Lebanon and Israel.

ESCAS now covers every country wanting to import Australian feeder and slaughter livestock.

MLA Livestock Exports Manager Peter Dundon said MLA's long-standing, established relationships throughout our export markets have assisted the ESCAS implementation.

"It hasn't been easy by any means, but these relationships have formed a solid foundation for liaising with the importers, explaining the system to them and helping them make the changes they need to become compliant," he said.

Figure1 **Number of Australian livestock exported to countries taking over 30,000 head in 2012. Arrows indicate the trend in comparison with the previous year.**



Total cattle exported live in 2012 – 617,301 head (↓17%).
Total sheep exported live in 2012 – 2.27 million head (↓7%).

"A good example of MLA's role occurred recently, when an exporter approached us wanting to start exporting feeder cattle into Russia.

"There are no ESCAS-approved supply chains there yet, so David Beatty [MLA's Manager Livestock Services – Middle East and Africa] went to Russia to meet with the exporter and importer, and he explained ESCAS to the importer."

The livestock export trade is worth $891 million to Australian sheep, cattle and goat producers, and $1.8 billion to the wider national economy.

With 13,000 Australian jobs relying on the livestock export industry, MLA has identified that maintaining access to livestock export markets by assisting supply chains to implement and comply with ESCAS is an area of key focus.

Under ESCAS, exporters seeking permits to export feeder and slaughter livestock must fulfil a number of requirements, including:

→ provide evidence of compliance with internationally agreed welfare standards

→ demonstrate control through the supply chain

→ demonstrate traceability through the supply chain

→ meet reporting and accountability requirements

→ include independent auditing.

MLA's initial role has been to conduct gap analysis for importers and exporters, identifying areas in their operations that need work in order to assure their compliance with the regulations.

MLA also offers risk analysis, training and technical advice to help importers and exporters achieve and maintain compliance.

Peter said it was important to clarify that MLA's role within the new regulatory environment was as an industry service provider, not as the regulator.

"ESCAS is regulated by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry under federal legislation and all compliance issues are dealt with by the regulator," he said.

"MLA is a provider of services – and we are invited into facilities by operators to help them become and remain ESCAS compliant."

New kids on the block

Countries which imported sheep or cattle in 2011–12 having only imported minimal numbers previously: Sri Lanka (2,000 cattle), Libya (6,900 cattle), Mauritius (1,300 sheep) and The Philippines (6,800 sheep).

90%

of all ESCAS approved facilities have been involved in MLA training and technical support.

2,500

people trained globally in low stress stock handling and slaughter techniques by MLA since September, 2011.

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www.daff.gov.au/aqis/export/live-animals/livestock/escas

A meat judging marathon

Clocking up 10 US states and 10,000 kilometres in one month, five young Australians have just gained a once-in-a-lifetime insight into the global meat processing sector.

Sponsored by MLA, the Australian National Meat Judging Team recently returned from an industry tour of the US. For the first time in the program's 22-year history, the group participated in three meat judging contests during the trip instead of only one.

The 2013 Australian team members, selected from the Intercollegiate Meat Judging Association (ICMJ) were Isaac Allen, Vanessa Campbell and Jordan Hoban, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW; Tim Ryan, University of Melbourne, Victoria; and Rozzie O'Reilly, University of New England, Armidale, NSW.

Following an intense training week at MLA in Brisbane, the team enjoyed a complete paddock-to-plate insight, from farm and feedlot visits to processor tours and visits to US retail outlets. The program included a meeting with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, an inspection of meat science faculties at major universities, as well as seeing the three major US processors – JBS, Tyson and Cargill – in action. While on tour, each student was required to complete a comparative study between Australia and the US on a topic of their choice, relevant to the meat industry.

The meat judging competitions were the Southwest Invitational at Texas Tech University, Southwestern contest at Fort Worth, Texas, and the National Western Contest at Denver, Colorado.

As a team, the Australians placed fourth at two contests and placed no lower than fourth place in all categories at the South Western.

Above: Training in a chiller in Greeley, Colorado. L–R: Emma Hegarty (coach), Vanessa Campbell, Rozzie O'Reilly, Brad Robinson (coach), Jordan Hoban, Isaac Allen and Tim Ryan.

Individual highlights included Isaac Allen winning the lamb judging at the National Western competition and Vanessa Campbell securing ninth place in the South Western contest. Tim Ryan, the 2012 Australian champion, placed ninth in the first contest, and secured the highest scoring individual in beef and lamb judging at Fort Worth.

Emma Hegarty of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Queensland, who assisted Brad Robinson in the coaching role, gave credit to the group's passion for the industry.

"This is a group of future industry leaders. They have diverse interests within the meat and livestock industry but all as equally as passionate," she said.

The ICMJ program's objective is to generate enthusiasm and help foster career paths into the meat and livestock industry. MLA continues to support this initiative in its endeavour to secure the future of our industry with well-educated and skilled professionals.

In July 2013, more than 100 University students – all passionate about the meat industry – will meet in Wagga Wagga to learn from key stakeholders and expand their knowledge of the meat industry.

Sarah Strachan, ICMJ Coordinator
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www.icmj.com.au

You be the judge...

Australia's Intercollegiate Meat Judging (ICMJ) contest has inspired university and high school students to pursue careers in the meat and livestock industry since 1990. Here we meet two of the past ICMJ participants.

How do you get involved with ICMJ?

- Participants must be enrolled in tertiary education, but it doesn't have to be agriculture-related.
- Students become involved in a university/college team.
- Participants train with their team prior to attending the annual workshop and contest. Training is held at universities, abattoirs and butchers.
- At the ICMJ workshop in July, students attend presentations, workshops and a Careers Expo, and compete in a two-day contest covering beef, lamb and pork.
- For registration information, visit **www.icmj.com.au/2013registrations.htm**

The ICMJ Association was founded in **1990**

1,600 students from **27** tertiary institutions have so far competed in the Australian ICMJ workshop and contest

105 students and **21** coaches have travelled to the US

Bovine Scanning Services' Roger Evans says the ICMJ experience helped him appreciate carcase traits from a customer's point of view.

Victorian DPI Sheep Extension Officer Ruth Corrigan at work in her 'office'.

Roger Evans

Roger Evans represented the University of New England in 1995 and 1996. He toured the US with the Australian team in 1996 before returning home to start a business offering cattle scanning services.

Describe your work.
I am a director of Bovine Scanning Services, an ultrasound business which operates in NSW, Queensland, Tasmania and King Island, as well as Argentina. Between three operators we scan about 40,000 head of cattle a year.

How did the ICMJ inspire your career path?
It gave me an understanding of carcase traits from a plate back to the paddock perspective, rather than paddock to plate. It made me realise we need to understand what consumers want. I have used that knowledge in my ultrasound business, as well as our Shorthorn stud and commercial beef enterprise.

What was the best thing about the ICMJ?
Travelling and learning with people your own age who have similar interests. It also made me appreciate the fact we're not just producing beef, but a protein source, and our biggest competitors are chicken and pork.

What would you say to someone considering a career in the livestock industry today?
Livestock is much more of a business than a lifestyle these days, and you need to be prepared to think outside the square and look at different options, rather than just doing what was done in generations past.

Roger Evans // E: evansnr@bigpond.com

Ruth Corrigan

Victorian Department of Primary Industries Sheep Extension Officer Ruth Corrigan represented the University of New England in the 2011 ICMJ workshop and contest, travelling to the US with the Australian team.

Describe your work.
I am in the sheep extension team and work with producers across a range of projects focusing on improving on-farm productivity. Currently we are running a number of projects using electronic ID to monitor and manage the performance of sheep flocks.

How did the ICMJ inspire your career path?
It opened my eyes to the job opportunities across the red meat supply chain. I have always loved livestock and farming so, if anything, it confirmed where I wanted to be.

What was the best thing about the ICMJ?
Definitely the people I met and the industry contacts and friendships I made. Also, the opportunity to gain broad exposure to the Australian and US meat industries across the whole supply chain.

What would you say to someone considering a career in the livestock industry today?
Who wants to sit in an office for the rest of their life? There are some really interesting jobs out there and everyone needs to eat, so go for it!

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Welcome to 'ask the expert' – a new *Feedback* feature

This is your chance to ask one of MLA's on-farm or marketing managers a question. Maybe you are facing an animal health, productivity, weed or pasture issue. Perhaps you want to know how Australian beef and lamb is competing with South American beef in our emerging markets. Maybe you'd like to know about the latest consumer trends.

To get the ball rolling, this month we're answering some of the questions MLA is asked at producer events around the country.

Isn't there a better diagnostic test for worms than Worm Egg Counts (WEC)?

Sheep producer, Dookie, Vic

There are a number of alternative diagnostic tests for different parasites, but they all have limitations. Where inhibited small brown stomach worm (*Ostertagia*) is the main problem, a test for a stomach enzyme that leaks into cattle blood from the damaged stomach lining is used in Europe. It works best where the majority of the worms are caught in the fourth larval stage. It has not shown much promise for use in sheep.

Where Barber's Pole Worm predominates, the dipstick test for blood in faeces can indicate dangerous blood loss even before WECs become positive.

Both these tests indicate the degree of damage to the host, rather than of the size of the worm burden.

PCR (named after the polymerase chain reaction – a technique used in the laboratory) tests will recover and quantify the amount of DNA in worm eggs, and can therefore replace a combined WEC and larval differential culture – and do so much more quickly. This test is expected to become commercially available in the near future and MLA is helping fund the development of PCR testing for worms.

Johann Schröder, MLA's Project Manager: Animal Health and Biosecurity

Do I make more money by spaying my cull females?

Cattle producer, Cloncurry, Qld

Spaying females will not improve their liveweight gain and, if bull control is not an issue, spaying will probably not increase your bottom line. However, in northern enterprises where bull security poses a challenge desexing cull females can provide more marketing alternatives, decrease breeder mortalities, reduce 'out of season' calves and provide market assurance for lot feeders and live exporters.

Geoff Niethe, MLA's Project Manager Animal Production

Why isn't a higher percentage of the levy spent on domestic marketing?

Cattle and sheep producer, Coonabarabran, NSW

The livestock transaction levy is an industry levy – not an MLA levy. It supports a range of activities, including research and marketing services through MLA, animal health programs through Animal Health Australia, and chemical residue monitoring programs through the National Residue Survey.

MLA receives a marketing levy from the Australian Government of $3.66 for grassfed cattle, $3.08 for grainfed cattle, 0.87% of sheep sale price and 1.2% of lamb sale price.

An annual marketing taskforce meeting, made up of peak industry councils and industry representatives, recommends where the levy will be directed for maximum benefit.

In 2011-12, MLA invested $18.8 million in domestic marketing programs, $28 million in international marketing programs, and $8 million in nutrition programs.

Michael Edmonds, MLA General Manager, Global Marketing

To ask your question, email the editor at **info@mla.com.au** (include 'Feedback – ask the expert' in the subject line) or write to Feedback, Reply Paid 906, Locked Bag 991, North Sydney NSW 2059.

Research at work

The latest on-farm strategies emerging from MLA's investment in research

In this issue

A tailor-made journey

New regionally specific EverGraze workshops offer southern producers a unique opportunity to take stock of their enterprises.

For producers wanting to take their enterprise to the next level, the new EverGraze Whole Farm Grazing Strategies program offers a six-step pathway to improving profits and achieving enterprise goals.

Graduating from its trial phase last year, the program draws on more than 40 years of research into southern Australian livestock and grazing systems to produce an educational package that considers all aspects of an enterprise – from profitability and sustainability, to lifestyle and personal issues.

Technical consultant Geoff Saul, who designed the course with Victorian Department of Primary Industries' Anita Morant, said the program excels because it doesn't just offer a one-size-fits-all solution to any problem, since every enterprise is unique.

"It guides each producer through a process of taking stock of where they're at, recognising what options are out there, and which ones will work best for them," he said.

"It doesn't matter who or where you are, there are always several options available to you."

Anita recommended Bred well. Fed well, Prograze or Lifetime Ewe Management courses be undertaken as an introduction to the new course and, for those who are unfamiliar with farm mapping, a one-day course can be added to the beginning of the program.

"The initial topics involve producers looking at their pastures, land classes and soil types, what they've got and what opportunities there are for improvement," she said.

Improving pasture

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"Next, we examine our livestock production systems, compare performance against regional benchmarks and again look for opportunities to improve."

In the following sessions, producers look at strategies for change, both short and long term, and the effects of those changes on farm profitability. They also determine pay-back periods on investment and learn to apply some of the EverGraze tools, such as the rotation planner and pasture improvement calculator, and MLA's feed demand calculator.

Geoff said one of the great strengths of this new course was its flexibility to be tailored for producers from any region in Victoria and southern NSW.

"This year, we hope to extend pilots to Western Australia and northern NSW, to make sure we've got the models for those regional areas right," he said.

Anita said the course's flexible mode of delivery aimed to cater for a wide range of learning styles.

"We understand some people like to sit and listen, while others prefer to get out and 'do', so the course tries to cater for everyone as much as we can," she said. "One of the highlights is the on-farm visits, where producers get to see how others tackle a particular issue and the practical solutions they have implemented."

Anyone interested in these workshops should contact their regional coordinator (see left).

EverGraze is funded by MLA, in partnership with the Future Farm Industries CRC and Australian Wool Innovation.

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Learn more about good grazing through:
www.evergraze.com.au

Lifetime Ewe Management
www.lifetimewool.com.au

www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au

www.mla.com.au/bredwellfedwell

MLA's feed demand calculator is at
www.mla.com.au/feeddemand

Project dashboard: Evergraze

MLA's financial contributions to the project (2005–2013):
$5.416m

AWI: **15%**
MLA: **17%**

Government (via CRC and CMAs): **68%**

Length of project: 10 years
Completed: 9 years

Project is part of MLA's objective to:
Create opportunities through genetic research and management practices to improve pasture and forage crop productivity, quality and persistence

Ever ready

Attending an EverGraze Wholefarm Grazing Strategies pilot helped beef producer Chris Murphy make management changes to improve profitability and lifestyle, with minimal outlay.

Being an average beef producer just wasn't enough for Chris Murphy. His ambitious nature demanded more.

The former international engineering and construction executive had done some benchmarking on his historic Victorian Western District property 'Woodhouse West' but, although he was "doing all right", he recognised others were doing better.

"I'd completed a Prograze course in 2010 and had attended field days, but I felt a lot of the 'nuts and bolts' were missing. I wanted something more intensive to fill the gaps," Chris said. He took part in a pilot of the EverGraze Whole Farm Grazing Strategies program last year and, as a result, has made some major changes to his enterprise to benefit profitability and improve his family's lifestyle.

for change

Snapshot

Chris and Hilde Murphy , Dunkeld, Vic.

Property: 515ha

Enterprise: Angus breeder for vealer and feeder steer markets

Livestock: 400 breeders

Pasture: 40% rye, 25% clover, balance weeds

Soil: Clay loam

Rainfall: 650mm

Chris and Hilde Murphy with their children Julia, 4 and Luc, 6.

Chris found it "very stimulating" because "every grazing convention I'd adopted – the course challenged it. It helped me make some important decisions to really get our operation on track".

The Murphys run a 515ha Angus and F1 operation with 400 breeders (roughly 50/50) aiming to produce vealers and feeder steers. However, a reduction in vealer demand in recent years has made Chris rethink his marketing options.

"When we moved here in 2008 from a smaller property we had to build our herd rapidly, which meant we had to buy what was available at the time. Consequently, 75% of our herd are autumn calvers and the balance are spring calving. We seemed to be calving all year round," he said.

Putting it into action

Chris developed precise plans on how to lift his production from 270kg of beef/ha to 320kg of beef/ha in the medium term, while creating a simpler enterprise with less labour demands, which was balanced with his lifestyle needs and risk profile.

"We're moving the entire herd to autumn calving because I think there are more marketing options available, and we'll phase out the F1s for vealer production," he said.

"I've made the mobs bigger and developed a four- to five-paddock rotation which has freed up time, because I'm spending less time moving cattle and rectifying hot wire faults. General maintenance is also less because the wear and tear on the fences has been halved.

"With better management of the mobs I expect to utilise the pasture better, which means I should be able to increase our joining to 450 females this year and 500 in the medium term. And, I'll have made these improvements without any extra investment in infrastructure."

To support his goal to increase production, Chris has decided to take a few more risks such as increasing his annual phosphorous application and investing more in potassium (by applying it to 50% of his property instead of the usual 20%).

He also hopes to tackle a water-logged paddock by planting a summer-active tall fescue. This will allow him to bring the paddock into his grazing rotation, and to extend the growing season across the rest of the property by planting a later heading rye grass as part of a pasture renovation program.

The course gave Chris the knowledge and opportunity to apply EverGraze tools such as the rotation planner, feed demand calculator and pasture improvement tool.

"We used the rotation planner and I customised my own from that. The feed demand tool is fantastic, and I used the pasture improvement tool to justify the moderate increases in phosphorous and potassium I plan to apply," he said.

Chris, who is married with two young children, said the course helped his family make decisions to help them achieve both their financial and personal goals.

"It helped me make informed choices, particularly in areas where our lifestyle needed to take priority over production improvements," he said.

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On the right course

Boundless enthusiasm can take you a long way, as young prime lamb and wool producer Ricky Luhrs found when he participated in the EverGraze Whole Farm Grazing Strategy course last year.

Ricky Luhrs is proof that enthusiasm can overcome many shortfalls.

The young lamb and wool producer was completely unfazed last year at being the youngest, least experienced and only sheep producer to take part in an EverGraze pilot course in Victoria's Western District. On the contrary – he thrived on the challenge.

"I was the only one in the course who hadn't done some form of prior learning and, at that stage, I'd only been at home on the farm for four months. I'd been a builder for the past seven years. I was definitely the least knowledgeable, but I didn't find it hard to catch up," he said.

Ricky and his father, Russell, run a 1,000ha wool and prime lamb operation spread over three properties, about 10km from Cavendish.

Ricky lives at 'Westburn' (267ha), where they raise up to 2,000 Merino weaners and run a flock of up to 600 two-year-old wethers for worm control. His parents live on the home block, 'Yarma' (364ha), where they raise 1,900 Merino ewes.

The family also runs 'Redwood', a 404ha property devoted to growing out prime lambs and running 2,000 first-cross ewes that are slowly being transformed into a Dohne over first-cross flock, joined to Poll Dorsets, to maximise their wool and meat yield.

For Ricky, the EverGraze Whole Farm Grazing Strategies course taught him valuable planning and design skills that he is applying at Westburn.

"Fencing was almost non-existent there, so it's an opportunity to lay the farm out to soil and land classes properly from the start and improve its DSE/ha," he said.

"During the course we also looked at what pastures grow best in wet and dry areas, and I gained a better understanding of stock feed requirements."

Assessing options

Ricky has plenty of pasture renovation plans and is using the EverGraze tools to assess his most profitable options. One change he has already adopted as a result of the course has been to move his cross-bred ewes from a set stocking regime to rotational grazing.

"They usually go into a feedlot (at home) at the start of January, to take the pressure off the paddocks during the toughest time of the year. But, by adopting rotational grazing, we've put that off until mid-February and the sheep are utilising more feed, so it's given us a chance to get rid of some of the weeds that accumulate from set stocking," he said,

Ricky said a particularly enjoyable aspect of the course was being able to share the knowledge he gained with his father and place it in context with the family's generations of farming experience.

He is now completing a Lifetime Ewe Management course, and hopes to be on the farm full time by next year.

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Snapshot

Ricky Luhrs, Mooralla, Vic.

Property: 1,035ha

Enterprise: Wool and prime lamb production

Livestock: 3,900 Merino, first-cross and Merino-Dohne cross ewes, 600 wethers, 2,000 Merino weaners

Pasture: Victorian rye grass, subclover

Soil: Sandy loam

Rainfall: 600mm

Environment

Dung disposers' debut

There is a lot of manure to manage in Australia's livestock industry, so MLA has joined forces with the CSIRO Biosecurity Flagship to deliver a small solution with a big appetite.

Onthophagus vacca. Image courtesy of CSIRO.

Whether they tunnel and bury dung under dung heaps or roll it into balls, dung beetles deliver big benefits by:

- reducing pollution of pastures and waterways from dung
- increasing water penetration and aerating soil by creating tunnels under dung
- providing plant roots with a pathway into the soil to access water and nutrients
- spreading the goodness by burying balls of dung across the paddock
- conserving soil nitrogen by reducing the loss of faecal nitrogen
- promoting earth worms for added soil health
- destroying the breeding sites of buffalo flies, bush flies and biting midges
- potentially reducing internal parasitic larvae

CSIRO scientists are busy breeding two species of dung beetles for an initial release in September 2014 – the first time a new species will be introduced to Australian pastures in more than 20 years.

Their names may be bigger than their bodies, but the *Onthophagus vacca* and *Bubas bubalus* beetles were specially chosen for their voracious appetite and spring activity.

MLA's Environment and Natural Resources Project Manager, Cameron Allan, said MLA was funding the project as a long-term strategy to improve pasture productivity.

"Different species of dung beetles are active at different times of the year. Southern Australia currently lacks a species that is active in late winter and early spring," Cameron said.

"Producers in this region are missing out on the benefits of dung beetles at a time when pastures are actively growing and at risk of restriction by dung pats.

"When established, these two species will provide a broader suite of dung beetles for Australian producers and will play a role in healthier soils by breaking down dung to release nutrients during the growing season."

CSIRO scientist Jane Wright said the introduced dung beetles were being processed in CSIRO's Canberra quarantine facilities to avoid the importation of exotic pests and diseases.

"Researchers placed the first round of dung beetle eggs (from adults imported in May 2012) into 5,717 hand-rolled dung balls and will repeat the process for the second importation this May," Jane said.

Did you know?

12 pats are produced by an adult cow each day

24 million hectares of Australian pasture is rendered unproductive from dung

3,000 flies can be produced on a dung pat in a fortnight

"Over the past year, nearly two tonnes of dung have been consumed by dung beetles in the laboratory during the process of rearing the first generation of Aussie-born beetles, synchronising both species to the southern hemisphere season and feeding new adult beetles. Next year, we will need at least five tonnes to feed our growing lab colonies."

Climate models will be used to identify five initial release sites across Victoria, South Australia and south-west Western Australia.

"These dung beetle species only have one generation a year so it will take time to build up sufficient numbers for wider distribution, but this is an important step towards improving future livestock and pasture management," Jane said.

After the initial release, industry networks such as Landcare, private companies and government departments will potentially be used to roll out starter colonies to producers, expected from 2015.

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Meet the beetles

Bubas bubalus larva. Image courtesy of CSIRO.

Onthophagus vacca:

- Found in a region extending from western Europe to the Caucasus region and Iran.
- Flies during the middle of the day when temperature exceeds 10°C.
- Attracted to fresh cattle and sheep dung in open pastures.
- An adult female devours 1kg of dung during her life cycle.
- Small releases were made in 1980 and 1983, but did not establish.

Bubas bubalus:

- Found in Mediterranean climate areas of southern Europe.
- Active at night.
- Requires large quantities of dung when laying eggs so tends towards cattle dung in grassy pastures and open woodland.
- An adult female uses 3kg of dung in her life cycle.

Life span:

Adults of these two species spend winter underground in obligatory hibernation.

They emerge in early spring to feed on dung and lay eggs in dung masses produced in the soil at the end of tunnels. Larvae develop in the dung masses and metamorphose into adults. They dig their way to the surface in spring and recommence the process.

Do's and don'ts

A few simple steps will help you get the most out of your dung beetles:

- Sample existing dung beetles to identify species that will fill gaps throughout the year.
- Consider your enterprise – do you need dung beetles suited to cattle, sheep or both?
- Keep stock in the release paddock so there is enough dung to establish beetles.
- Consider the season before release to ensure there is sufficient soil moisture for dung beetles to establish nests.
- Release new beetles from the centre of the paddock.
- Change to a dung beetle friendly parasiticide before beetle release to reduce mortality.
- Reduce fox numbers to prevent dung beetle predation.
- Monitor dung beetle populations annually to evaluate survival rate.

Suppliers of dung beetles can match species to your enterprise, location and climate:

The Dung Beetle Expert: **www.dungbeetleexpert.com.au**

Dung Beetle Solutions Australia: **www.dungbeetlesolutions.com.au**

Beetling away for 45 years

Introduced dung beetles have been burying or rolling dung across Australia for nearly 45 years.

In response to the lack of suitable native beetles to tackle cattle dung (native beetles mostly process dung from indigenous fauna) and the resulting increase in fly populations and reduction in pasture quality, CSIRO undertook a dung beetle importation and release program from 1967 to 1982.

Of the 55 species imported from the Mediterranean and Africa, CSIRO released 1.73 million beetles (43 species), with 23 species establishing. Some species, such as *O. vacca*, did not establish, so CSIRO has drawn on new knowledge about dung beetles to guide breeding and management of this species.

Except for two species released in 1990–92 in Western Australia by CSIRO and the WA Department of Agriculture, dung beetle collection and redistribution has primarily continued through Landcare, producer groups and individual dung beetle specialists.

Introduced dung beetles in Australia 1967:2007 by Penny Edwards. Available at **www.landcareonline.com.au**

Dung Beetles Australia: **www.dungbeetle.com.au**

CSIRO dung beetle research: **www.csiro.au/dungbeetles**

Field guide to dung beetles: **www.landcareonline.com.au/dungbeetle/DungBeetle_Dict.aspx**

Dung beetle resource package: **http://northeast.landcarevic.net.au/lucyvale-bbg/projects/dung-beetle-resource-package**

Beetles beat flies

Snapshot

Cindy and Steven Scott, Henty, NSW.

Property: 1,450ha (500ha cropping)

Enterprise: Seedstock and commercial Angus beef production, cereal cropping

Livestock: 2,000 Angus cattle

Pasture: Phalaris and sub-clover

Soil: Brown clay loam

Rainfall: 550mm

Cindy Scott shares her dung beetle experience at an environmental school excursion at Glen Elgin. Image courtesy of Cindy Scott.

Dung beetles don't just boost pasture productivity, they also help control flies.

To say Cindy Scott loves dung beetles might be an exaggeration, but she admits they have played a very positive role in the cattle business she runs with husband Steven at Henty in southern NSW.

"When I moved to our property Glen Elgin in 1998, I couldn't believe the number of flies. I grew up in South Africa and spent a lot of time in the bush. Despite the large quantities of elephant, rhino and hippo dung there, I'd never encountered as many flies as on the farm in Australia," she said.

"I didn't realise that, unlike Australia's native beetles, dung beetles from Africa had evolved to tackle manure produced by much larger animals."

Her battle against flies seemed a lost cause until 2009 when Cindy heard a dung beetle expert extolling the benefits of the introduced species.

Four years and nine dung beetle colony releases later, Cindy credits the beetles with reducing the property's fly population by an estimated 90%. The Scotts released 8,000 beetles of four different species, climate-matched to their property for year-round activity.

Numbers have boomed as the dung beetles happily work their way across the 1,450 hectare property, breaking down manure produced by the Scotts' 2,000 Angus cattle and supporting Cindy and Steven's goal to be good custodians of their land.

Steven, a sixth generation beef producer, was initially sceptical of the beetles' value.

"Like all producers, he was mainly interested in how it could improve the bottom line," Cindy explained. "But the visibility of beetle activity – with dung pads broken down in 24 hours – quickly convinced him.

"It is rewarding to drive around our paddocks and see how quickly the beetles are breaking down and burying dung, transferring nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous underground, and how their tunnelling aerates the soil and can reduce run-off – not to mention reduce flies."

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Management tips:

Cindy said preparing for dung beetles was simple and required only minor on-farm adjustments:

- Collect samples of existing beetles so your dung beetle supplier can provide the best species for year-round activity.
- Change to a dung beetle friendly drench before you establish beetle colonies.
- Control foxes to minimise dung beetle predation.
- Maximise distribution by releasing beetles in the centre of the farm.
- Networks such as Landcare are a valuable source of management information. We participated in a local Landcare monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of our dung beetles.
- Collecting dung beetles and monitoring populations is a great on-farm activity for kids and schools.

Grazing land management

To rip or not to rip?

Research answers the question

An MLA-funded Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) has examined the benefits of different preparation techniques for planting leucaena.

Establishing leucaena on loam soil after ripping at Drumburle. Photos supplied by Stuart Buck, QDAFF

Research in Central Queensland has found short-lived plant establishment benefits from ripping non-clay soil prior to planting leucaena, but there is little benefit from ripping clay soil.

The PDS project also sought to examine the production impacts of either fully removing grass or removing grass in strips prior to establishing the forage legume shrub.

Project leader Stuart Buck, from Queensland's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF), said the findings were significant because establishment costs were a considerable barrier to the adoption of leucaena, particularly given the potential for establishment failure.

"Planting leucaena after fully removing grass can cost $425/ha, whereas removal of grass in strips reduces costs to around $334/ha," Stuart said.

"Ripping prior to planting will add another $75–$100/ha depending on the row spacing and machine used."

Stuart set up trials on the Barrett family's properties 'Drumburle' and 'Lawgi Station' near Thangool to determine which establishment options were most effective.

Soil moisture and nutrient measurements were taken prior to ripping and again at planting. Biomass samples (dry matter yield) were collected at four months, 13 months and 39 months.

Stuart found there was a soil moisture benefit from ripping prior to sowing in both the deep loam and the rocky soils on Drumburle.

He found no moisture benefit from ripping the cracking clay soils on Lawgi, but a slight benefit on the heavier, hard-setting clay.

There were no plant establishment or dry matter benefits derived from ripping either of the clay soils.

It's in the numbers

The big surprise for Stuart was the magnitude of the plant population difference between the ripping and non-ripping sites on Drumburle.

"We measured the dry matter four months after sowing and found a 30% increase in plant establishment where it was ripped on the deep loam and the rocky, ironbark rise," he said.

"This dry matter difference disappeared by 12 months after sowing, indicating that ripping on these soils only provides short-term plant establishment benefits."

The trial found no production benefits from fully removing grass, compared to leaving grass strips, prior to planting, but Stuart believes more research is needed in this area as the conclusion was drawn after only one trial, in one year.

Figure 1 **Leucaena plant population and dry matter yields at Drumburle and Lawgi Station**

Property and soil type	Treatment	Plant population (plants/m/row)	Dry matter – 4mths after sowing (kg/ha)	Dry matter – 1yr after sowing (kg/ha)	Dry matter – 3yrs after sowing (kg/ha)*
Drumburle (Loam)	Rip	13.5	420	1,090	1,870
	No Rip	10.2	240	960	1,810
Lawgi (Clay)	Rip	13.6	250	1,320	110
	No Rip	12.9	250	1,210	130

** Lawgi sites were grazed prior to 3yr measurement. Drumburle sites were not grazed.*

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Leucaena learning at Thangool

Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) cooperator Stuart Barrett was surprised by some of the findings from the leucaena trials hosted on his family's properties, while other results confirmed his own experience.

.15–.20kg/head/day
additional weight gain achieved with leucaena

Snapshot

Stuart Barrett, Thangool, Qld.

Property: 7,300ha

Enterprise: Beef cattle breeding and finishing

Livestock: Droughtmaster with some terminal crossbreeding to Senepol bulls

Pasture: Mixture of native and improved pasture with native bluegrass and black speargrass, Seca stylo, sirato, buffel, creeping bluegrass and purple pigeon grass.

Soil: Mostly light forest loam in open rangeland with black soil clay flats on 'Drumburle', and self-cracking, black clay scrub soils at 'Lawgi'

Rainfall: 600mm

Lessons learned

- Talk to as many people as possible who have experience with leucaena. I learnt from QDAFF, Fitzroy Basin Association, contractors, neighbours, Central Queensland Beef Group, other growers, seed sellers, merchandisers and agronomists, University of Queensland, and a great website called farmz.com.au
- Plan for additional labour requirements during establishment.
- We're now achieving an additional 0.15–0.20kg/head/day liveweight growth. However, it takes cattle time to get used to it and really get going.
- Lock up the paddock for a year during establishment, which gives all the pasture a very long break.
- Monitoring is important, as you need to leave 10–20% leaf on the leucaena for regrowth, so the grass gets that break as well.

PDS producer cooperator Stuart Barrett (right) and Joe O'Reagain from the Fitzroy Basin Association taking samples at the leucaena PDS trial site at 'Drumburle', before the first graze in 2010.

Stuart Barrett has been growing leucaena for the past six years on 'Drumburle' and 'Lawgi Station' near Thangool, in Central Queensland. He says it's difficult to get going, but worth the trouble once established.

In mid-2008 he joined forces with the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF) Senior Pasture Agronomist Stuart Buck to set up a PDS that tested the benefits of ripping or not ripping soil prior to planting leucaena.

"We have always used deep ripping for pasture renovation and have seen big results, so I expected much the same on the leucaena," Stuart Barrett said.

"That didn't eventuate on both soil types, which was a surprise."

The trial found a short-term establishment benefit from ripping on loam soils, but no benefit from ripping clay soils.

"I have found it is always easier to establish leucaena on the black cracking clay soils, and I have a terrible time getting it right on the lighter loams, so I'll consider anything that will lead to a higher success rate when planting into that type of soil," Stuart said.

The PDS also tested the practice of removing all grass versus removing grass in strips, prior to planting. The results were inconclusive due to inadequate establishment on plots at one site and the limited time frame of the trial.

"I'd love to know whether it would be worth the extra cost in completely removing the grass," Stuart said.

"I currently strip cultivate a seed bed and then spray the grass between. I don't have the resources – time, dollars and equipment – to cultivate a 40ha area when I can strip cultivate a seed bed less than one-third of that area for the same outcome, even if it does take a bit longer to establish."

Stuart introduced leucaena in order to gain protein and nitrogen where he needed it most – in the forest country – and add to the pasture mix on the scrub soils.

"I like the fact it's a fodder crop that, unlike oats or sorghum, doesn't need to be re-planted every year," he said.

"It does go right back to sticks in the winter when it's frosted, but grows back from the base in spring. It's packed full of protein, has a taproot and fixes nitrogen.

"At this stage, I'm achieving additional weight gains of 0.15–0.20kg/head/day. Weaning onto leucaena can also see weaners hold onto more weight than on native pasture alone, and in times of need I'm able to sell off dry stock and open it up to breeding cattle."

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Grazing land management

Going south

Leucaena is proving a profitable, reliable, easy-to-grow legume for pastures in some areas of inland southern Queensland.

When George Lambert saw leucaena growing in Southern Queensland 10 years ago, his first thought was "what the bloody hell is that doing here?"

George had worked with beef producers in the Northern Brigalow Belt of Central Queensland for 12 years to integrate leucaena pastures into their enterprises.

One decade and several trials later, the former Central Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI) extension agronomist is convinced the forage legume shrub is also suited to the better soils of the southern inland. Plantings, he predicted, could potentially increase by another 200,000ha in the region, including areas west to Roma and Injune.

George has recently concluded an extended, MLA-funded Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project that collected animal production data and monitored the effects of cool weather and frosts on previously established leucaena plantations.

The project confirmed the earlier 'Leucaena on the Downs' project findings that leucaena is highly suited to the warmer parts of the region; requires good, fertile soil with a high moisture-holding capacity; and tolerates moderate frosts.

"Leucaena is fast growing in summer and quite drought tolerant because it has a substantial, deep root system.

"A leucaena-based pasture at Chinchilla is now 18 years old and still going strong," George said.

"With a minimum 500mm of summer rainfall, leucaena can replace annual summer-growing forage crops and supplement winter-growing oats, to the extent of reducing the area required.

Leucaena growing requirements for southern inland Queensland:

- Minimum 500mm of summer-dominant rainfall.
- Well-drained alkaline soils with good water-holding capacity.
- Inoculation with specific rhizobium at planting.
- Tolerates moderate frosts (keep out of severe frost zones).
- High soil fertility, particularly phosphorous.
- A minimum of 20ha.
- Rotational grazing is in place.
- Ensure at least 10% of cattle are inoculated with the rumen bug that breaks down DHP (available from DAFF Queensland).

"Our producer sites showed that leucaena in 5–8m wide rows, with vigorous grass between the rows, will carry at least two animal equivalent/ha over about 170 days from late October until late May.

"Steers on well-established leucaena pasture will average 0.8kg liveweight gain/day, and during peak growing periods that will vary from 1.0 to 1.3kg/day."

George said that "if farmed properly" with good weed control, soil moisture and fertility, leucaena can be planted in October and lightly grazed the following April. The plants take two to three years to fully develop.

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Looking for more on leucaena?

The guidebook *Leucaena: A Guide to Establishment and Management* is available at **www.mla.com.au/leucaena**

The Leucaena Network: **www.leucaena.net**

Making More From Sheep

Making more from a new enterprise

The past two years have been a steep learning curve for Kangaroo Island sheep and cattle producer David Westbrook. He is new not only to the island, but also to the livestock industry.

His beef, lamb and wool enterprise is a far cry from the cropping enterprise David's family ran on the Yorke Peninsula and he considers a recent Making More From Sheep (MMFS) course a critical investment.

"I can't put a dollar figure on what the course is worth to me, but if I hadn't participated I would be doing a lot of things differently and it would be costing a lot in lost productivity," he said.

In January 2010, David and his wife Becky, a Kangaroo Island local, bought 745 hectares at Parndana in the island's central region. Another 450ha was added in January 2012.

"We have a five-year plan to run our Kangaroo Island properties in conjunction with my brother's cropping enterprise at Maitland on the Yorke Peninsula. We breed

Snapshot

David and Becky Westbrook, Kangaroo Island, SA.

Property:
Two properties totalling 1,195ha

Enterprise:
Beef, prime lambs, wool

Livestock:
450 Angus-Simmental cattle, 4,000 Merino and Merino-White Suffolk sheep

Pasture:
Annual grasses with sub clover, some perennial Porto Coxfoot

Soil:
Laderite over clay

Rainfall:
600mm

David Westbrook with his son, Jed, 3.

our own calves and lambs and send them to his farm to be finished on stubble and in the on-farm feedlot," David said.

The Westbrooks' flock is made up of 1,200 Merino ewes for wool production and 2,500 Merinos crossed with White Suffolk rams to produce prime lambs, which are ferried to the mainland to enter the feedlot in December.

They also cross 450 Angus breeders to Black Simmental bulls. Yearlings are feedlot finished for 100 days and sold direct to processors at 450kg.

The feedlot provides security in the face of Kangaroo Island's short growing season, allowing David to focus on efficiency gains in other parts of the business. Thanks to MMFS, he is focusing on worm control, weaner management, condition scoring and pasture management to boost productivity and profitability.

"We now conduct regular worm egg counts and rotate sheep and cattle between the two farms as a management tool," David said.

"The ability to identify individual performers in the flock and manage their nutrition was another highlight of the course. We already rotationally grazed, and the course provided reassurance of this system. I have renovated a few paddocks with perennial grasses and will incorporate feed budgeting into the future so we can achieve optimal stocking rates of 12-13 DSE/hectare."

David will start priority feeding ewes to maintain minimum scores of 3 to 3.5, and plans to work with MMFS presenter and Kangaroo Island veterinarian Greg Johnsson to set benchmark targets to improve stock performance.

"We had to build our flock from scratch, but I will now start culling for fertility, class and performance, and investing in better genetics. Making More From Sheep has given me the skills to do this so we can build the numbers and quality of our stock and improve efficiency and productivity."

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Making More From Sheep has a range of workshops, seminars and courses coming up this year. To find out more go to **www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au/events.htm** or contact your state coordinator

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Producer Demonstration Sites

After being inspired by the Larrawa PDS, ponds were built on neighbouring Bulka Station. After rain, the waterponded area came back to life. Photo by Felicity Brown.

Demonstrating good practice

Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS) are on-farm research and demonstration projects created to reduce the time-lag between research and on-ground change. Fifteen sites supported by MLA are running or have recently been completed across northern Australia.

The projects are aimed at groups of cattle producers and partner organisations throughout Queensland, the Northern Territory, and the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia.

The sites involve groups of producers and extension staff demonstrating, developing and adopting priority research technologies and findings. They aim to:

- → increase whole-property and local industry sustainability and profitability
- → increase industry-wide adoption of beneficial research findings
- → adapt research findings to practical, commercial implementation
- → improve producer skills, knowledge and practices
- → improve collaboration and coordination between producers and support agencies

Fast facts

- → Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS) have enabled a broad range of projects to be demonstrated on-farm, helping to reduce the time-lag between research and on-ground change.
- → The waterponding PDS at Larrawa Station, in Western Australia's Kimberley region has seen over 800 ponds being built on neighbouring stations.
- → The fat scanning PDS in Rolleston, Queensland, gave producers another tool to help meet the requirements of the EU and MSA markets.

Create your own PDS

Producers keen to be involved in on-farm research and demonstration sites can apply for funding through MLA's Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS) projects.

PDS projects are aimed at groups of producers and supporting organisations such as state departments of primary industry, departments of natural resources, CSIRO, universities and private consultants. They enable producer groups to partner with research organisations and focus on trialling MLA-supported R&D or addressing key research.

Funding support is available for producer groups involved in northern beef, southern beef, lamb and sheepmeat, and goat production.

Applications may be submitted at any time. Preliminary applications should be submitted at least 12 weeks before the project is planned to start so the proposal can be reviewed and – if successful – contracted, before the project begins.

To download an application form go to **www.mla.com.au/funding-for-producers**

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Southern Australia PDS' –
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Figure1 Existing and recently completed Producer Demonstration Sites in northern Australia

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1 **Glenflorrie Station:**
Demonstrating the effects of supplementation of phosphorus on the productivity of heifers in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

Completion December 2014

2 **Yalleen Station:**
Demonstrating twice-a-year weaning of a breeder herd in the Pilbara to increase productivity of the breeder herd and profitability of the business.

Completion December 2015

3 **Country Downs:**
Using the Tick-Off system to control external parasites in cattle.

Completion May 2013

4 **Leopold Downs Station, Fitzroy Crossing and Roebuck Export Depot, Broome:**
Increasing awareness of weight change between yarding and delivery to exporter.

Completed September 2012

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

5 **Larrawa Station:**
Investigating the practicality of regenerating degraded pastoral land. (See story on page 26)

Completed April 2012

NORTHERN TERRITORY

6 **Hayfield Station:**
Boosting steer growth and comparing the profitability of different hormonal growth promotant strategies in the Northern Territory.

Completed September 2012

7 **Lakefield and Avago Station:**
Demonstrating the use of the polled gene marker test to increase the frequency of polled progeny and the use of fixed time insemination in commercial Northern Territory herds.

Completion August 2014

QUEENSLAND

8 **Richmond:**
Using walk-over-weighing and remote camera monitoring to identify key management triggers and reduce costs.

Completion December 2014

9 **Charters Towers and Lower Burdekin districts:**
Utilising MSA feedback to enhance MSA compliance.

Completed November 2012

10 **Emerald and Springsure:**
Managing reproductive diseases in Central Queensland breeder herds.

Completion December 2013

11 **Rolleston:**
Demonstrating innovative approaches for introducing legumes into buffel grass pastures.

Completion November 2013

QUEENSLAND

12 **Rolleston, Arcadia Valley and Springsure:**
Investigating and improving market compliance issues in beef markets in central Queensland.

Completed January 2013

13 **North East Darling Downs:**
Demonstrating the economic performance of beef cattle finishing systems used on the North East Downs.

Completion October 2013

14 **Darling Downs area:**
Demonstrating the productivity and value of newly established leucaena in selected areas of the Darling Downs (see story on page 22).

Completed September 2012

15 **Biloela-Thangool area:**
Demonstrating the impacts of land preparation techniques on leucaena establishment and productivity.

Completed July 2012

Visit the FutureBeef website: **www.futurebeef.com.au/resources/producer-demonstration-sites**

Waterponding works

The experience from the Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) at Larrawa Station, WA, shows what can happen when an idea grabs people's attention.

The Larrawa PDS showed how waterponding could improve land condition, water and nutrient retention, and potentially boost returns from increased forage production.

Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA) development officer Matthew Fletcher said the idea of waterponding had really taken off since the PDS was completed and a field day was held at the site.

Since the completion of the PDS, about 1,000 ponds have been surveyed on neighbouring stations, and more than 863 have now been built.

The original PDS was a partnership between MLA, Rangelands NRM and DAFWA. It involved using earthworks to create horseshoe-shaped ponds on previously barren areas.

"The problem with these barren areas has been that there is no soil moisture. By holding the water, the ponds create soil moisture," Matthew said.

"Where the water ponded, the soil became spongy underfoot and small cracks (2–4mm) appeared after the subsurface clay layer had swelled and cracked. In turn, these created niches for seed capture and germination."

Analysis of the Larrawa PDS data showed the waterponding cost $148.52 per hectare if done with a 16G grader. Rehabilitating one hectare involved building two 210m ponds, with two rips (50m long) on the inside of each pond to roughen the surface of the soil, and seeding with 2kg forage sorghum seed (Sweet Jumbo LPA).

Matthew said it was too early to assess increased productivity as a result of investment in ponding. An immediate financial return has not been forthcoming as producers are waiting on the build up of desirable perennial pasture species.

"Benefits from the demonstration so far include increased groundcover protecting the soil from erosion; reducing sediment load flowing into King Sound (Indian Ocean) via the Fitzroy River, Christmas Creek and Lumbar Creek and biodiversity, both aquatic and non-aquatic, would also benefit with less sediment filling natural pools in creeks and rivers between the point of erosion until discharging into King Sound," he said.

New life

Larrawa producer Kevin Brockhurst said it was remarkable how waterponding had regenerated barren country.

"The first year, we got about 25% vegetation coverage but this year it's up to about 50%. The grasses are starting to grow now," he said.

"To start with, you get some of the weedy species coming in; the grasses come later."

Kevin put cattle into the paddock this year – back onto country that hasn't supported grazing for many years.

A field day at the Larrawa PDS generated interest in taking the project a step further, and more people became involved. Mel McDonald from Rangelands NRM believes the burgeoning interest was inspired by the visual results created by the demonstration ponds.

"In one wet season, ground that had been bare for decades opened up and came back to life," Mel said.

"The primary colonising species have come back and, as that evolves, the perennial grasses come back."

Kevin Brockhurst will continue waterponding at Larrawa. He would also like to go back and do more at the earlier sites, putting into practice what has been learnt along the way.

"If I see a degraded area now, I want to pond it," Kevin said. "The more I look, the more I see and want to fix.

"I'm hoping that what I've done is encouraging for others."

Lessons learned

- → It was more economical to use a higher capacity 16G grader than a 12G when building water ponds.
- → Banks built with the opposed disc plough were too small to be effective at ponding water.
- → An experienced machine operator is essential to get full value out of machine hire.

Snapshot

Kevin and Wendy Brockhurst, Larrawa Station, Kimberley, WA.

Property: 191,000ha

Livestock: 5,000 high-grade Brahman and Brahman-cross cattle

Pasture: Buffel grass in river systems; harder spinifex on rocky areas; soft spinifex on desert

Soil: Red country; Pindan; gravelly ridges

Rainfall: 380–430mm

Kevin and Wendy Brockhurst are thrilled with the results of waterponding at Larrawa Station. Photo courtesy Brockhurst family.

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www.mla.com.au/Larrawa-pds-results

Getting the inheritance

For decades, scientists have seen heredity as a function of DNA. Traits are handed down from one generation to the next, leading to the inheritance of characteristics such as growth rate.

However, recent discoveries in epigenetics have shown that it is not quite that simple, and it seems DNA is not the only thing we inherit from our parents. Pioneers in epigenetics have found there's far more to it, including – in some cases – our paternal and maternal environment.

To understand the potential for livestock producers, MLA funded an $8,000 literature review last year. Although the research concluded that epigenetics has little relevance for sheep and cattle breeders now, it should be watched with interest.

The literature review was carried out by international epigenetic expert and molecular geneticist Professor Emma Whitelaw, from La Trobe University, and University of Melbourne livestock geneticist Professor Mike Goddard.

Mike explained why epigenetics may, one day, be useful to livestock producers.

"In mammals, females influence the environment of their young before and after birth, and this environment may have a permanent effect on the growth and other characteristics of the young," he said.

"This maternal environment effect could involve changes in the regulation of genes in the young but these changes in gene function are usually not passed on to the next generation. However, in rare circumstances, these acquired changes in gene function can be passed on, and it is this epigenetic inheritance that may, in the future, prove useful to sheep and cattle breeders."

Emma, head of genetics in La Trobe's School of Molecular Sciences and Director of Research was a leader in the research to demonstrate this phenomenon in mammals through variations in the coat colour of mice with exactly the same DNA.

In humans, the study of epigenetic abnormalities linked to obesity and diabetes as well as other chronic diseases is attracting significant interest. Researchers warn, however, that it is still early days and links between paternal environment and the behaviour of an offspring's genes are still far from conclusive.

"Epigenetic inheritance across generations is difficult to demonstrate, rare and, at the moment, poorly understood," Mike said.

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Assessing the benefits of dual-purpose crops

Dual-purpose cereal and brassica crops are increasingly being used to fill winter feed gaps in the high-rainfall zones of south-eastern Australia, and even in the drier regions of southern and western Australia.

But does the addition of extra, high-quality feed and the income from grain increase or decrease a farm's business risk and the reliability of its year-round feed supply?

An MLA-funded project is seeking to answer that question with a series of inter-linked grazing experiments at three locations: Canberra, Wagga Wagga and Hamilton.

Led by Dr Luis Ferreira, the four-year project is being undertaken by CSIRO in partnership with Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga and Victoria's Department of Primary Industries.

CSIRO grazing systems scientist Dr Andrew Moore said each site would seek to answer different questions.

"The Canberra experiment is looking at increasing the per-hectare productivity of a Merino-based system by converting a portion of grazing land to wheat and canola crops that can be grazed during the winter feed gap," Andrew said.

"The Wagga Wagga site will consider whether dual-purpose crops fit better with Merino- or Dorper-based production systems. The Victorian site will assess whether canola crops can be sown in spring, grazed by young ewes in autumn and then grown on for grain."

4 millon ha

of crops grazed in 2010

Source: GRDC mixed farmer survey

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Beef CRC champions

Continuing the Beef CRC's legacy

The Beef CRC was at the forefront of beef research and made an enormous impact on the industry.

The appointment of 20 champions will ensure the results and practical applications of research from the third phase of the Beef CRC will flow through to producers for years to come.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Beef Genetic Technologies (the Beef CRC) may be no more, but the legacy of this internationally respected research centre lives on.

The Beef CRC Champions, an Australia-wide extension project co-funded by MLA, has been initiated to ensure the centre's achievements will continue to move from the laboratory to the paddock for the benefit of all producers.

Project coordinator Dr Stephen Lee, from the University of Adelaide, said the 20 champions are extension specialists from across Australia whose job is to guide the development of extension material from the Beef CRC. They will share research outcomes through direct-to-producer activities and by training other technical experts who will help facilitate delivery.

"We're focusing on four key topics: genetics, meat quality, maternal productivity in the south and improving reproductive rates in the north," he said.

"Each topic has a small team of champions working with scientists to develop user-friendly fact sheets that show on-farm implications of research, webinars and also case studies of producers involved in the research who have taken up the technology."

Stephen said some of the major achievements of the Beef CRC included the release of the genomic prediction equations last year, the Poll Gene test which has had significant uptake by seedstock producers, and the Southern Maternal Productivity project.

Stephen said the champions network was developed by Bill McKiernan, who recently retired after a distinguished career in NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) as an extension officer, scientist and manager.

Perhaps the work Bill is best known for is the pioneering research into ways to assess muscling on cattle and the importance of muscling for retail beef yield, and hence producer returns.

This work had a significant influence on the Beef CRC III Maternal Productivity Program. Bill also contributed to the CRC II Regional Combinations Project, which investigated how genetics and nutritional effects on growth path interact.

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www.beefcrc.com

For more on selection indexes visit **http://breedplan.une.edu.au** and click 'techincal' then 'BREEDPLAN tipsheets' then look under 'Understanding Selection Indexes'.

Contact the Beef CRC Champions

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Some of the key outcomes from Beef CRC III research have been condensed into 20 fact sheets that translate science into on-farm applications. These are:

Improved genetic gain with genomic technology

- Understanding DNA technology
- Genomics – Utilising DNA to change type traits
- Beef CRC genomic prediction equations: Improving productive traits with DNA
- Utilising DNA for parentage verification
- Utilising DNA to manage genetic conditions
- Genomics tools – What do I put in and what do I get back?

Improved compliance rates to better meet market specifications

- BeefSpecs – a tool to improve beef cattle market compliance and profitability
- Selection for muscling and its effects on carcase attributes
- Producers can eliminate 'dark cutting'
- Processors can reduce 'dark cutting'
- Effect of supplementation and age of slaughter on marbling

Increased reproduction rates and maternal productivity

- Improving and selecting female cattle for genetically improved reproductive performance
- Selection and management of the maiden heifer
- Muscularity and a productive breeding herd – Achieving both
- Opportunities for improvement in feed efficiency
- Using carcase EBVs to change body composition traits in breeding cow

Improved animal welfare standards

- The Australian Poll Gene Marker test
- Transitioning to a polled herd
- Selecting for improved temperament and the benefits for beef production

Improved adaptation and whole herd efficiency

- Simultaneously improving productive and adaptive traits in tropically adapted cattle

All these can be sourced at **www.beefcrc.com/publications/fact-sheets.html**

Further fact sheets, case studies and webinars will be developed during the Champion program's second phase.

Bridging the gap

In profile **Dr Stephen Lee**

Dr Stephen Lee, from the University of Adelaide, is the coordinator of the Champions program that is charged with maintaining the Beef CRC's legacy and delivering its research outcomes to producers.

His specialist area is how BREEDPLAN Estimated Breeding Values (EBV) are associated with cow body composition.

What does your role as Champions' Coordinator involve?

I help to match up scientists whose work is ready for the extension phase with champions who have specialist technical skills. The champions will develop fact sheets, webinars and case studies and work out the best ways to convey the implications of the science to producers. I also review their work and make sure the Beef CRC's outputs are delivered.

Why are the champions important?

The champions provide a vital link between research outcomes that are still being generated from Beef CRC projects, such as the Maternal Productivity project, and producers. There is still a lot of valuable information that will have an impact on productivity and on-farm practices to flow from these projects for years to come.

What have you learnt about how BREEDPLAN EBVs are associated with body composition?

The Beef CRC Maternal Productivity project found that producers can confidently select for changes in mature cow body composition by using existing BREEDPLAN carcase EBVs. Therefore selection pressure applied using BREEDPLAN EBVs for rump and rib fat depth, intra-muscular fat and eye muscle area will have corresponding effects on cow body composition. Bearing this in mind, the best breeding strategy is to seek bulls with high $ index values for a selection index that suits the production system and target market.

What do you feel are the biggest challenges in communicating research outcomes to producers?

Producers are business operators and they're strapped for time. There needs to be a clear value proposition and a clear answer to the question 'what does it mean for me?' Will it improve productivity, increase profit or increase the amount of time available? If the answer is not clear, it's more difficult to achieve uptake.

Project dashboard: Beef CRC

MLA's financial contributions to the project:

$8.67m

of total: $55.4m

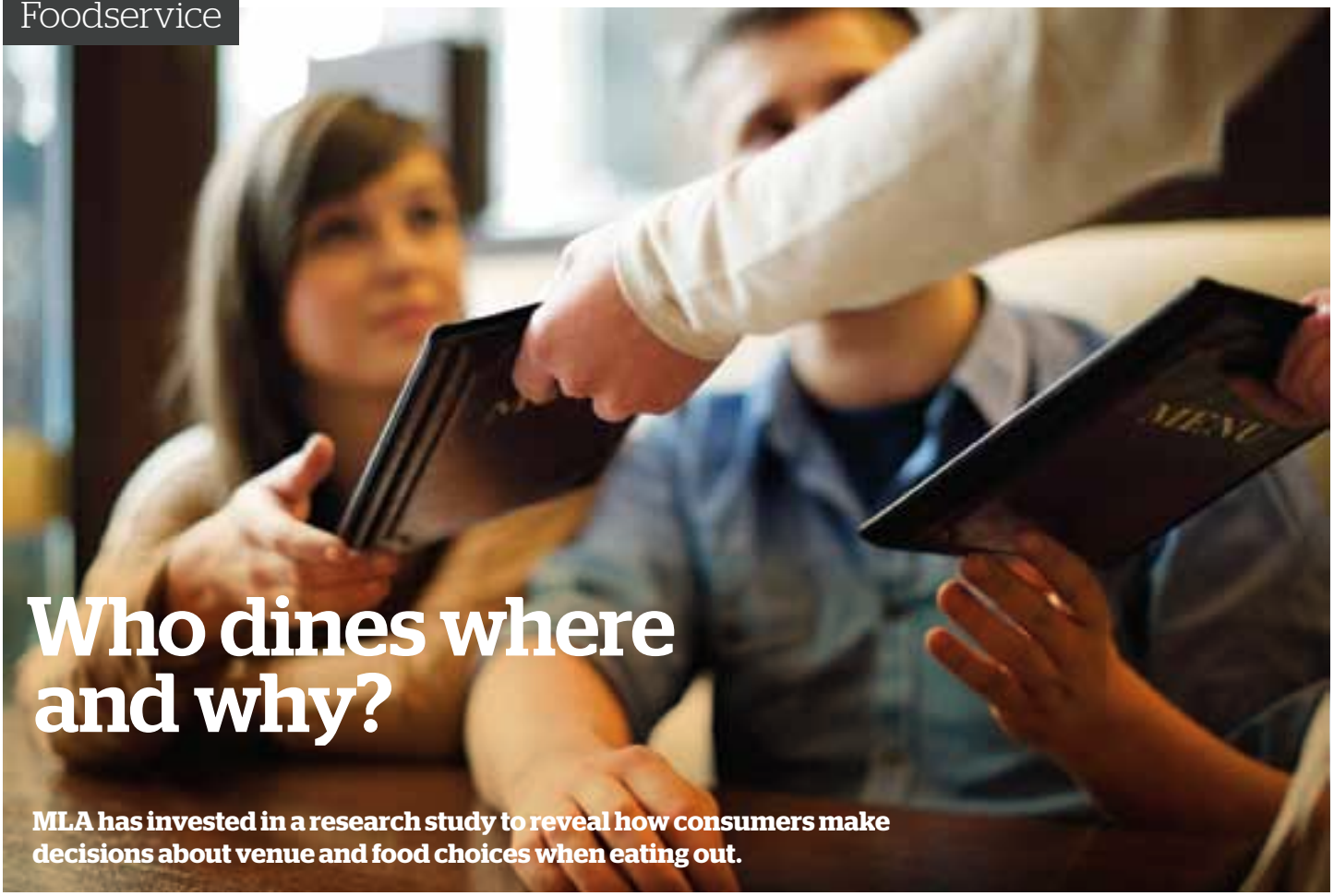
Meat and Wool NZ: **2.5%**
MLA: **17%**
Universities, industry and state departments: **26.5%**
Government CRC funding: **54%**

Length of project: 7 years

Completed: 7 years

Project is part of MLA's objective to:
Increase productivity in Australian beef herds.

Foodservice



Who dines where and why?

MLA has invested in a research study to reveal how consumers make decisions about venue and food choices when eating out.

Nineteen. That's the number of times an adult Australian – who considers themselves as someone who dines out regularly – will eat out each month. On average, regular diners will eat at a café 5.5 times, fast food 4.8 times, in a pub 2.1 times, in a casual food outlet 3.2 times, at a club 1.8 times and will experience fine dining 1.5 times.

The Dining Out study, by market researchers Ruby Cha Cha, also revealed what consumers will eat, where they will eat it and why they don't order particular foods.

The study helps identify the needs of both the customer and chef, including growth opportunities in sectors such as in the pubs and clubs and will enable MLA to create appropriate resources and strategies for the trade, and further position itself to industry as a resource for relevant information, including dining trends.

Claire Tindale, MLA Marketing Manager – Food Service, said the study provided some fundamental insights.

"The research found diners are looking for lighter-style cuisine that appeals to their interest in flavours, but also in healthy food," she said.

"In looking for healthier options, they often choose Thai and Vietnamese food when eating out as they perceive these cuisines as healthy."

Diners are also looking for authenticity in flavours and ingredients and want to know more about where their food comes from. Claire said the main drivers for choosing a club or a pub as a dining venue were value for money, convenience, food they liked, atmosphere and a venue to suit the occasion.

"Parents want a restaurant where families are welcome, where they can eat food the whole family will like, and somewhere they can go for birthdays and events. Clubs and pubs meet these expectations," she said.

Research into diner behaviour is important to help understand what the customer drivers are.

"For example, we know consumers want to know where their food comes from, so MLA takes chefs and butchers on-farm to show them first-hand how beef and lamb is produced – chefs can then share this knowledge with their diners," Claire said.

Through programs such as Masterpieces, MLA can demonstrate to chefs the creative possibilities using non-loin red meat cuts that help satisfy their customers' needs for variety, as well as value for money.

"Consumers are expecting more of dining options in clubs and pubs these days," Claire said.

"No longer seen as just a 'cheap feed', these venues are being forced to step up to maintain their share of the dining dollar. This is where MLA can assist the pub and club sector through sharing consumer-dining insights and offering solutions using red meat to satisfy the changing needs of consumers."

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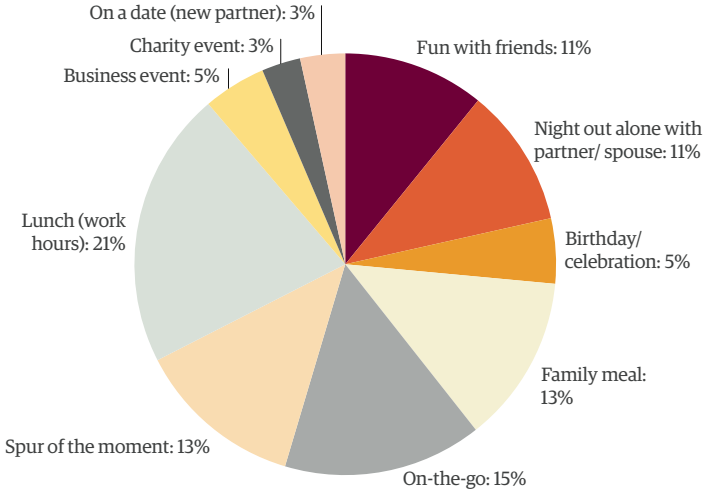
Occasions when diners choose to eat out

Over a quarter of occasions are driven by a spur of the moment or 'on-the-go' decision.



Source: The Dining Out study, Ruby Cha Cha

Diners have levels of engagement

The Dining Out study identified three groupings:

Unsophisticated diners
Enjoy simple, no pretence food and dining environment - no fuss!

10%

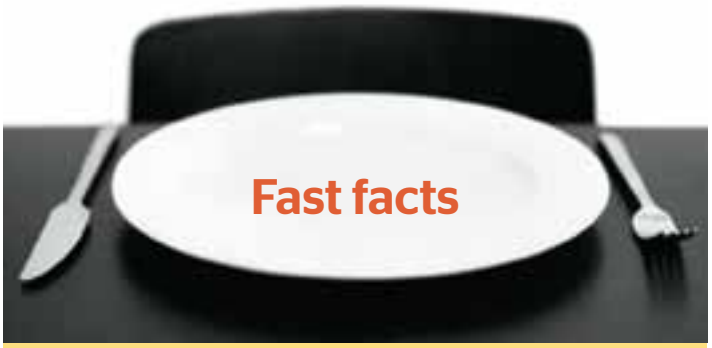
Everyday diners
Most likely to scan the menu for familiar items that have been tried and tested.

62%

Foodies
Food is an adventure and are always on the look out for an exciting mouth feel and play of flavours. Foodies drive many trends, which filter through to the masses over time.

28%

Source: The Dining Out study, Ruby Cha Cha



Fast facts

On average, regular diners will eat out at the following types of establishments per month.

Source: The Dining Out study, Ruby Cha Cha

Five themes were identified as being areas where MLA could work to increase the number of times beef and lamb are ordered. They were:

Family dining. The research revealed the need for dining that suits the needs of parents and children. Participants reported they often 'dumbed down' their tastes to find venues that suited all members of the family. The opportunity here is to develop and reinvent beef and lamb dishes as fast, but fresh and flavourful, food.

The real deal. Key words here are authenticity and substance. Diners like to know the story behind the produce. They are looking for provenance and branding. We can look to examples such as grassfed beef, organic meat, Wagyu, Angus, dry aged, etc, and encourage chefs to use these points of differentiation for cuts of beef and lamb on their menus.

Value for money. The survey found diners want good quality dining, but their decisions are often swayed by the perceived value for money. Further development of non-loin cuts, as seen through MLA's Masterpieces program, can ensure restaurants keep good quality beef and lamb on the menu, but at an attractive price and in an innovative way.

Safe experimentation. Diners want to try new foods, but they don't want to risk being disappointed. This is all about taking beef and lamb a step further and developing recipe ideas and techniques for new products and alternative cuts (like lamb belly, beef short ribs, etc) while still serving them with traditional sides.

Fresh indulgence. People like to feel they are treating themselves when dining out, but through lighter, healthier meals. Beef and lamb can be presented in cooking styles that consumers associate with health, such as grilling or poaching, and paired with fresh, unprocessed ingredients. This satisfies a diner's need for a healthy meal, but doesn't compromise taste or the chance to be adventurous with their meal choice.

In profile | Foodservice

Simon McNamara //

Executive chef, Canterbury Leagues Club

Once the domain of schnitzel and chips, and roast of the day, many services and sporting clubs have upped the ante in the food stakes to serve innovative cuisine for a range of diners.

Simon McNamara, Executive Chef at Sydney's Canterbury Leagues Club, said many clubs are matching the top hotel restaurants - particularly with the preparation and plating of lamb and beef - while still offering meals at a reasonable cost.

Simon oversees a staff of 32 across five outlets some of which are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and says he loves running the club's kitchens.

What are your customers looking for?

Predominantly, value for money. But they also want quality; they want to know where food is sourced and if the meat is grainfed or grassfed. I'm a big advocate of Meat Standards Australia (MSA) and for more contact between chefs and suppliers. We're making a bigger push for beef and lamb, and steaks, roasts and schnitzels remain popular. We serve Wagyu steaks, MSA lamb and dishes including beef cheek shepherd's pie and a churrasco dish which contains lamb leg and beef rump. Club chefs have to be available to the club members. I spend a lot of time talking to members, explaining what's on the menu and listening to their comments and ideas.

How do you remain competitive and contemporary?

Working closely with MLA helps us gain information and to be more creative about how to prepare and serve red meat. I began working with MLA in 2001 on the *We Love Our Lamb* cook books, and have attended many trade shows and programs. Essentially, MLA helps us pinpoint foodservice trends and inspires us to try different cuts and recipes, and new cooking techniques, as well as teaching us how to gain greater value from secondary cuts. Our purchasing officers and chefs attend MSA training programs and workshops and visit farms, butchers and abattoirs. To achieve the best outcomes, it's important for us to engage and work closely with our suppliers.

What's changed in club dining?

The meal turnover in clubs is now comparative to big hotels, but it takes place on a careful budget.

Each year, we choose two young chefs to compete in the prestigious Chef's Table Awards, created by Clubs NSW to recognise talented chefs, cooks and apprentices. It gives clubs the opportunity to challenge their kitchen teams and showcase their dining venues. Our teams have made the finals for the past six years. In 2008, they won Restaurant of the Year and last year our two young chefs placed third. Clubs have certainly come a long way since I started here eight years ago.

Simon McNamara // T: 02 9704 7777
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Annual beef consumption at the club is
26,500kg
for lamb it's
5,700kg
Serves
5,000
meals a week and
22,700 steaks a year.

Recipe

12-hour slow braised lamb shoulder

This recipe adds a whole new meaning to slow food, but at the same time creates a restaurant worthy dish out of a secondary cut – the humble lamb shoulder.

Developed by Heath Dumensy, De Bortoli's head chef at its Yarra Valley restaurant Locale for the MLA-produced chef's journal *Rare Medium* to promote techniques for cooking of secondary cuts, slow cooked lamb is a mainstay on the restaurant's winter menu, which can be viewed at **www.debortoli.com.au**

Serves: 7

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 12-15 hours

Ingredients

1 lamb shoulder

2 red onions, roughly chopped

2 carrots, peeled and chopped

4 sticks celery, chopped

6 rosemary stems, leaves removed and chopped

½ bunch fresh sage, chopped

1 garlic bulb, cut in half

1 large red chilli, chopped

1 tin whole tomatoes, peeled

300ml red wine

2L beef stock

100g Parmesan cheese, grated

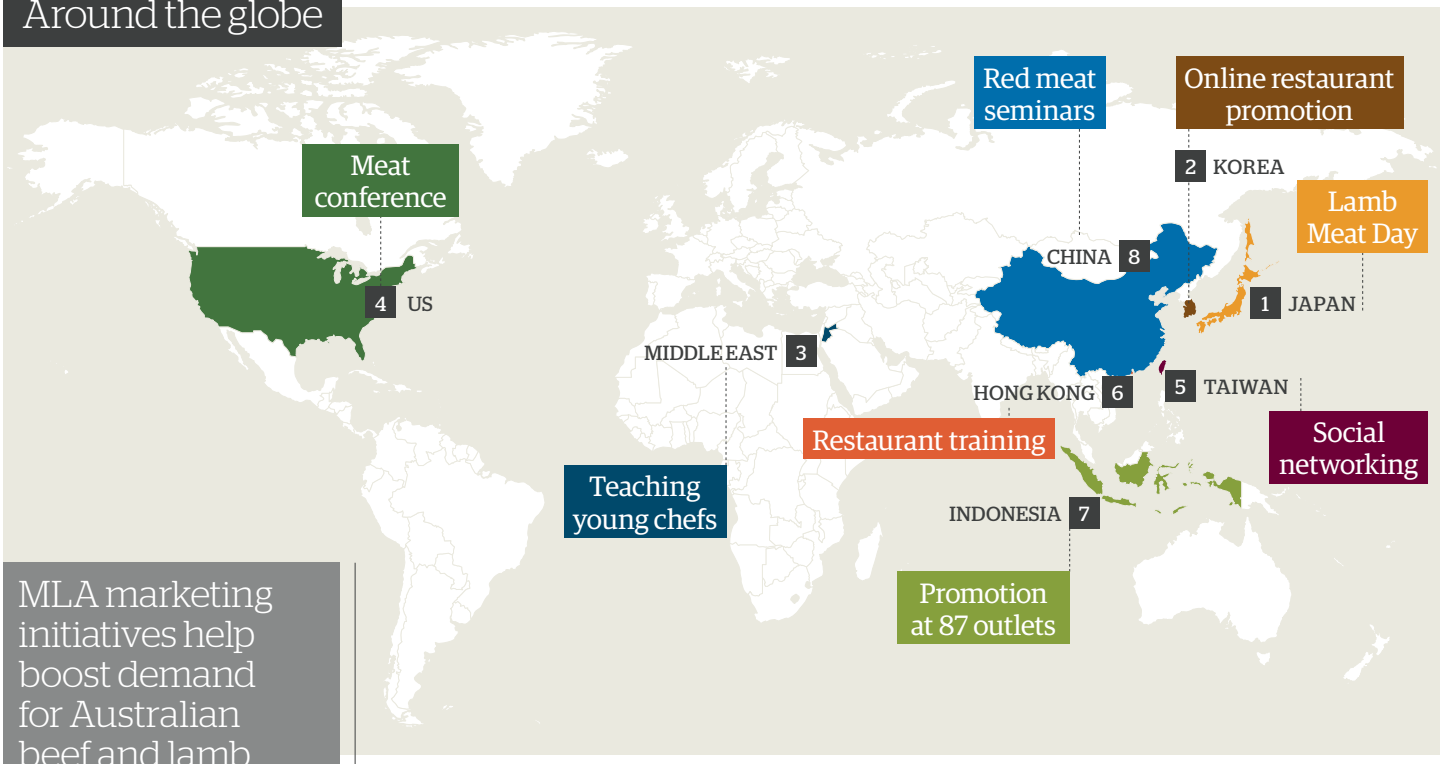
Method

1. In a heavy based pan, season and brown the lamb shoulder and remove from the pan.
2. Add the vegetables and the garlic halves, sauté until they start to colour.
3. Add the herbs and chilli and cook for two more minutes.
4. Deglaze the pan with the wine and add the tomatoes, leaving three aside.
5. Place all the ingredients into a deep tray. Place the lamb shoulder on top of the vegetables and add the stock. It should come about halfway up the shoulder.
6. Put the remaining tomatoes on top of the lamb and sprinkle over the Parmesan cheese.
7. Cover with non-stick baking paper and then seal with foil.
8. Place in the oven and cook at 75°C for at least 12 hours (or up to 15 hours) or until the meat starts to fall off the bone.
9. Once cooked remove the lamb from the tray. Strain off the sauce and pour back over the lamb.

Tip

To serve, cover lamb with foil and heat until the shoulder has heated through. Remove the foil and heat for approximately 10 minutes more, continually basting with the sauce until the shoulder becomes nice and dark in colour.

Around the globe



MLA marketing initiatives help boost demand for Australian beef and lamb both at home and in our global marketplace.

1 JAPAN

Welcoming spring with Aussie yōniku

Eight Tokyo-based importers and wholesalers participated in an 'Australian Sheepmeat Projection Seminar' as part of a retail and foodservice promotion that ran until the end of May. The campaign centred on the annual *yōniku no hi* (Lamb Meat Day) on 29 April. The seminar focused on the sheepmeat market, export conditions, the current market share in Japan and marketing plans for Australian sheepmeat.

2 KOREA

A back-rib bonanza

MLA teamed up with Hanuso, a Korean franchise restaurant, for an online promotion in February, just in time for the Lunar New Year holiday. Hanuso uses Australian back-rib for *Galbijjim* (Korean short-rib stew) and *Galbitang* (Korean short-rib soup). The restaurants provided gifts through a lucky draw to customers who left comments on the Hanuso website.

Through the promotion, sales of *Galibitang* and *Galbijjim* increased 8.5% compared with the same period last year, and 15% when compared with the two weeks before the promotion.

15%

lift in sales of short rib stew and soup featuring Australian beef during Korean promotion

3 MIDDLE EAST

An Aussie education

MLA's corporate Executive Chef, Tarek Ibrahim, began his first official training module within the prestigious Les Roches Culinary School in Jordan, the market leader in the Middle East region for culinary education. Tarek taught young chefs about meat quality and the importance of meat traceability throughout the production line. He also ran a butcher's master class focusing on carcase utilisation through value adding.

4 UNITED STATES

A powerful promotion

Australian products were showcased at the Annual Meat Conference held in Nashville, Tennessee, where the majority of US retailer buyers were in attendance. The annual Power of Meat Study was released at the conference which gives an in-depth look at meat and poultry through the consumers' eyes.

5 TAIWAN

Status update

The internet user rate in Taiwan reached 73% in 2012, while the Facebook penetration rate hit 88%, according to the Taiwan Research Development and Evaluation Commission. MLA Taiwan plans to use the popularity of social media to convey direct messages about Australian beef and lamb and interact with the public.

88%

of Taiwanese internet users use Facebook

6 HONG KONG

Hands-on training

The famous Hong Kong Old Harbour Hotpot restaurant has teamed with the Gourmet Farm premium butcher shop to run a training workshop for local staff. Conducted by MLA, employees and business owners received basic training on product knowledge such as the AUS-MEAT language and labelling, handling and safety, and an overview of the Australian beef and lamb industry. This was followed by a tasting. The feedback on the training was positive, with the owners showing strong interest in using Australian product, particularly non-loin cuts, within their business.

7 INDONESIA

Restaurants promote Aussie beef

One of Indonesia's largest restaurant chains, Es Teller 77, has partnered with MLA to showcase Australian beef through its 87 outlets across the country. The program included meat preparation, handling and cooking demonstrations, then a tasting session for 80 diners. The audience was educated on the quality attributes of Australian beef and the importance of consuming beef in a balanced diet.

87

restaurant outlets in Indonesia promote Aussie beef

8 CHINA

Seminars in the cities

MLA conducted the second round of Australian Red Meat seminars in Tianjin and Hangzhou. The seminars were open to members of the trade, foodservice and retail sectors. The events introduced the advantages of using Australian non-loin cuts in Asian-style cuisine and demonstrated how to calculate the yield and plate cost of these cuts.

100

attendees participated in red meat seminars in China

On the ground

Indonesia

Dr John Ackerman
MLA Regional Manager – Indonesia
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With a population of about 240 million – more than half aged under 29 – Indonesia has been touted as the next trillion dollar economy, potentially as soon as 2014.

Indonesia's red meat consumption is at relatively low levels for the region so partnerships between Indonesia and Australia offer interesting opportunities.

Impediments to increasing trade with Indonesia continue to revolve around market access issues and import permit quotas. The ban on live cattle exports in 2011 has increased the resolve of Indonesian authorities to reduce reliance on imported meat or livestock.

Despite a reduction in exported Australian product to Indonesia, MLA recognises the importance of continuing to promote Australian beef and is working with Indonesian and Australian governments and business groups to examine ways to avoid any drastic decreases in trade.

MLA provides support to the trade, retail, foodservice and consumers through regular sampling programs, merchandising and training. Consumption stimulus programs for consumers use a nutritional story as the pillar, and are communicated through MLA's Family Ambassador and School Nutritional programs, and social and mainstream media. Support to the foodservice sector is provided through promotion and training, such as giving consumers ideas on how to use non-loin cuts of Australian beef.

Economic and demographic factors, the historic relationship between Indonesia and Australia, and the proximity of the two countries should provide further opportunities to improve trading relationships and partnerships.

An Indonesian school learning about a balanced diet that includes Australian beef.

Market observations

Sales surge from summer dry

The vast northern cattle production area received below average summer rainfall and the continuing dry conditions, compounded by two or three years of herd rebuilding, are adding pressure to producers and markets.

Ben Thomas
MLA's Beef
Market Analyst

First-round musters in the north and brandings usually start in February and can take months to complete, with rain interruptions slowing proceedings and filtering the numbers coming onto the market. This year, without the normal disruptions, first-round brandings have finished sooner and larger lines have come through to sale.

Additionally, in previous years (particularly the past three), a large proportion of weaner steers were grown out to bullocks, heifers were either used in the live trade or grown out to breeding cows, and dry cows were fattened and sold in prime condition.

With reports of limited lease country and scarce agistment land available, producers were left with little option but to sell. Consequently, store cattle sales through autumn increased significantly, with yardings in excess of 12,000 at Roma, 10,000 at Dalby and 5,000 at Longreach.

Seasonal conditions in the southern states also remained dry in summer and autumn, further pressuring markets and contributing to the increased slaughter numbers for the first few months of the year.

In contrast, pockets of the eastern third of Queensland and NSW had well above-average rainfall through summer, causing flooding in some regions and in the process building sufficient feed banks for the winter. This has, to a small extent, eased some of the pressure on cattle markets.

In the north, feed will remain scarce and the high slaughter rates are likely to continue through the winter months. Fingers remain crossed for good winter rainfall in the southern states, to alleviate some of the pressure on markets and slaughter.

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Lamb seasonality

Lamb for all seasons

The availability and price of lambs have peaks and troughs through the year. The timing of when they occur differs from region to region in Australia and depends significantly on seasonal conditions.

Regional differences in lamb supply and price trends are most evident between Western Australia and the eastern states. In 2010 and 2011, most of eastern Australia had two of the wettest years on record while WA remained dry until mid-2011, resulting in a large eastward movement of stock.

Lamb supply

Lamb slaughter figures increase from the start of the year until autumn, drop away in winter and spike again in spring. This is clearest in WA in recent years (see Figure 1), where the industry did not enjoy the effects of an extended period of widespread rain.

In the eastern states, the same pattern can be seen until 2010. In 2011 and 2012 there was a marked change, with an upward trend right through the year, including during the normally low winter months (see Figure 2).

The two traditional peaks in lamb slaughter reflect a large turn-off ahead of potential winter feed shortages and the appearance of new season lambs in the market in spring.

Sheep supply

For sheep, the pattern is even more pronounced, but in a different shape to lambs. In recent years, this pattern has been consistent

Figure 1 Western Australian monthly lamb slaughter

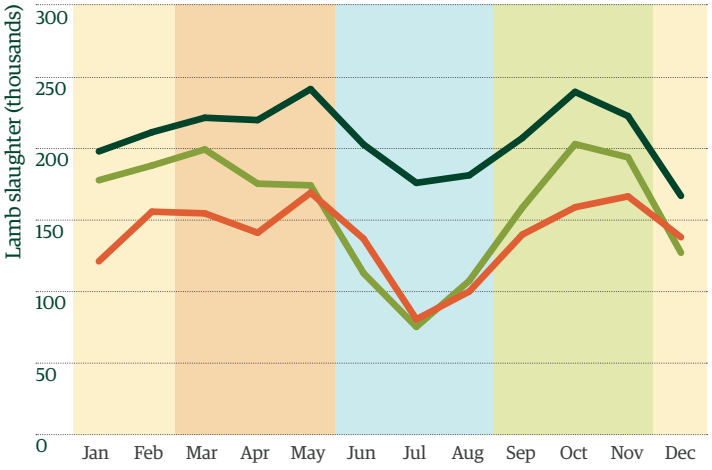


Figure 2 Eastern states monthly lamb slaughter

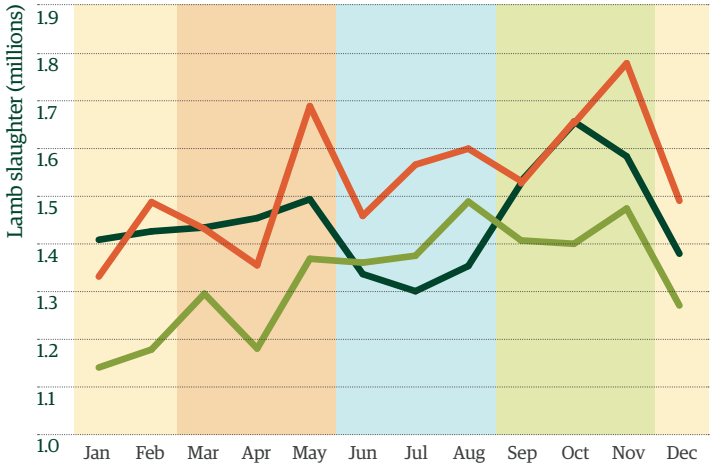


Figure 3 Western Australian trade lamb indicator (18–22kg)

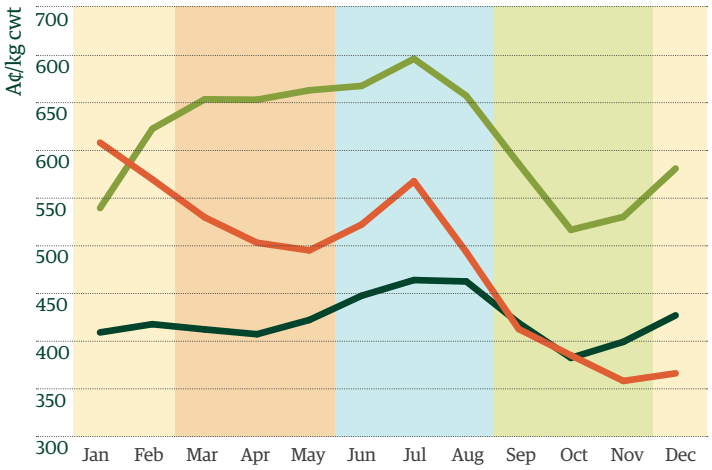
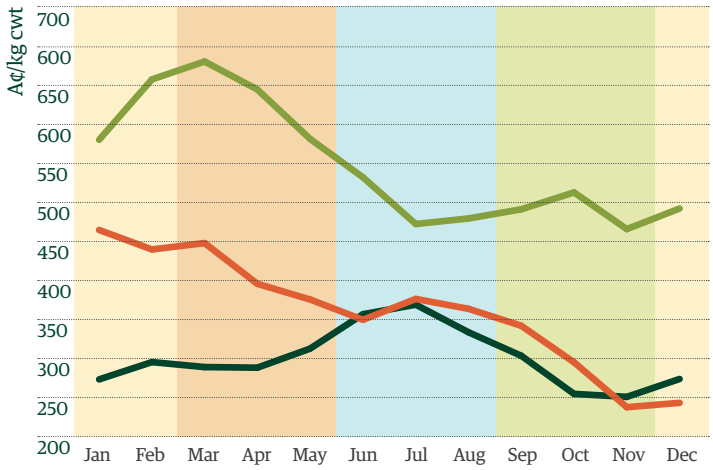


Figure 4 Eastern states trade lamb indicator (18–22kg)



2012 2011 2005–2009 Summer Autumn Winter Spring

across the eastern states and in WA, with sheep slaughter in both regions limited by the peak lambing period in winter. There is a noticeable drop in both sheep and lamb slaughter in December, due to a focus on crop harvests as well as the Christmas break.

Live exports are also a factor. There is generally strong demand for sheep throughout the year in Australia's live export markets; however, demand lifts at two key times – Ramadan and Eid al Adha – while shipments ahead of the Middle Eastern summer (Australia's winter) tend to be slightly lower. The availability of ships can vary depending on lengths of voyages – including whether a trip to the eastern states is required for loading.

Price trends

The availability of lambs for slaughter affects prices, and Figure 4 shows an inverse pattern for the Eastern States Trade Lamb Indicator over the period 2005–09. As lamb slaughter increased throughout 2011 and 2012, prices declined. The same relationship is evident when looking at the WA saleyard trade lamb indicator (see Figure 3), with periods of low supply drawing higher prices in the yards.

Other factors have an impact on where and when sheep and lambs are sold for slaughter in Australia, including wool prices, rainfall, pasture growth, crop prices relative to sheep, and other things that occur on a season-to-season basis. Despite these factors, the effect of seasonal breeding patterns on sheep and lamb slaughter and prices is clear to see.

The irregular period of lamb slaughter in 2011 and 2012 was almost a reversal of the previous 5–10 years, which shows how a consistent feed supply can help smooth out the seasonal finishing time.

In 2013, weather conditions may be closer to those experienced throughout the 2000s, and stock availability patterns may return to the traditional winter low and spring high.

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MLA's *fridayfeedback* e-news provides the latest data on lamb and sheep supply and price trends. To subscribe T: 1800 675 717 or E: publications@mla.com.au

The *Australian sheep industry projections* also highlights these and other trends and provides an overall assessment of the health of the sheep industry in 2013 and beyond. **www.mla.com.au/industryprojections**

Going beyond in Brisbane

Thirty-five producers from Queensland and northern NSW gathered for MLA's Beyond the gate tour to see first hand how their beef and lamb move along the supply chain to the consumer. In a packed day, the producers visited the JBS Dinmore processing plant, local Brisbane wholesalers and high-end butchers, followed by a demonstration at the Black Pearl Cooking School and dinner at steakhouse Cha Cha Char.

The feedback was positive, with most producers saying the experience gave them useful information to take back to their farms.

More information: Megan Davies, MLA
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www.mla.com.au/events

Photos courtesy of Queensland Country Life

The Beyond the gate Brisbane group at JBS Dinmore.

Left: Peter Cabassi, Kobe's of Whites Hill Gourmet Butchery, Brisbane. Middle: Gary McPherson, MLA's program coordinator for Qld/NT on the Beyond the gate tour Right: Leo Neill-Ballantyne and Matt Turich, Galloway Plains, Calliope, Qld.

Upcoming events

Find more events and information at **www.mla.com.au/events**

Innovation workshops – Pacific Beef Expo

Take part in MLA's Innovation workshops to pick up new ideas and skills to help build a better beef business. The one hour workshops will focus on the key profit drivers in your beef business and deliver practical information and tools that can make a difference to your bottom line.

When and where:
20–22 June, Casino NSW

Bookings: www.mla.com.au/pacificbeefworkshops or 1800 675 717 (option 4)

Planning for success

This workshop is designed to enable sheep producers to review their business, undertake a SWOT analysis, develop achievable goals, strategies and actions, and develop a monitoring program. The process will also enable producers to see common areas where they can create joint projects to maximise efficiency and pool resources.

When and where:
Session 1: 18 June, Carrieton, SA
Session 2: 10 September, Carrieton, SA

Bookings: 08 8841 4500
www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au/events.htm

Brian (Smokey) Ashton with the Pastures and Grazing Management group at Minnipa Agricultural Centre

Looking at labour efficiency

Twelve members of the Wudinna Pastures and Grazing Management group met earlier this year at the Minnipa Agricultural Centre in South Australia to discuss new technology to improve management and reduce workload. Researchers, consultants and producers presented on their adoption of various technologies. Topics discussed included the use of RFID eartags for performance recording, the use of remote camera systems for livestock management and farm security, and systems for more efficient farm water management. The session was facilitated by Smokey Ashton of Sheep Consultancy Service Pty Ltd, Port Lincoln.

More information: Brian (Smokey) Ashton
E: ashtonba@gmail.com

Crunching numbers in WA

You need to know where your business is to know where you want to take it... this was the message from two young beef producers who shared the impact business analysis had on their enterprises during workshops at Dadaragan and Bridgetown in Western Australia in March. The workshops run by the WA Beef Council and Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) were held to discuss potential improvements and the use of business analysis in livestock enterprises. The highlight was two young producers Stuart McCormack from Pinjarra and Tim Prosser from Scott River discussing how business analysis benefited them.

More information: DAFWA
E: wabeef@agric.wa.gov.au

Stuart McCormack (left) – winner of lowest cost of production within the WA beef analysis with Tony Hiscock, chair WA Beef Council.

Beefing Up at Atherton and Innisfail

About 60 members (and potential members) of the Tropical Grass Fed Beef producers group attended Beefing Up Performance Workshops at Atherton and Innisfail in February. The workshops were a joint effort between AgForce and MLA.

The producer group was formed to explore opportunities to market beef produced in this region of northern Queensland. Attendees were taken through the MSA program and learnt about the requirements for their properties to obtain certification for the EU market.

More information:
Terry Farrell, MSA
E: tfarrell@mla.com.au
T: 0417 645 093

Scanning for success

Understand the costs and benefits of scanning pregnant ewes and managing to wean more lambs.

When and where:
5 June, Gretna, Tas
6 June, Cressy, Tas
7 June, Waterhouse, Tas

Bookings: 0408 129 373
andrew.bailey@utas.edu.au

Influential Women workshops

MLA is supporting a series of Influential Women's workshops to build the capacity of rural and regional Australia by increasing the skills and confidence of women.

When and where:
3–4 June, Benalla, Vic
6–7 June, Holbrook, NSW
27–28 June, Canarvon, WA

Bookings:
www.influentialwomen.com.au

BeefUp forums

Discover how to make more money from your beef production enterprise at MLA's BeefUp forums.

When and where:
3–4 June, Mt Garnett, Qld
3–4 June, Tully, Qld

Bookings: 1800 675 717

More information:
www.mla.com.au/events

Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

The theme of the 2013 policy forum is 'Building Trust' and will address the reality of farming, food and fibre production in Tasmania; and look at how to better engage with the broader community to reinforce the message.

When and where:
11 July, Launceston, Tas

Bookings: 03 6332 1800
nardia@tfga.com.au

More information:
www.tfga.com.au/in-the-news/events

AgForce state conference 2013

This conference is your chance to hear speakers relevant to your business, to talk to AgForce staff and to meet other primary producers from across the state. The conference is also the place to communicate the issues and concerns which need to be addressed by industry.

When and where:
17–19 September, Townsville, Qld

Bookings:
www.agforceqld.org.au

WANTED: 6 PRODUCERS

Would you like to make an impact on your bottom line this year? What if you had a team of business coaches, researchers and producer mentors helping you get there?

MLA is looking for producers like you to join our new MLA challenge. This is an opportunity to make the most of your levies, using the latest research on your property to increase the reproductive efficiencies of your cattle and sheep; as well as your pasture production.

We need six participants from family or corporate properties: two from northern cattle stations, two from southern cattle properties and two sheepmeat producers.

If selected, we will track you on your journey to inspire other Australian producers to take on the MLA challenge too.

TAKE THE MLA CHALLENGE NOW.

Visit **mla.com.au/challenge**