

# FEEDBACK

MLA – FOSTERING PROSPERITY

DECEMBER 2019/JANUARY 2020



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# FEEDBACK

MLA fosters the long-term prosperity of the Australian red meat and livestock industry by delivering world-class research, development and marketing outcomes.



Cover (page 12): Windy Station Manager David Lee and his wife Clare hosted a producer tour as part of Red Meat 2019. Image: Lisa Hatz Photography.

## Have your say!

We'd love to hear from you

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# A NOTE FROM THE MD...



## Welcome to our Red Meat 2019 special edition of Feedback.

MLA's Red Meat 2019 event was a great way to close off what has been a challenging year for red meat producers. It was pleasing to see the 550 industry stakeholders who made the huge effort to join us in Tamworth, particularly given the tough conditions.

For those who couldn't make it, please take a look at the full coverage of the event on pages 10–14. From farm tours and ag-tech demonstrations to panel discussions, global marketing insights and networking over delicious red meat, there was something for everyone across the three days. Most importantly, it was a chance for producers to find out how MLA is investing your hard-earned levies.

As I mentioned in my address at the AGM, MLA remains absolutely committed to fostering the prosperity of the Australian red meat industry and will continue to look at new ways to achieve this. The insights and innovations shared at Red Meat 2019 are testament to that – but in 2020 and beyond, where will our focus lie?

**We are going to do fewer things, we are going to do them bigger, and we are going to be bolder about our ambitions.**

This approach ensures what we do and how we do it will deliver real impact to our levy payers. Every decision, action and investment will be made to create unprecedented transformational change in our industry.

I announced during the AGM the first component of this strategy: that MLA will temporarily waive fees and charges relating to all products and services delivered directly by MLA to levy payers. This includes fees related to LPA accreditation, NVD books, and workshops and forums like Bred Well Fed Well and BeefUp Forums.

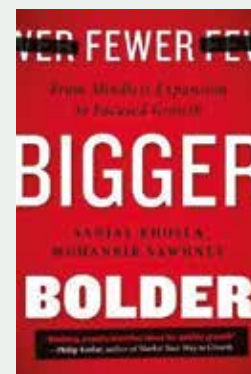
Despite the floods, fires and prolonged drought many have experienced this year, our intention is that by removing these fees, it will make it that little bit easier for producers to adopt new technologies and best practice management strategies uncovered by MLA research. See page 5 for more details.

To further assist the national recovery effort, we have also compiled a 'resilient businesses' feature in this edition of Feedback. Please have a read of pages 16–26 – there are some great farm management tips, tools and resources in there, especially for those who are recovering from natural disasters.

It was a pleasure to meet so many producers at this year's Red Meat event, but for those who weren't able to share their feedback with me in Tamworth, please don't hesitate to contact me to share your views on Feedback magazine or any other aspect of MLA.

**Jason Strong**  
MLA Managing Director

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'Fewer, Bigger, Bolder' isn't a new concept. It's a well-worn path paved by authors Sanjay Khosla and Mohanbir Sawhney, underpinned by a seven-step program to simplify your operations and drive growth. I recommend adding this to your reading list.

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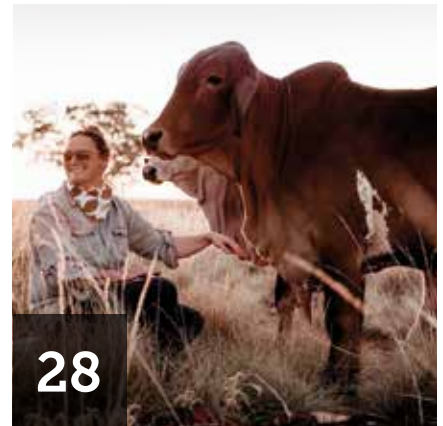
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## Looking for facts, fast?

Check out MLA's annual beef and sheepmeat industry *Fast Facts* for a snapshot of key statistics including herd and flock size, production, value, consumption, exports and Australia's position relative to other countries.

Some of the highlights for 2018–19 are:

- Australia produced approximately 2.35 million tonnes carcass weight (cwt) of beef and veal
- 3.14 million grainfed cattle were turned off – approximately 38% of all cattle slaughtered
- Australia exported 72% of its total beef and veal production to more than 70 countries, generating \$9.5 billion
- Australia produced almost 501,000t cwt of lamb and 230,000t cwt of mutton
- Australia exported 66% of total Australian lamb production and 96% of total mutton production (DA, ABS). ■

Read the *Fast Facts* at: [mla.com.au/fast-facts](http://mla.com.au/fast-facts)

## Meet our newest Nuffield scholar

Tasmanian prime lamb producer and secondary agricultural teacher Clare Peltzer received the 2019 MLA-supported Nuffield Farming Scholarship.

Clare (pictured) will use her scholarship to visit leading agricultural universities around the world to research how Australia's agriculture sector can attract and retain the talent it needs through better alignment with schools and tailored education programs. ■

For more information on MLA-supported study programs, visit: [mla.com.au/scholarships](http://mla.com.au/scholarships)



## A 'Taste' of red meat

MLA has teamed up with Australia's biggest recipe website, [taste.com.au](http://taste.com.au), to inspire the site's 5.1 million visitors to cook more beef and lamb each month.

Taste influences 45.4 million meals a year, and over 12 months the partnership will help build greater awareness and cooking confidence among Australian consumers.

Beef and lamb will be integrated into recipe collections, supported by how-to videos.

Taste will report back to MLA about consumer insights and upcoming food trends, to guide future beef and lamb campaigns. ■

Check out the beef and lamb recipes on Taste: [taste.com.au/beef](http://taste.com.au/beef) [taste.com.au/lamb](http://taste.com.au/lamb)



## Greatest butchers on the block

A new campaign is giving Australian butchers the chance to showcase their favourite summer beef or lamb recipe on the national stage.

Launched by MLA with support from Australian Meat Industry Council and award-winning journalist Jessica Rowe, the campaign sets out to celebrate the greatest red meat dishes for summer – and the people who created them. ■

Find out more at: [greatestbutcher.com.au](http://greatestbutcher.com.au)



## New integrity systems hub

A new Integrity Systems Company website was launched during Red Meat 2019 in November. It houses all of the resources for the Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) program, National Vendor Declarations (NVDs) and the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

Information about the online carcass feedback resource, Livestock Data Link (LDL), can also be found on the new website. ■

Check it out at: [integritysystems.com.au](http://integritysystems.com.au)



# Accelerated Adoption Initiative begins

Levy payers can now access a wide range of MLA's products and services, delivered directly to them at no cost, following the commencement of the Accelerated Adoption Initiative.

The initiative – announced by Managing Director Jason Strong at Red Meat 2019 in Tamworth – came into effect on 25 November 2019 and will operate until 30 June 2021.

Under the Accelerated Adoption Initiative, MLA will provide a temporary relief for costs incurred for the delivery of key products and services, from MLA, directly to red meat levy payers. It does not include the livestock transaction levy, which will remain unchanged.

Eligible items include:

- Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) accreditation and reaccreditation
- National Vendor Declarations (NVD) books
- training workshops, forums and field days delivered directly by MLA such as Bred Well Fed Well, BeefUp and MeatUp Forums
- Sheep Genetics membership and services.

Jason said MLA's focus is to fast-track producer adoption of as many tools as possible that deliver direct benefit to levy payers as MLA looks to support the national recovery of the red meat supply chain.

**“The removal of financial barriers for producers to access MLA products and services is one of the first steps identified by MLA to provide that direct support to producers,” Jason said.**

Red Meat Advisory Council (RMAC) Chairman Don Mackay said MLA's focus on delivering direct benefits to levy payers should be applauded.

“This is a bold initiative from MLA and I thank the MLA Board, Jason and the senior leadership team for making it happen,” Don said.

“RMAC has set an ambitious 10-year target for the red meat and livestock industry and we all have a role to play in doubling the value of red meat sales by 2030.” ■

For further details on the Accelerated Adoption Initiative, including eligible MLA products and services, visit [mla.com.au/AAI](http://mla.com.au/AAI)



## We are Australian farmers

**M**LA is part of a national campaign to start a conversation between producers and the community to better connect all Australians with agriculture and the people behind it.

The ‘We Are Australian Farmers’ initiative was recently launched by the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF), with funding from MLA.

It responds to new research which reveals more than two-thirds of urban dwellers have no connection to farming, agriculture or rural Australia.

To restore the connection, a ‘We Are Australian Farmers’ video was created to celebrate the shared values of all Australians and challenge some of the dated perceptions of farming.

The video features producers such as Andy, Jamie, Jonty and Izzy Ingle of Holbrook, NSW (pictured).

MLA will connect its extensive community engagement work to the ‘We Are Australian Farmers’ initiative, including the Australian Good Meat program and website, which answers many common questions about the way red meat is produced and is an easily accessible resource for curious consumers. ■

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📺 Watch the ‘We Are Australian Farmers’ video at: [farmers.org.au/campaign/we-are-australian-farmers](http://farmers.org.au/campaign/we-are-australian-farmers)

Australian Good Meat:  
[goodmeat.com.au](http://goodmeat.com.au)



# Telling the real story about red meat

**A**ustralia's red meat industry is operating in an increasingly challenging global environment.

Producers are not only experiencing tough seasonal conditions in many regions, but are also facing significant attention focused on the sustainability of the red meat and livestock sectors and the place of red meat in a healthy diet.

More than ever before, consumers are interested in the 'what, how and who' behind the products, goods and services they consume.

Producers can be proud of what they do to nourish the community. However, with so much information available, often with contradictory messages, it's important that consumers know the truth about red meat.

Here, MLA Managing Director Jason Strong shares how MLA informs consumers about the health, welfare and environmental credentials of red meat to drive continued demand and consumption domestically and overseas.

## Is it a challenge talking to consumers about red meat?

Absolutely. Increasing media attention is focused on the environment, sustainability, healthy diets and the supposed increase in demand for meat alternatives. As a result, our industry faces a challenge to ensure the strong credentials of red meat, particularly as a critical part of a healthy diet, continue to be acknowledged.

We know consumers – particularly in developed markets – are interested, more than ever, in where and how their food is produced.

But despite this growing interest, we know consumers remain confused by the sheer volume of information available and the fact many reports offer conflicting information on the credentials of red meat.

This means, as an industry, there is an opportunity to cut through the information maze, providing consumers with the facts so they can continue to enjoy red meat.

For MLA, talking with consumers remains an integral component of our work across marketing, research and development. However, a critical area of focus is better communication with red meat producers to provide them with information and resources to be better advocates for our industry.

## Do some of the headlines about red meat match the facts?

Unfortunately not. With so much media attention on these issues, small interest groups can seem to have a huge voice compared to Australians in general.

In the past 12 months, we've seen an increase in reports of a surge in vegan or vegetarian diets or a rise in meat alternatives, and the subsequent impact on red meat consumption.

While anti-meat extremism has spiked in recent news headlines, 80% of that coverage has been favourable towards red meat producers.

The fact is red meat producers are trusted by consumers and our research tells us that:

- 61% of consumers feel producers make a positive contribution towards society
- nearly two-thirds say the industry's animal welfare practices are good or very good.

The reality is this occurs while most of Australia's population continues to buy red meat and enjoy it as part of their weekly diet.

MLA's research shows the percentage of households that eat beef and lamb remains very high. Beef was on the menu in more than 90% of Australian households last year, and lamb in more than 76% of households.

**MLA's consumer insights confirm that red meat continues to be the most popular protein with Australian consumers by value, with red meat and vegetables the most popular meal in Australian households.**

An example is the recent ABC Australia Talks National Survey of 55,000 Australians from across every state and territory and every federal electorate about their attitudes, behaviours and experiences. The survey revealed just 1% of the nation identifies as vegan, while just 3% considered themselves vegetarian.

These findings are supported by MLA research which shows that, for the past three years, the number of metropolitan people who identify as vegan or vegetarian has remained stable. It also shows there is a proportion of this group who occasionally eat meat.

## Are plant or alternative-based proteins a threat to Australian red meat?

Plant-based proteins have received a lot of air-time this year. At first glance, it seems they pose major competition to our product, but let's look at the facts.

Plant-based alternatives aren't new.

What is new are alternatives seeking to mimic the experience of eating red meat – its taste, its smell and its appearance – but without the perceived animal welfare or perceived environmental impacts.

What's also new are the cell-based products that are grown in a lab, rather than in a paddock.

MLA is keeping a very close watch on these alternatives to red meat and how consumers react.

Our research indicates there's low consumer awareness of cultured and synthetic meat and only a modest number would like to try these products.

Global mega trends indicate 'health' and 'wellbeing' and a preference for 'natural, quality foods from trusted sources' are important to consumers. Coupled with this is strong consumer interest in provenance and production.

While red meat products are natural, makers of lab-grown meat and plant protein products will have a much tougher job to make these same claims.

But, to remain relevant in this competitive environment, we need to continue to focus on the consumer.

### How is MLA promoting red meat in this environment?

MLA's core role is to invest in programs and activities to increase the profitability and prosperity of the Australian red meat industry. Another core role is to drive continued demand and consumption of red meat domestically and overseas.

MLA's research role also means we invest in consumer insights to better inform industry policy and consumer decision making. This allows MLA to focus on stimulating demand using the purchase drivers most important to most consumers: eating quality, nutrition and versatility, the need to fit in with the household budget, and convenience.

Our consumer insights also show a strong trend towards health and wellbeing. Australians want variety

and healthier meals, but can be confused about how much red meat is healthy. A critical solution to address this confusion is to provide guidance to consumers on the amount (portion size) of red meat they should be consuming as part of a healthy meal.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines are based on scientific evidence and guide regulators, policy makers and health professionals about the amount and kinds of foods that consumers need to eat for a healthy diet.

These guidelines currently recommend the consumption of 65g/day cooked red meat or 92g/day raw (equivalent to 455g/week of cooked red meat) as part of a healthy diet because red meat is considered the most important protein source for iron and zinc.

Not surprisingly, MLA's research shows consumers remain confused about how to interpret the Australian Dietary Guidelines and incorporate the recommendations into their everyday meals in a practical way.

In response, MLA has developed practical resources to give consumers confidence to continue to enjoy red meat as part of a healthy diet:

- MLA's *So what's for dinner?* initiative provides resources designed for general practitioners and dietitians to use with their patients to help them achieve variety, balance and enjoyment in their meals. This consumer-focused approach provides a bridge between the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the plate: [mlahealthymeals.com.au/healthy-eating](http://mlahealthymeals.com.au/healthy-eating)
- MLA's consumer marketing campaigns for beef and lamb include significant elements that promote meal ideas, including point-of-sale material such as posters and recipe booklets featuring easy recipes (pages 45–47). ■

✉ Jason Strong  
E: [jstrong@mla.com.au](mailto:jstrong@mla.com.au)

## MLA's consumer and community programs to promote red meat's credentials include:

- The Australian Good Meat website, where 20 frequently asked questions from consumers are answered: [goodmeat.com.au](http://goodmeat.com.au)



- Paddock to Plate virtual reality experience for beef and lamb: [mla.com.au/vr](http://mla.com.au/vr)



- Rare Medium foodservice program and e-magazine: [raremediummag.com](http://raremediummag.com)
- School education – engaging schools and teachers through red meat teaching resources aligned with the national curriculum: [mlavirtualexcursions.com](http://mlavirtualexcursions.com)



- Partnerships with royal shows, food festivals and other major community events.

This program of work is ongoing and is extremely important to the long-term prosperity of Australia's red meat industry.



# MSA delivers record farm gate returns

**Australia's eating quality grading program, Meat Standards Australia (MSA), delivered an additional \$198 million to producers – a direct in-the-pocket benefit averaging \$84/head for non-feedlot cattle – in 2018–19.**

This figure, in the form of price differential for MSA versus non-MSA young cattle, represents a 30% increase on the \$152 million in additional farm gate returns MSA delivered in 2017–18.

The MSA *Annual Outcomes Report* also highlighted a record-breaking 3.5 million cattle were MSA graded in 2018–19, the highest number of cattle graded in a year since MSA's inception in 1998. This represents 43% of the national adult cattle slaughter.

In 2018–19, 4.1 million sheep followed MSA pathways, representing 19% of the national lamb slaughter, with 73.5% of these going on into 18 MSA-trademarked brands.

MSA Program Manager Sarah Strachan said the latest data demonstrated the value MSA continues to deliver to producers and Australia's red meat industry.

**“In 2018–19, the average price premium for young non-feedlot MSA cattle was 30¢/kg hot standard carcass weight or \$84/head, according to the NLRs over-the-hook weekly reports,” Sarah said.**

“In addition to delivering price premiums for producers, the MSA program ultimately delivers a consistent eating quality experience for consumers in Australia and in our export markets.”

MSA is recognised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe as a global standard in eating quality and is

one of only three programs outside the United States to be approved by the US Department of Agriculture as a Process Verified Program.

### Insights

Other MSA insights from 2018–19 are:

- growth in MSA beef and sheep brands continues, with an additional 23 new brands licensed, lifting the total number of MSA-licensed brands to 195
- more than 3,400 beef and sheep producers became MSA registered
- more than 3,000 beef and sheep producers attended 47 MSA education days
- 2,800 people undertook training via the MSA e-learning portals
- the myMSA online feedback portal was utilised by 4,300 producers, 16,140 times.

“This commitment to education is reflected in outstanding compliance to MSA minimum requirements at 93.8%

for cattle and 96% for lambs,” Sarah said.

“With increases in the volume and variation of cattle being presented for MSA grading, producers across the country achieved a national average MSA Index of 57.48.”

The Eating Quality Graded (EQG) cipher, released in 2017 as part of the Beef Language Review, has continued to have strong adoption.

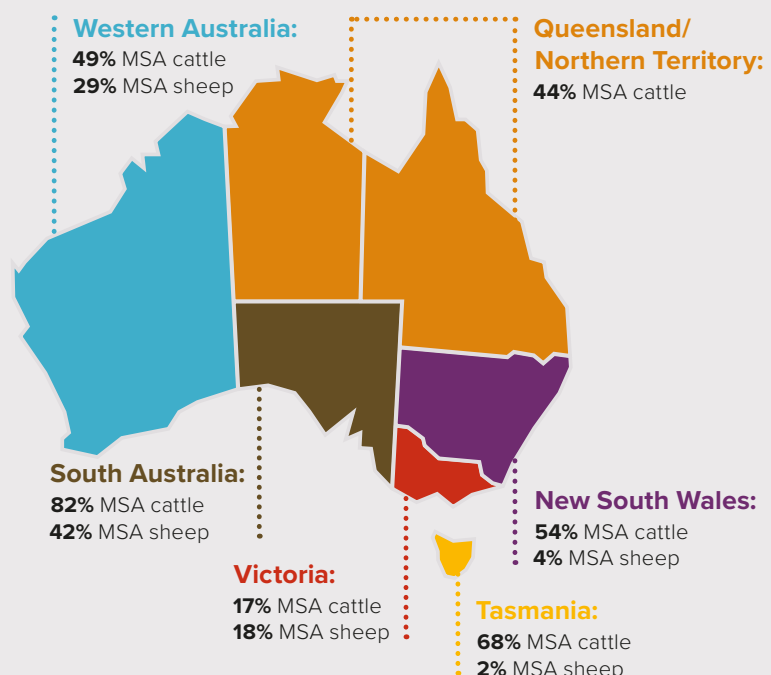
MSA-licensed processors and operators now using the EQG cipher within parts of their business represented 48% of MSA graded cattle at June 2019. ■

✉ Sarah Strachan  
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📄 View the 2018–19 MSA *Annual Outcomes Report*:  
[mla.com.au/msa-annual-report](http://mla.com.au/msa-annual-report)

Meet some of the MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Award winners on pages 30–31

## What percentage of each state's slaughter is MSA?





# Year in review

Haven't had a chance to read *MLA's Annual Report 2018-19* yet?

Here are some highlights from major projects MLA led, managed or contributed to in 2018-19. For more, visit: [mla.com.au/annualreport](http://mla.com.au/annualreport)

**Australian beef became an official partner of Australia's 2020 Olympic and Paralympic teams**

[mla.com.au/olympics](http://mla.com.au/olympics)



**Five lamb processors and one beef abattoir adopted DEXA technology**

[mla.com.au/dexa](http://mla.com.au/dexa)

**8.2k+** visits to **MLA's new genetics hub**, providing producers with the basics of getting started with breeding values  
[genetics.mla.com.au](http://genetics.mla.com.au)



**100,000** Australian lamb meals served in new airline partnership

[mla.com.au/paddock-to-plane](http://mla.com.au/paddock-to-plane)

**21.6%** of total supply chain movements from eNVDs, following a range of improvements to the system

[mla.com.au/e-nvd](http://mla.com.au/e-nvd)

**25%** increase in retail lamb sales following **MLA's 2019 summer lamb campaign: 'New Australia-land'**

[mla.com.au/lamb-campaigns](http://mla.com.au/lamb-campaigns)



**\$198m** in additional farm gate returns through **Meat Standards Australia**

[mla.com.au/msa-returns](http://mla.com.au/msa-returns)



**57%** reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the Australian red meat industry between 2005 and 2016

[sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au](http://sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au)

**Psyllid-resistant leucaena variety and Di-Bak Parkinsonia released**

[mla.com.au/redlands](http://mla.com.au/redlands) and [mla.com.au/dibak](http://mla.com.au/dibak)



# The home of red meat

**T**amworth became the home of red meat as well as country music in November when more than 550 producers and industry stakeholders rolled into town for Red Meat 2019, hosted by MLA.

As well as MLA's Annual General Meeting (AGM), the industry's flagship event featured on-farm tours, the latest research, innovation and marketing insights, and social events.

At the AGM, MLA members voted on the election of three directors to the MLA Board, including first-time director John Lloyd and the re-election of Robert Fitzpatrick and Erin Gorter. ■



New MLA Chair Alan Beckett with newly-elected MLA Board Directors Erin Gorter, Robert Fitzpatrick and John Lloyd.



Retiring Chair and MLA Board Director Dr Michele Allan reflected on her eight years in the role at the social function.

## Reflections from MLA's outgoing Chair

**At the event's main social function, retiring Chair and MLA Director Dr Michele Allan reflected on her eight years in the role and the significant changes in the industry in that time.**

"In 2011, nearly 70% of our beef exports were concentrated in three markets – the US, Japan and Korea. I remember the forecast back then that there could be a really good opportunity in China; it was 1% of our export market," she said.

"We as an industry are now less reliant on those three markets. Today, they are less than 60% of our exports. We're realising those opportunities in China and it's on the brink

of becoming Australia's largest beef export market in 2019."

Michele cited a range of innovations and advancements including the introduction of DEXA objective carcass measurement in processing plants, the signing of free trade agreements with Japan, Korea and China, MSA delivering record high farm gate returns, and the release of new leucaena varieties as some of the highlights MLA had delivered during her time as Chair.

"I'm proud of what this industry has achieved and what MLA has delivered on behalf of levy payers in increased productivity, profitability and sustainability in the industry," Michele said. ■

## Triumph over adversity

**Sprinter, Paralympian and third-generation producer Scott Reardon kicked off his role as an MLA Australian Beef Ambassador with an inspiring presentation at Red Meat 2019.**

Australian Beef is an official partner of Australia's 2020 Paralympic Team, and Scott will be representing Australia at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games in the men's 100 metres T63.

Born and bred in Temora, NSW, Scott was 12 years old when he lost his right leg in a farm accident when his shoelace got caught in the PTO shaft of a tractor. ■



Sprinter, Paralympian and third-generation producer Scott Reardon kicked off his role as an MLA Australian Beef Ambassador at Red Meat 2019.

## Red meat on the menu

Red meat wasn't just talked about at the event – there was plenty consumed as well.

Participants gained insights into simple, delicious meal options using Australian red meat with cooking demonstrations by MLA Corporate Chef Sam Burke, P&O Cruises Australia Executive Chef Uwe Stiefel and MLA Culinary Chef Julie Ballard.

As the crowd enjoyed lunches including slow-cooked beef brisket and lamb shoulder, the chefs whipped up delicious dishes such as Masterstock soy-braised New England lamb with wok-tossed choy sum and caramelised wild rice puffs.

Sam said the demonstration intended to showcase the versatility of red meat.

“Food doesn't have to be hard, and dishes like this show both the versatility and simplicity Australian red meat provides.” ■




MLA's Culinary Chef Julie Ballard and Corporate Chef Sam Burke with P&O Cruises Australia Executive Chef Uwe Stiefel during one of the lunch-time cooking demonstrations.



## Tune in to Red Meat 2019

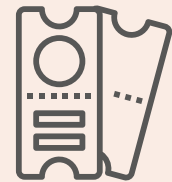
If you didn't make it to Tamworth for Red Meat 2019, you can catch up on what you missed on MLA's YouTube channel. Videos include:

- on-farm producer tours wrap
- daily wrap-ups
- MLA Managing Director Jason Strong's keynote speech. ■

 [youtube.com/meatandlivestock](https://youtube.com/meatandlivestock)

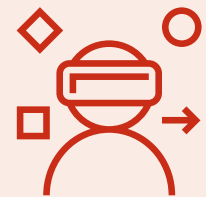


## Red Meat 2019: the numbers



**550**

producers and stakeholders attended Red Meat 2019



**15**

technology providers in attendance



**13**

different red Meat meals on the menu



**6**

red meat industry forums

# Romani puts ag-tech to the test

*Windy Station Manager David Lee  
and his wife Clare.*

**R**omani Pastoral Company is boosting on-farm efficiencies with digital technology, and producers got a rare insight into the innovations they're rolling out on their two NSW properties during Red Meat 2019.

Romani has partnered with MLA to implement a range of ag-tech products and services as part of the Digital Livestock 4.0 pilot project.

Technologies to remotely monitor water, pasture and animals, map weather and climate, and manage inputs have been installed on Romani's 21,500ha beef cattle and cropping enterprise, 'Windy Station' at Quirindi, and at their 9,600ha cattle, sheep and cropping property, 'Garangula', near Harden in southern NSW.

## Water wise

Windy Station Manager David Lee said he was particularly keen to see the impact remote water monitoring will have on reducing the costs of bore running and preventing water loss.

"All of our water is bore water which is pumped to tanks and reticulated back to troughs," David said.

"We spend four days a week monitoring waters at a cost of about \$100,000 a year.

"Then there's the cost if you lose a tank of water from a cow knocking a trough float off and draining a tank of water.

"Through this pilot project, we've installed monitors on every tank and about one-third of the troughs so far at Windy Station. Once we see which solutions are working the best, we'll install more monitors on more of our troughs."

## Stocking rates

Romani has set a target to increase the property's stocking rate from 4 DSE/ha to 9 DSE/ha.

To achieve this, pasture monitoring and animal monitoring technology is being deployed on the property.

"We're currently running 2,500 Angus breeders and we're aiming to lift our stocking rate to 4,500 breeders," David said.

"The animal monitoring aspect of the pilot has seen tags applied to 100 of

our Angus and Hereford bulls to ensure they're in the right paddocks. The tags have an alarm system that will alert us if they move out of their paddock."

The commodity and input management aspect of the pilot has seen grain silo level monitors installed, as well as fuel tank level monitors and a new fuel management system.

Five weather stations, eight rain gauges and nine soil moisture probes have been installed as part of the pilot's weather and climate monitoring.

"For us, the pilot project is a great opportunity to test digital technology in a commercial setting and at scale," David said. ■

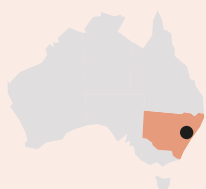
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🖥️ [romanipastoral.com.au](http://romanipastoral.com.au)



*Windy Station Manager David Lee addresses the crowd during the Red Meat 2019 Producer Tour to Windy Station in the historic woolshed.*

## SNAPSHOT: 'Windy Station', Romani Pastoral Company, Quirindi, NSW



**Area:**  
21,500ha

**Enterprise:**  
Beef (targeting feedlots) and 10,000ha cropping

**Livestock:**  
2,500 Angus breeders with a cross-breeding program utilising Herefords

**Pasture:**  
Sub-tropical pastures, native plains grass, fodder crops

**Soil:**  
Deep black clay, cracking clay and lighter granite soils

**Rainfall:**  
620mm

# Killara sets the pace



Elders Killara Feedlot Manager Andrew Talbot.

## SNAPSHOT: Elders Killara Feedlot, Quirindi, NSW



**Area:**  
610ha

**Enterprise:**  
Licensed 20,000-head feedlot; 400ha of cropping including irrigated corn for silage, triticale and barley for hay production, and barley for backgrounding

**Livestock:**  
Cattle

**Soil:**  
Self-mulching, chocolate alluvial soils

**Rainfall:**  
660mm

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💻 [eldersrural.com.au/livestock/elders-killara-feedlot](http://eldersrural.com.au/livestock/elders-killara-feedlot)

**T**he strategies behind the buying and marketing decisions of one of Australia's oldest feedlots were shared with beef producers when Elders Killara Feedlot hosted a tour during Red Meat 2019.

The 20,000-head feedlot near Quirindi has feeding programs ranging from 70 days through to 150 days or more. The facility feeds out 340 tonnes of feed per day to turn off 1,500 head a week for domestic and export markets.

About 12,000 head are supplied into premium beef brand, Jack's Creek.

Elders Killara Feedlot Manager Andrew Talbot, the Killara team and Jack's Creek Managing Director Patrick Warmoll shared aspects of the feedlot's operations and what they're looking for when buying cattle from producers.

Killara buys cattle directly from the paddock and Andrew said the message to producers is that their on-farm management decisions such as genetics, animal handling techniques and pre-vaccinations impact

how their cattle performed in the feedlot and ultimately on farm gate returns.

"Killara is an interesting barometer of the vigour of the beef industry, because while a lot of feedlots are owned by vertically integrated companies, Killara is not.

"This means everything we buy we've got to find a customer for, and so all the cattle in the feedlot are already marketed before they get here," Andrew said.

"So, if our short-fed domestic inventory or long-fed inventory starts to grow, it gives you a gauge as to strength in those different markets."

### Targeting market specifications

The Killara team discussed the strict specifications they adhere to when sourcing cattle for each of their feeding programs and markets.

The business has transitioned from predominantly supplying the domestic market to now exporting 70% of their beef to markets including South-East Asia and Europe. Domestically, the feedlot is Woolworths' biggest supplier.

### Bullish outlook for grainfed beef

Andrew said they had learnt a lot through the ongoing drought, including reassessing what commodities they use in feed rations based on availability and dropping the minimum induction weights of some cattle from 380kg to 350kg.

Despite the drought, Andrew said he remained bullish about what 2020 might bring.

"When it does rain, grain will be cheaper, so if there's a drop of \$40/tonne, that equates to a saving of about \$100/head.

"There will be no way feedlots will want to start reducing numbers on feed.

**"When the drought does break, there will be restockers wanting to retain heifers to breed from, so the biggest issue next year will be supply."**

He's also confident about international demand.

"A rise in price won't stop China eating beef. We get phone calls every week from suppliers to China trying to source beef.

"I came away from a recent trip to the United States feeling good about where our beef industry is compared to the US – we've got our integrity and traceability systems such as the National Livestock Identification System and the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme. The quality we've got and the rigour of our systems gives me comfort." ■

# Producers have their say

Producers from across Australia headed to Tamworth, NSW, in November for Red Meat 2019. Here, they share the insights that sparked their attention and the presentations which inspired them during the event.



**Jenny:** "I love the opportunity Red Meat events provide for producers to network with other producers from right across Australia."

**Anita:** "Seeing the steps forward in R&D and how applicable and adoptable it is for producers has been really interesting."

**Sarah:** "It's been great to see that consumers are at the heart of what MLA is doing."

*Jenny O'Sullivan, Gippsland, Victoria, with mobile abattoir owners Anita Taylor and Sarah Burrows, Red 8 Produce, Uralla, NSW*

**Scott:** "We're looking at going into backgrounding, so the feedlot tour was really valuable for us."

*Scott and Stacey Hillier, Torbanlea, Queensland*



**Jane:** "The networking has been fantastic, and seeing what innovation is happening in the industry. You can't adopt innovation and information if you don't know it exists."

*Rodney Neill and Jane Mactier, Neill Trading, Guyra, NSW*



**Mark:** "It was interesting to hear about the innovation that's happening right throughout the supply chain, especially how individual producers have found ways to successfully solve their own problems."

*Mark and Gillian Fennell, 'Lambina Station', Lambina, SA*



**Jacyntha:** "A highlight for us was the industry breakfast and the discussion around what we can do to engage with consumers who are concerned about eating red meat and the environmental impact. We need to keep reassuring consumers that we're doing the right thing."

*Jacyntha and Adam Coffey, Coffey Cattle Co, Miriam Vale, Queensland*



"I came to Red Meat 2019 particularly to hear about the latest global trends and what the key drivers for consumers are in both domestic and international markets."

*Hamish Irvine, National Sales Manager, Bindaree Beef Group, Sydney*



**Greg:** "The industry breakfast was exceptional – the insights into how metropolitan consumers think were fantastic."

**Leonie:** "This is our first time attending an MLA Red Meat event – we've found all of the forums stimulating and informative."

*Leonie and Greg Ball, 'Grenell', Singleton, NSW*

# ON FARM

RESEARCH IN ACTION



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# Building resilient businesses

**L**ate January marks one year since the start of a 12-day tropical monsoon which caused major flooding across northern Queensland and devastated hundreds of rural communities and businesses.

As recovery continues, the red meat and livestock industry is committed to rebuilding resilient businesses which can withstand future extreme circumstances, whether flood, fire, drought or market failure.

MLA continues to work with government and industry, including the North Queensland Livestock Industry Recovery Agency (established by the Australian Government after the floods), to identify how best to grow and support resilient beef businesses.

MLA's Program Manager – Grassfed Beef Productivity, Nigel Tomkins, said ensuring a strong industry which is

resilient in the face of any extreme is a priority for MLA.

“We’re assessing how best to help with rebuilding the north Queensland beef industry and identify opportunities to reduce future losses,” Nigel said.

“This includes providing producers with tools to understand their options and support decision making for rebuilding or redirecting their business.”

Former CSIRO Chief Research Scientist, Andrew Ash, has been appointed to coordinate MLA's contribution to state and federal northern recovery activities.

“Identifying existing and potential MLA initiatives to complement recovery activities and contribute to redeveloping and growing industry's resilience is critical,” Andrew said.

“Extreme events and climate variability will pose an ongoing challenge for producers, so our focus is on medium to longer-term industry sustainability.”

This feature brings together some of the practical tools, strategies and resources available for producers, whether they're taking stock after a natural disaster or preparing their business for a major, unexpected event.

It reflects MLA's continuing investment to help producers:

- confidently rebuild and restock after environmental extremes
- manage pasture recovery for a sustainable feedbase
- access improved predictive tools to guide management decisions before, during and after an event
- reduce cost of recovery through proactive management and investment
- access education and training opportunities to establish resilient grazing businesses. ■

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## Recovery resources

### Flood

Producers who were affected by the 2019 north Queensland floods can still apply for assistance for recovery and rebuilding activities.

### Rebuilding herds

The \$400,000 dollar-for-dollar Restocking, Replanting and On-farm Infrastructure grants are still available. Producers can access the funds when they're ready to use them.

Flood-affected producers who are restocking can also receive 50% freight subsidies of up to \$50,000 a year for two years.

Low-interest loan products are also available to assist with the costs of restocking, rebuilding infrastructure and meeting carry-on requirements.

Information on these grants and other assistance is available at [droughtandflood.gov.au](http://droughtandflood.gov.au).

### Financial considerations

The free Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) provides individual support to deal with financial hardship.

RFCS North Queensland has specific information for flood-affected producers: [rfcsnq.com.au/north-qld-flood-support](http://rfcsnq.com.au/north-qld-flood-support).

### Flood recovery officers

The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries appointed five industry recovery officers to work with producers and communities after the flood. Contact the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority on 1800 623 946 or contact [us@qrida.qld.gov.au](mailto:us@qrida.qld.gov.au) for details.

### Need someone to talk to?

NQ Connect is a 24/7 free phone and online counselling service available to anyone in flood-affected areas. Call 1300 059 625 or visit [nqconnect.com.au](http://nqconnect.com.au).

Information on other services is available at [droughtandflood.gov.au](http://droughtandflood.gov.au)

### Drought

FarmHub is a website developed by the National Farmers' Federation with support from the Australian Government to provide a central point for drought support resources: [farmhub.org.au](http://farmhub.org.au).

### Fire

For information on Australian Government disaster assistance for bushfires and other extreme events, visit [disasterassist.gov.au](http://disasterassist.gov.au). ■

# Managing the extremes

**N**orth-west Queensland producer Colin Burnett knows the risks of running a grazing business in extreme conditions all too well.

Shortly after he used his 2018 Nuffield Scholarship to study business sustainability in varying climate and market forces, Colin (pictured) was facing a natural disaster of his own.

In just 11 days from 2 February 2019, 'Lara Downs' – which Colin runs with his brother Adam – received 963mm, nearly double their annual rainfall in one event.

Colin said the region's climatic cycle tends to be five years of average or below-average rainfall, followed by five years of average or above-average rainfall.

This flood came on the back of a better than average season in 2018.

As soon as the torrential rain eased, the Burnetts put a drone up to check the damage.

"It was pretty bad, a quarter of the property was under floodwaters," Colin said.

They lost 20% of their herd and, with 18km of the Flinders River running through the property, there was extensive infrastructure damage, including 45km of fencing and erosion to 15km of roads and gullies across the property.

The Burnetts are taking a measured response to recovery, looking for opportunities to rebuild a more robust business to manage future risk.

## Short term

After conducting aerial fodder drops and property inspections to estimate losses, their next priority was moving cattle out of flooded areas and into paddocks less susceptible to flooding, in case more water came down the system.

In March and April, after waters subsided, they turned their attention to re-fencing. The first stage was 27km of new boundary fencing, followed by repairing or replacing internal fencing.

"We took this opportunity to realign fences to reduce future risk and maximise return on investment," Colin said.

"We shifted fences away from flood areas and removed three of the five fences crossing the river."

He credits support from the community and organisations such as BlazeAid as vital for 'boots on the ground' help with fencing and mustering immediately after the flood.

## Medium term

The fencing program pushed the usual April–May muster back to June, when the Burnetts could get a real handle on stock losses and plan future business requirements.

They sourced good quality young cattle out of dry areas along the eastern seaboard but, with no rain since the flood and limited pasture response, they have not fully restocked, and by October 2019 were only running at about two-thirds of capacity.

Colin drew on financial planning resources offered by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries,



including cashflow management and restocking strategies (see 'Recovery resources' on previous page).

He accessed the \$75,000 Queensland Government grant for initial recovery activities, including fodder and fencing, and has been approved for a \$400,000 grant to continue restocking.

## Long term

By the end of the year, Colin finally had a chance to catch his breath and take a critical look at his business.

He has taken any opportunity to generate cash flow, including trading cattle, baling and selling pasture hay, and contracting their earthmoving equipment.

Ongoing activities include controlling weeds such as noogoora burr and prickly acacia brought down in the floodwaters and working with Southern Gulf Natural Resource Management to address erosion along the river.

Colin said the flood highlights the need for risk management in northern Australia's unpredictable environment.

"For me, sustainability means a prosperous agricultural industry across northern Australia, which leads to the whole community's viability, but risk is inherent and should be part of normal management.

"In particular, climate risk management is one of the critical factors to business sustainability – it's a must." ■

## SNAPSHOT:

**Colin Burnett,**

Julia Creek,  
Queensland



### Area:

36,400ha

### Enterprise:

Backgrounding and fattening cattle

### Livestock:

4,000 Brahman-cross cattle

### Pasture:

Open Mitchell grass downs

### Soil:

Cracking clays, river plains

### Rainfall:

520mm annual average (963mm received in February 2019)

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📺 Watch Colin's Nuffield Scholarship presentation: [youtube.com/user/nuffieldcomau](https://www.youtube.com/user/nuffieldcomau) and search 'Colin'

MLA is a supporter of the Nuffield Scholarship program. See page 4 to meet our newest scholar, Clare Peltzer.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > Look for non-traditional opportunities to generate cashflow.
- > During herd rebuilding, source the right cattle for your production goals.
- > Strategically rebuild infrastructure to reduce risk and maximise investment.

# Recipe for resilience

## What makes a resilient grazing business?

Two advisors who work with northern producers to build sustainable, profitable enterprises share their insights on positioning livestock, land and people to endure extreme circumstances and minimise business upheaval.

### Resilient livestock and land

As Flood Recovery Coordinator with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, David Phelps has some practical tips to get grazing businesses back on track.

“A resilient grazing business has its animal production system performing to its potential, regardless of the situation,” David said.

“For example, breeder numbers might be destocked down to 10%, but the producer is managing cow condition to maintain good calving rates so they’re in a position to react when conditions change for the better.”

He said when seasonal conditions enable restocking, a measured approach and willingness to adapt are crucial.

This could include:

- trading cattle to maintain positive cashflow until breeding numbers are rebuilt
- exploring opportunities to manage an increase in numbers, such as buying pregnancy-tested in-calf cows or heifers.

“A resilient grazing business also has country in good condition, so it’s ready to respond better to rainfall,” David said.



Business advisor and agricultural economist Rebecca Mohr-Bell.

While land class A or B is the aim, he said erosion following last year’s heavy rains and flooding means many areas in the north are now in C condition.

“As a rough guide, C condition land has half the long-term carrying capacity of A condition land,” David said.

The intense, concentrated rain event in January and February last year also knocked around pasture response.

“Northern producers would normally expect to grow 2,500kg of dry matter (DM) per hectare on 600mm of wet season rain, but the response in flood-affected areas has only been around 500kg DM/ha.

“On a positive note, property surveys after the flooding identified high levels of Mitchell grass seedlings, so it’s important to give paddocks a long wet season spell until after Mitchell grass goes to seed in March or later, depending on the season.”

### Resilient people and processes

A resilient grazing business is one which can take advantage of unexpected opportunities as well as survive unexpected negative circumstances, according to NT-based business advisor and agricultural economist Rebecca Mohr-Bell from ArGyll Consulting.

Rebecca is the NT/WA coordinator for MLA’s Profitable Grazing Systems program.

“A resilient business knows its strengths and limitations, is proactive about risk management and planning, and is willing to be flexible when required,” she said.

She said challenges are a case of “when, not if”, so preparation is essential.

“Having up-to-date information at your fingertips allows you to make decisions quickly and confidently when an emergency does occur, whether it’s about weather, markets or people.”

A highly productive Mitchell grass plain in good land condition.

Image: Dionne Walsh

Here are some practical strategies to help with decision making.

### 1. Maintain an up-to-date budget and operating plan

These documents should reflect personal and business strengths and weaknesses as well as available resources (land, livestock, people and money).

Know your cost structures, where fat can be trimmed from the business and how any cost cuts would affect production. For example, cutting a supplement budget will reduce growth and reproduction.

“A budget is not a static document, it’s a flight plan,” Rebecca said.

“If you have to detour, it provides a way back, but if you don’t regularly look at it, you could end up lost or going in circles.”

Northern producers can attend MLA’s Business EDGE workshop to enhance their knowledge and skills in basic financial and business management to improve efficiency and profitability.

### 2. Maintain accessible and up-to-date information

This includes livestock numbers, property maps (including pipelines and underground electricity) and financial documents such as wills and insurance policies. Store copies offsite or online so they can be accessed if the homestead or office is destroyed or inaccessible.

The FarmMap4D Spatial Hub provides land managers with data and mapping tools to develop accurate digital property plans and infrastructure maps ([farmmap4d.com.au](http://farmmap4d.com.au)).

### 3. Protect your business with wills, succession plans and on-farm policies

“People often think preparing a will or succession plan means they’re handing over control – or others think they’re at death’s door and no longer useful – but it’s really about protecting your family and business,” Rebecca said.

Other formal plans are just as important for risk management, including:

- **Workplace health and safety:** Don’t underestimate the cost of poor workplace safety and not having the right paperwork and procedures, such as staff, contractor and visitor inductions. A major accident or death on property is not only stressful for everyone involved but the compensation and legal implications could send a business under.
- **Biosecurity plans:** Establishing quarantine paddocks for livestock or weed washdown bays for vehicles minimise the risk of disease, weed and pest incursions and could save a lot of time and money down the track.

### 4. Build support networks

“When you have a team of people involved, it forces you to stop and consider areas of opportunity, growth and threats on a regular basis – before small problems become big ones.

“It’s the job of your trusted advisors to be on top of developments in their area of specialty and know your business well enough to identify where new advances can be useful,” Rebecca said.

“It’s just as vital to have a personal support network, especially during and after extreme circumstances.” ■

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📺 EDGENetwork: [mla.com.au/edge](http://mla.com.au/edge)  
Profitable Grazing Systems:  
[mla.com.au/pgs](http://mla.com.au/pgs)

## What can you do right now?

- Take a critical look at pastures and set appropriate stocking rates through autumn and winter. Strategies to help set stocking rates according to the feed that is actually (not historically) on hand at this time of year include the following:
  - Reassess land condition: [futurebeef.com.au/knowledge-centre/land-condition](http://futurebeef.com.au/knowledge-centre/land-condition)
  - Estimate current standing dry matter using pasture growth tools: [longpaddock.qld.gov.au](http://longpaddock.qld.gov.au)
  - Develop a feed budget to calculate how many livestock you can run: [mla.com.au/feedbudget](http://mla.com.au/feedbudget)
- Be vigilant about the spread of invasive weeds when it does rain. Monitor fodder drop sites for introduced weeds and look for weeds spread by floodwaters, such as prickly acacia: [dcq.org.au/projects/prickly-acacia-control](http://dcq.org.au/projects/prickly-acacia-control).
- Check your life insurance and wills. Do you have them? Are they up-to-date? Are they safe and accessible?
- Update your budgets (including feed and production budgets) to actual expenditure and commit to doing this at least once per quarter.
- Ask yourself some ‘what if?’ questions: what would we do if a key decision maker died? What would we do if we had a flood, fire or disease outbreak?



# Clean slate for profitable paddocks

**While rebuilding after fire or flood can seem like a daunting task for many producers, it's also an opportunity to reposition fences and watering points to improve paddock productivity.**

Dr Dionne Walsh, who manages the Rangeland Program of the NT Department of Primary Industry and Resources, is leading the MLA-supported Paddock Power project to unlock the secrets of profitable paddock development.

“After an event such as fire or flood, the immediate need is often to just get fences and waters back up but, where there’s an opportunity to stagger rebuilding efforts, a rethink can contribute to improved grazing and herd productivity,” Dionne said.

She said producers can maximise their investment in wire and water by considering:

- **Water location:** For example, troughs in the corner of a paddock dramatically concentrate grazing.
- **Water spacing:** The rule of thumb is 6km between water points in extensive grazing systems and 1–2km in more intensive areas, to improve landscape use.
- **Carrying capacity:** Repositioning fences and water points is an opportunity to reset stocking rate policies. Dionne recommends seeking independent, evidence-based advice about the current status of paddocks (taking into

account events such as floods which can change land condition) to assess how many cattle they can sustainably support.

## Downsize for productivity

“Many paddocks in northern Australia are too big and under-watered to achieve optimum productivity and pasture utilisation,” Dionne said.

In the Barkly Tableland region, for example, average paddock area is 218km<sup>2</sup> (21,800ha) and some are more than 1,000km<sup>2</sup> (100,000ha).

Previous research has shown that developing more water points is a sound investment for achieving better pasture utilisation and increasing carrying capacity.

However, the improvements in breeder herd performance and/or live weight gain that can be achieved from infrastructure development are less clear.

“Producers tell us they need data on potential productivity increases to justify investment in new infrastructure to create smaller, better watered paddocks.

“The Paddock Power project, which includes tracking cattle movements with GPS, is measuring the influence of paddock area and distance to water on breeder herd performance, steer live weight gain, mortality rates, operating costs and feedbase management.”

Dionne said some producers speculate low rates of calf survival could be partly driven by cows leaving newborn calves to return several kilometres back to

water, increasing the risk of calf predation or dehydration.

Large, poorly watered paddocks can also have an impact on reproduction and business profitability due to:

- over- and under-utilised feed
- reduced live weight gain and body condition as cattle walk long distances between water and feed
- reduced re-conception and calf survival rates from poor breeder body condition
- incomplete musters
- limited opportunities for controlled mating
- difficulty in strategically managing pastures.

“Project findings will refine current recommendations on water point spacing and provide better information on where to place new infrastructure to maximise return on investment,” Dionne said.

Paddock Power will deliver a user-friendly online calculator so producers can compare the costs of different infrastructure development options and evaluate their profitability based on specific land types, cost base and livestock productivity. ■

## RESEARCH IN REVIEW

### PROJECT NAME

Paddock Power

### RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

NT Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT DPIR)

### FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

MLA and NT DPIR

### GOAL

To gather data about productivity increases from paddock development and develop a calculator.

### BUDGET

MLA: \$416,000

In-kind:  
NT DPIR: \$266,000  
industry: \$1,100,000

### DURATION

April 2019 – April 2021

✉ Dionne Walsh  
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📄 Paddock Power updates:  
[facebook.com/groups/326686724590667](https://facebook.com/groups/326686724590667)  
[futurebeef.com.au/projects/paddockpower](https://futurebeef.com.au/projects/paddockpower)  
Paddock planning tools:  
[farmmap4d.com.au](https://farmmap4d.com.au)



Dr Dionne Walsh, Rangeland Program Manager, NT DPIR.

# Back and better than ever

**In November 2015 a fire engulfed 80,000ha in SA, including Troy and Nette Fischers' property where it killed 650 White Suffolk stud sheep and destroyed 1,000 round bales of hay, sheds, machinery and 35km of fencing.**

The Fischers' resilience, goal setting and careful decision making, along with support from the community, ensured a return to productivity in under two years and paved the way for genetic gain.

## Immediate response

In the days after the fire, Troy, Nette and Troy's parents Brian and Rhonda turned their immediate focus to managing the surviving 550 ewe and ram lambs.

"We had so many questions: where to run these lambs, how to replace the breeding ewes, how to use all the offers of help, would our insurance come good and where to start? It was overwhelming," Troy said.

A critical step was to divide up the workload so everyone had a specific role as they moved to rebuild their business.

They found agistment within five days at a nearby stud breeder's farm, which ensured their ovine Johnne's disease MN3 status wasn't compromised.

Their flock rebuild goals were to:

- hold the annual stud ram sale in September 2016
- produce enough lambs in 2016 to have a ram sale in 2017
- continue genetic improvement.

Troy asked six White Suffolk stud owners to contribute elite breeding ewes to an embryo transfer program. Another stud breeder loaned 70 stud ewes to obtain a drop of lambs. The Fischer family also purchased breeding ewes.

With sheep coming in from nine properties across Australia, the Fischers

were conscious of not introducing new diseases or weeds.

Sheep were drenched and vaccinated on entry into a confinement feeding yard and drenched again before being moved out to paddocks.

Donated hay was only fed in the yard to reduce risk of weed invasion.

## Post-disaster management

Pregnant ewes were managed according to Lifetime Ewe principles. They received hay up to the late stages of pregnancy, when they were also fed supplementary grain, and were moved out to pasture just before lambing.

The Fischers sought advice from professionals and engaged a consultant to help with planning and decision making.

"The fire gave us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to re-evaluate how the farm was set up," Troy said.

**"It was really important to have someone with an independent view to look at our business and provide advice on which direction to head and where to focus our limited financial and labour resources."**

The Fischers widened all gateways to a standard 10m to ensure easy machinery access and built a containment yard and state-of-the-art sheep yards to improve labour efficiency and make sheep work more enjoyable.

Four years on, the Fischers have expanded their flock by 50% and have seen their rate of genetic gain increase.

They doubled the area of crop by leasing land and upgraded seeding and harvest equipment for improved labour efficiency and timeliness of sowing. ■

## TOP TIPS FOR DISASTER RECOVERY

- > Seek expert advice to assist with decision making.
- > Accept offers of help, especially from organisations such as BlazeAid.
- > Divide the workload and develop appropriate time frames for rebuilding tasks.
- > Look after each other, exercise tolerance and take time off for physical and mental health.
- > Make calculated decisions; don't rush into them.
- > Look out for members of your community who are struggling.

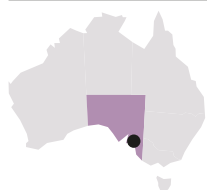


Troy and Nette Fischer with their youngest child, Elke.

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🖥 Making More From Sheep: [makingmorefromsheep.com.au](http://makingmorefromsheep.com.au)  
Lifetime Ewe Management: [lifetimewool.com.au/LTEM.aspx](http://lifetimewool.com.au/LTEM.aspx)  
Sheep Genetics: [sheepgenetics.org.au](http://sheepgenetics.org.au)

## SNAPSHOT: Troy and Nette Fischer, Wasleys, SA



<b>Area:</b> 830ha	<b>Enterprise:</b> White Suffolk sheep	<b>Livestock:</b> 700 stud ewes	<b>Pasture:</b> Cereal and legume pastures, using vigorous varieties that establish early for resilient pastures	<b>Soil:</b> Grey clay over limestone, black bisque, red loam	<b>Rainfall:</b> 400mm
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# Rebuilding a genetically superior herd

**Producers who are preparing to restock after flood, fire or prolonged drought can use these events as an opportunity to rebuild a genetically superior herd.**

Felicity Hamlyn-Hill of Beef Enterprise Advisory Services delivers MLA's Breeding EDGE workshops and said genetic improvement is important to:

- increase individual animal performance and overall herd performance and profitability
- speed up rebuilding with better weaning rates and less reproductive wastage
- improve opportunities and choice in animal selection, retention and culling.

"The genetic improvement decisions you make now could impact your herd's performance for at least the next 15 years," Felicity said.

## Here are Felicity's top tips to build a better beef herd.

### 1. Determine what traits contribute to key profit drivers

Critically assess what aspects of herd performance drives your profit. Is it fertility, growth, carcase or reducing mortalities and in what combination? Where can improvements be made to lift the performance of your current herd? Where specifically would you get the most lift?

### 2. Understand relationships between traits

Sometimes selecting for one trait can create change (desirable or undesirable) in another. If the relationship between traits is undesirable, it's important to place appropriate selection pressure to counter the effects.

### 3. Rank the traits in order of importance

This makes developing breeding objectives easier. It also aids sire

selection (and elimination) as bulls can be viewed as a package of traits. Too many traits make it difficult to maintain selection pressure on each one, so emphasise the most important traits to improve herd performance and rank these.

### 4. Develop SMART breeding objectives

After selecting and ranking traits, the next step is to develop SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) breeding objectives and write them down. These represent the ideal animal you wish to breed. They should be long-term goals that don't change based on short-term market signals. There may be a selection index which matches your breeding objectives to help balance a number of traits.

### 5. Identify appropriate selection criteria to ensure animals have genetic merit for priority traits

There are large genetic differences within a breed for traits. However, the genetic merit of many commercially important traits cannot be accurately assessed visually. Fat can hide poor muscling; growth rate can be masked by feeding, nutrition and the environment; key fertility traits cannot be assessed visually; and inherent temperament can be modified by handling.

Objective measurement assists in ensuring animals selected for breeding will have the desired genetics for traits of importance. Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) are calculated from measurement information on the sale animal and its relatives. Increasingly, the addition of genomic information is used to improve the accuracy of EBVs.

Understand what each EBV is and which one is most appropriate. For example, 20-day growth EBVs are the most appropriate selection criteria for selecting for early growth. For fertility

traits, there are a number of EBVs depending on the breed, such as Days to Calving.


Not all bulls for sale have EBVs, or the full suite of EBVs. If producers want to change this, they can start by requesting their bull breeder collects information to produce EBVs for important traits.


### 6. Manage the genetics to match the environment

Cattle that are not adapted are costly to run, may require special husbandry and may not be able to adequately express the genetic merit for the production traits they are recognised for in other environments. It's important the breed mix can perform in the given environment, especially when cross-breeding.

### 7. Build your knowledge

Workshops such as Breeding EDGE help producers understand genetic improvement and genetic tools, as well as fertility management, to assist in herd rebuilding, particularly after times of drought. ■

 Felicity Hamlyn-Hill  
Beef Enterprise Advisory  
Services Pty Ltd  
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 Want to learn more about how to effectively use genetic improvement principles and tools, including EBVs, in your own herd?

- Attend a Breeding EDGE workshop:  
24 February – Rolleston, Qld  
12 March – Karratha, WA  
17 March – Broome, WA
- Find out about more upcoming EDGE events: [mla.com.au/edge](http://mla.com.au/edge)
- Visit MLA's genetics hub at: [genetics.mla.com.au](http://genetics.mla.com.au)

# Tools to manage climate risk

**M**LA is supporting the development of climate forecasting tools to help producers navigate seasonal variability and better prepare for extreme events.

One project which is improving seasonal forecasts is 'Forewarned is Forearmed', supported by the Australian Government's Rural Research and Development for Profit program.

The project is directly aimed at giving producers advance warning of extreme weather events such as heatwaves, cold snaps, droughts and floods.

Researchers aim to develop new forecasting models to predict these events well in advance, to help producers make weather and climate risk management decisions, such as when to:

- move freshly shorn sheep to sheltered paddocks ahead of unseasonal cold and wet conditions
- shift livestock to higher ground if extreme rainfall is predicted
- advance or delay animal management procedures
- sell, buy or transport fodder or livestock ahead of a period of high or low feed availability.

One prototype forecast product being tested allows users to identify extreme heat events weeks to months ahead (current temperature and weather forecasts project seven days into the future).

Another prototype product takes seasonal planning a step further by increasing the range of probability of seasonal rainfall from two categories (above or below the long-term median rainfall) to five categories (very dry, dry,

median, wet or very wet). This enables better interpretation of forecast data.

MLA's Supply Chain Sustainability Innovation Manager, Doug McNicholl, said accessing more timely and accurate information can improve on-farm productivity and reduce financial losses.

"Producers can use this information to make the best decisions to mitigate risk and maximise opportunities from seasonal conditions and extreme weather events.

"Forecast accuracy is being improved through continued advancements in computing power, combined with targeted efforts to improve weather and climate data collection and modelling for producers.

"If improved forecast tools are adopted into business decision making, they can greatly assist climate risk management on-farm and through the supply chain."

The Forewarned is Forearmed project will also take steps towards making seasonal outlooks more interpretable and aligned with producer decisions (see pages 25–26).

The prototypes developed within the project are being tested with industry reference groups, with the first products expected to be released on the Bureau of Meteorology website ([bom.gov.au](http://bom.gov.au)) in early 2021.

The MLA Donor Company is also investing in new forecast tools and extension initiatives specifically for the northern grazing industry through the Northern Australia Climate Program, in partnership with the Queensland Government and the University of Southern Queensland. ■

✉ Doug McNicholl  
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🖥️ **MLA-supported climate variability projects**

Forewarned is Forearmed:  
[climatekelpie.com.au/index.php/mcvproject](http://climatekelpie.com.au/index.php/mcvproject)

Northern Australia Climate Program: [bom.gov.au/research/projects/NACP](http://bom.gov.au/research/projects/NACP)

Drought and Climate Adaptation Program:  
[longpaddock.qld.gov.au/dcap](http://longpaddock.qld.gov.au/dcap)

**More resources to help manage climate variability on-farm**

*The Break* e-newsletters (southern seasonal updates):

[agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/weather-and-climate/newsletters](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/weather-and-climate/newsletters)

Guide to using seasonal forecasts: [agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au) and search 'Guide for using seasonal forecasts'.

Climate Kelpie:  
[climatekelpie.com.au](http://climatekelpie.com.au)



# A well-stocked weather toolkit

**Australian livestock producers are contributing to the development of new seasonal climate forecasts to ensure they're easy to use and provide relevant information for on-farm decisions.**

Alister Hawksford (pictured), who heads the Bureau of Meteorology's (BoM) Agriculture Program, said feedback from producers has helped identify the biggest challenges with making weather-dependent decisions.

"When it comes to forecasts for specific decisions, most producers we surveyed said stocking and restocking was their most important decision, followed by when to fertilise or sow crops and pastures," Alister said.

"This reinforces the importance of weather information that supports decisions around when and how well pastures and crops will grow."

He said while BoM is working with industry to make forecasting tools more accurate (for example, through the Forewarned is Forearmed project

with MLA and others, page 23), producers can create opportunity by applying existing products to key decisions.

"Our seven-day rainfall forecasts are misinterpreted more than 90% of the time, so understanding how to use forecasts is critical to good decision making," he said.

"We're exploring options with partners across the country to create more tailored, interpretable forecasts that directly relate to key decisions."

## Looking ahead

Alister shared his tips for using forecasts accurately at an MLA Livestock Advisor Update (page 36).

"Increasing climate variability is increasing the financial volatility of grazing businesses and it's no longer enough to review seasonal trends," he said.

"We're in a new climate state with more extreme and unpredictable events, so we need a renewed focus on what's coming up."


While he doesn't advocate tossing out your property's historical rainfall



records just yet, Alister said there are three products (see below) which should be part of a producer's decision-making toolbox.

"Use these tools to drill down to farm-level information and mitigate ever-increasing weather and climate variability.

"The key is to understand how to interpret information from each tool, and which tool provides the most applicable information for specific decisions." ■

 Alister Hawksford  
E: [alister.hawksford@bom.gov.au](mailto:alister.hawksford@bom.gov.au)

## Decision-making tools

### 1 Australian Landscape Water Balance

**What to use it for:** Identify regions where conditions are favourable to source fodder or find agistment; target livestock sales or purchases to regions based on seasonal conditions; and assess how much evapotranspiration has occurred in an irrigation system.

**How to use it:** This service can be used to access 100 years of historical data about soil moisture, rain, run-off and evapotranspiration on your farm. Search for your property by postcode, location name or coordinates, or zoom in on the map. Alister said a practical use is to monitor current conditions in other regions.

[bom.gov.au/water/landscape](http://bom.gov.au/water/landscape)

### 2 Seven-day forecasts

**What to use it for:** Forecasts are updated every three hours to allow producers to better plan weather-dependent activities such as mustering, spraying and sowing.

**How to use it:** Search for your property by postcode, location name or coordinates, or zoom in on the map. To fully benefit from this tool, it's crucial to correctly interpret the seven-day rainfall forecast.

A common mistake is to interpret a forecast such as '60% chance of rain; 5–10mm' as meaning there's a 60% chance of getting 5–10mm of rain. It really means a 60% chance of any rain (precipitation over 0.2mm), a 50% chance of getting more than 5mm and a 25% chance of getting more than 10mm.

For tips on how to interpret the forecast, go to [bom.gov.au](http://bom.gov.au) and search for 'How to interpret the daily rainfall forecast'.

[bom.gov.au/australia/meteye](http://bom.gov.au/australia/meteye)

### 3 Seasonal outlooks

**What to use it for:** These outlooks are there to shift the odds in your favour, not for big one-off gambles. They are best suited for planning stocking rates over the next season or planning which week to muster in the next month.

**How to use it:** These forecasts were recently upgraded to include weekly and fortnightly forecasts.

The higher the past accuracy, the more confidence you can have in using the information, so make sure past accuracy is greater than 50% before using the forecast in your decision-making process.

Search for your property by postcode, location name or coordinates, or zoom in on the map.

[bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks](http://bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks)

# Managing costs in an uncertain climate

**There are long odds on keeping cattle productive when the northern wet season fails to deliver, but Queensland beef producer Ian MacGibbon has a strategy to meet the challenge head on.**

“You don’t make money speculating on rainfall – managing risk by managing costs is vital,” he said.

His Fitzroy grazing enterprise includes coastal land and river country, which present different seasonal challenges.

Throughout the year, Ian carefully monitors seasonal rainfall and adapts his business with a focus on maintaining profitability.

Strategies include:

- managing stock numbers to protect ground cover
- increasing the focus on rotational grazing to improve grass composition
- adjusting joining time to maximise breeder condition.

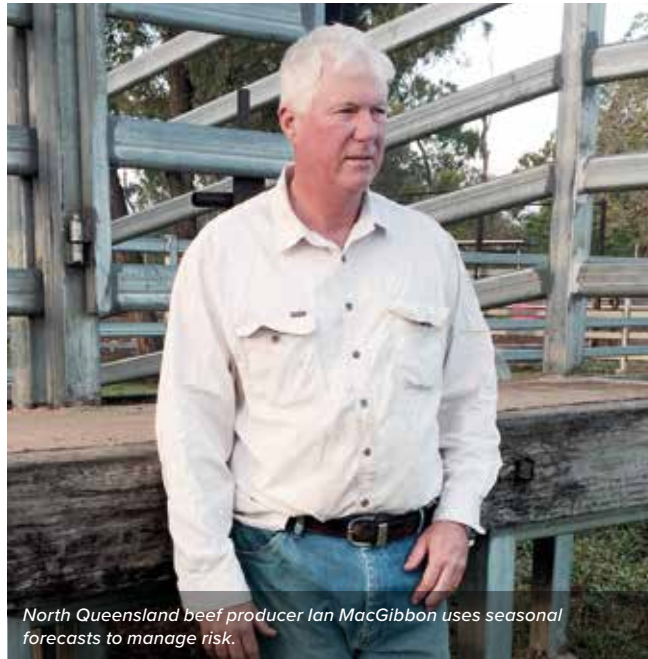
## Productive pastures

When the 2018–19 wet season yielded only 50–60% of the usual rainfall, Ian made the decision to reduce stock numbers substantially.

He sold more than 900 head above his normal annual sales – this maintained grass so he didn’t have to feed cattle through winter.

Protecting ground cover also allowed him to take full advantage of any water captured.

Ian started experimenting with rotational grazing around 10 years ago, dividing two 1,200ha paddocks into quarters to spell over the wet season. This improved



North Queensland beef producer Ian MacGibbon uses seasonal forecasts to manage risk.

grass composition and regenerated native grasses and stylos, which perform better in dry conditions.

In the past few years, Ian has taken it a step further and cut his paddock size again, dividing the 1,200ha paddocks into six paddocks of around 200–250ha. One is grazed while the other five are spelled.

Monitoring rainfall has also motivated Ian to push joining back a month to 1 December.

“Cattle condition can deteriorate over the winter, so we need to wean early and maximise condition before joining.”

This matches the local ‘green date’ of 1 December for St Lawrence – the date locals expect 50mm of rainfall within a three-day period.

Ian’s approach to dealing with climate variability is about maintaining income while reducing risk, such as running a high-content Brahman herd which is well suited to the environment.

He has further spread risk by diversifying into sugar cane, purchasing a 280ha irrigated property at Millaroo in the Burdekin region.

## Tools

Ian compares his 12-month rolling rainfall total from his own records to local averages to plan his stocking rates.

In the past two years, he’s only had five-eighths of the average rainfall, which means he’s only willing to hold five-eighths of his potential cattle numbers.

He also uses the CliMate app to keep track of where he is, compared to seasonal averages, and the Bureau of Meteorology short-term weather forecasts to plan planting, spraying and irrigating.

The next project on the agenda is to improve grass-budgeting techniques, to help plan nutritional requirements from the end of April through to the start of the wet season. ■

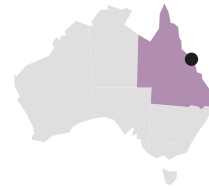
## SNAPSHOT:

Ian and Penny

MacGibbon,

St Lawrence,

Queensland



### Area:

13,700ha

### Enterprise:

Beef cattle and sugar cane

### Livestock:

5,000 Brahman cattle

### Pasture:

Improved with legumes and Rhodes grass, as well as native black spear grass and forest Mitchell grass

### Soil:

River flats, heavy clay, ranges, lighter coastal flats

### Rainfall:

720mm (variable)

✉ Ian MacGibbon

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📱 CliMate app:

[climateapp.net.au](http://climateapp.net.au)

Bureau of Meteorology short-term weather forecasts:

[bom.gov.au/climate/ ahead](http://bom.gov.au/climate/ahead)

For more stories like Ian’s, visit:

[climatekelpie.com.au](http://climatekelpie.com.au)

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Manage risk by managing costs.
- Monitor seasonal outlooks and adapt management accordingly.
- Manage pastures so they respond to rain events.

# Building resilience from the ground up

**If NSW beef producer Gillian Sanbrook had to distil her grazing business into one concept, it would be ‘ground cover, ground cover, ground cover’.**

Tapping into the benefits of 100% ground cover – such as retaining moisture and promoting healthy soil microbiology – allows her regenerative business to remain resilient in the face of climate variability.

When Gillian (pictured) moved from the Riverina plains to the Wymah Valley in the south west slopes of NSW, she expected to find reliable rainfall and plenty of cattle feed.

But since she arrived at ‘Bibbaringa’ 12 years ago, annual rainfall has ranged from 380mm to more than 1,000mm.

The last few growing seasons have been particularly late with no real spring or autumn, so not much grass was produced before the cold winter.

Gillian realised she would need to take a more opportunistic approach to grazing.

In April 2016 she sold her entire cattle herd and now focuses on buying in young

cattle and finishing them over nine months or so, selling off at 500–550kg. She runs between 200 and 600 head at any one time, depending on the season.

## Forecasting grass

Gillian re-fenced the property into more than 60 paddocks for rotational grazing and planted around 20% of the farm to trees, shrubs and native grasses, which have become part of the grazing rotation. She established contour banks to slow the flow of water across the property, allowing more time for it to be absorbed.

“It’s taken a long time, but I now have reliable ground cover and am rebuilding soil organic matter,” Gillian said.

She uses tools such as Bureau of Meteorology forecasts, monthly climate reports and regular webinars to make stocking decisions at the start of autumn and end of spring.

Gillian uses her own spreadsheet system to manage livestock and paddock feed, and forecasts carrying capacity based on past performance and how much grass is on hand.

Cattle are moved every two to five days, leaving paddocks to rest for three to seven months, depending on

the time of year.

“My mantra is 100% ground cover, 100% of the time,” she said.

Usually Gillian restocks during March/April, but in 2019 she made the decision to restock in June at a third of her normal stocking rate, based on the forecast and feed and water availability.

“By looking after the land, I am in a much better position to look after the livestock.”

## New opportunity

Gillian’s regenerative farming approach is shared by a local network, ‘8 Families’, who meet every six weeks to share ideas and learn from speakers and tours.

In December, through a partnership between 8 Families and paddock-to-plate company Provenir, her cattle were processed on her farm in a mobile abattoir. The beef was marketed to Provenir’s customers, which include high-end restaurants.

As well as reducing costs and reducing stress to cattle, she sees this as a better route to market with full traceability for her grassfed beef, produced without antibiotics or hormones. ■

## SNAPSHOT:

Gillian Sanbrook,  
Bowna, NSW



**Area:**  
990ha


**Enterprise:**  
Trade cattle

**Livestock:**  
500 head

**Pasture:**  
Phalaris, natives and annuals

**Soil:**  
Granite slopes and creek flats

**Rainfall:**  
750mm

 Gillian Sanbrook  
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 BOM forecasts:  
[bom.gov.au/climate/ahead](http://bom.gov.au/climate/ahead)

BOM webinars:  
[bom.gov.au/webinars](http://bom.gov.au/webinars)

For more stories like Gillian’s, visit:  
[climatekelpie.com.au](http://climatekelpie.com.au)

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > Maintain ground cover to protect the natural capital (soil).
- > Climate variability demands an opportunistic approach to business.



Image: Jayne Newgreen

# Over the fence

In this series, *Feedback* follows a group of producers from across Australia as they manage their operations over the course of a year and respond to the challenges that arise in modern grazing enterprises. This is the second instalment of the 2019–20 series.

## SNAPSHOT:

**Nikko and Jade Lord, Ardie and Kacie Lord,**  
Richmond and Tambo,  
Queensland



### Area:

240,000ha across  
six properties

### Enterprise:

Backgrounding, breeding  
and fattening

### Livestock:

Brahman-cross cattle

### Pasture:

Spear grass, spinifex, stylos,  
Wynn cassia in the north,  
Mitchell and Flinders grass  
in the south

### Soil:

Downs country with  
limestone ridges running  
to gidgee country and  
sandy bauhinia

### Rainfall:

475mm/550mm

✉ Nikko and Jade Lord  
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com.au

## Nikko and Jade Lord



*Nikko and Jade Lord with their children, Jock and Sandy.*

### SEASONAL CHALLENGES:

We have consistently managed to get 50–100% of our 700mm annual rainfall over the last five to 10 years in our northern country. On paper, we shouldn't have had a drought but there definitely seems to be a lack of response across the country. We're looking over the horizon but, the last few years, early storms have become less and less frequent. Because we're missing out on those earlier storms, by the time we get the rain, the country is quite scalded.

### WHAT'S ON OUR PLATE:

We've just finished the first six months at 'Woodstock', Richmond, and are still getting our head around the new place. We bought a very overstocked property in a light year, so there have been a lot of challenges. Stocking rates have had to come back to something manageable. We tweaked our supplementation program to include lick blocks with loose lick to give cattle more choice and that seems to have paid dividends. We're also finding value in feeding a molasses

supplement to assist with young growing stock and first-calf heifers. Water management has been a big focus lately as well. We're aiming to increase water access throughout the property, so there's no more than a 3km walk-out radius for the cows. We've created a little overflow trough for water to go through before the dams to increase cleanliness.

This wet season we will market a lot of feeder cattle. This will give us room to aerially seed Verano and Seca stylo and Wynn cassia, before we spell for the wet season.

### MY GO-TO TOOLS AND RESOURCES:

We use an online calendar through Google Sheets which allows everyone in the business to see the short and long-term plans. We've taken everything onto the cloud using OneDrive and OneNote folders. In the last 12 months, we've gone to great lengths to expand our Wi-Fi capacity. ■

### ACTIVITIES OVER THE NEXT TWO MONTHS:

- > marketing young cattle
- > feeding out
- > spelling country.

**SNAPSHOT:**  
Jane and Haydn Sale,  
Kimberley, WA



**Area:**

Approximately 1,619,000ha across several stations and Indigenous sub-leases

**Enterprise:**

Breeding and backgrounding cattle

**Livestock:**

50,000 Brahman/  
Droughtmaster

**Pasture:**

Spinifex and annual grasses, buffel and curly spinifex on river blocks, Mitchell, bundle bundle and blue grass

**Soil:**

Desert country is red sand over clay, and river country is clay loam and into white clay

**Rainfall:**

350mm–550mm (ranges between properties)

## Jane Sale

**SEASONAL CHALLENGES:**

The season is very dry and light on feed, so we implemented an early sales program to lighten our load. This involves feeding our light cattle from 250kg to a boat weight of 280kg. Because of the poor year, we also brought forward our mustering and weaning to remove the calves from their mothers and take some of the pressure off.

**WHAT'S ON OUR PLATE:**

We've been working on developing catchment dams before the wet season starts and opening up some new areas. We've also been checking and servicing the water points and distributing our wet season lick.

The bulls went out with breeders in December and we're shifting some cattle to some of the newer-developed areas and sub-leases. Due to controlled joining, most breeders started calving

from September. This will continue right through to the end of the wet, with a smaller percentage of out-of-season calves dropping into the dry season.

On the human resources front, we've begun recruiting staff for our 2020 mustering season, and planning our inductions and some procedural improvements to our workplace health and safety systems. This is also the time of year when we spend some time on budgeting and forward planning.

**MY GO-TO TOOLS AND RESOURCES:**

Haydn went on a Rabobank Global Farmers trip to Brazil to look at their beef cattle systems. Their climate and cattle type are similar to the north of Australia, so we're hoping this will give us some new tools and plans for future procedures and development. ■

**ACTIVITIES OVER THE NEXT TWO MONTHS:**

- > wet season maintenance and maintaining and monitoring water sources
- > permanent staff take holidays in rotation and we'll recruit staff for 2020
- > budgeting and planning.

✉ Jane Sale  
E: jane.sale@bigpond.com

🖥 Visit: [rabobank.com/en](https://rabobank.com/en) and search 'Global Farmers Master Class'



Image: Stephanie Coombes

**SNAPSHOT:****Andrew Mitchell,**

Mintaro, SA

**Area:**

3,300ha over several properties, plus 300ha leased

**Enterprise:**

Dual-purpose Merinos, cropping and wine grapes

**Livestock:**

6,000 sheep, including 3,200 Merino ewes

**Pasture:**

Native pastures, sown cereals, ryegrass and white clover

**Soil:**

Heavy red-brown clay, some chocolate brown earth

**Rainfall:**

600mm

## Andrew Mitchell

**SEASONAL CHALLENGES:**

It's not as good as it could be, but it's better than other places. We cut more hay this year than we planned to earlier in the season, because some of the crops didn't fill as well as we thought they would.

**WHAT'S ON OUR PLATE:**

We have two separate blocks at Black Springs and Mintaro. After lambing at Black Springs, the ewes started to run out of feed, so we moved them back towards Mintaro to the higher-rainfall country, where we weaned the lambs. The ewes were then crutched and sent back out to the Black Springs block. The lambs went onto the clover and ryegrass pastures or onto lucerne at Mintaro. Because they're nearly all Merinos, we'll hold them all through to March. We'll shear

them and send them off around April or May.

A lot of people were quitting sheep towards the end of the year because they didn't want to feed them, but we're in a slightly different position because we have lucerne and crop stubbles as a feed option. We'll have to start feeding them, but probably not until around February or March. We will put the rams in with the ewes in February, for an August lambing. We will also prepare our autumn-lambing ewes and get them settled into their paddocks before they start lambing in April.

We will shear our wether lambs in February ahead of selling them in March, after they have been finished in the feedlot or on bean stubbles. ■

**ACTIVITIES OVER THE NEXT TWO MONTHS:**

- > shearing
- > monitoring stock through summer
- > selling lambs.

✉ Andrew Mitchell  
E: aandkmitchell@bigpond.com



*The Mitchells' ewe lambs were weaned onto ryegrass and clover pastures.*

# Meet the best of the best

Beef producers from across Australia were recently honoured at the 2019 Meat Standards Australia (MSA) Excellence in Eating Quality Awards. Hosted by MLA, the awards recognise producers who have achieved outstanding compliance rates and eating quality performance, as represented by MSA Index results for MSA-graded cattle during 2017–18 and 2018–19.

Here, we take a look at how two of the award winners are producing MSA-compliant cattle.

## Low-stress handling key to win

**F**or Victorian beef producer Richard Nessler, the key to producing the best eating quality beef lies in the low-stress handling of his cattle.

But handling is just one of the factors Richard (pictured) considers in his commitment to the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) program, introduced to his Port Campbell grazing business three years ago when he started supplying to the JBS Farm Assurance Program.

Richard won the 2019 MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Most Outstanding Beef Producer Award for Victoria for Band 2 producers (producers consigning smaller volumes). He achieved 97.8% MSA compliance and an average MSA Index of 64.12.

Richard is also a helicopter pilot along the Great Ocean Road, but when it comes to his livestock he takes a slower approach and enjoys spending time in the paddock, checking on the cattle and moving them gently around the farm.

“Low-stress stock handling is important to me. I’m generally the only one who works the cattle, quietly by myself, without dogs or motorbikes,” Richard said.

“Keeping the herd together as a consignment lot at least a month before they’re sent to the abattoirs is also important, so they all know each other and there’s no fighting among the mob.”

Richard said while stress has a big influence on beef eating quality, it’s just one part of the story that contributes to producing a high-quality, natural, grassfed beef product.

“For a finishing business, it’s critical to start with the right animal,” he said.

**“I deal directly with producers with strong breeding programs, so I know I’m going to turn off a guaranteed product at the end of the day.”**

He purchases purebred Angus cattle between nine and 12 months old and grows them out until they’re finished.

“Producing a quality animal that meets compliance does revolve around certain genetics and breeds.”

Nutrition also plays a part in turning off high-quality beef for the pasture-fed program run by JBS.

“It’s about matching the head count to the pasture we have available, depending on the season.”

Richard uses rotational grazing to get optimum growth out of the pastures and maintains soil fertility with fertiliser applications throughout the year and weed management.

Richard said MSA is a great reference tool and he advises other producers to “get on board”.

“MSA is well worth the effort. The rewards are there financially and there are lots of incentives by abattoirs to meet compliance. You’re getting more money in your back pocket at the end of the day,” Richard said. ■

### SNAPSHOT:

**Richard Nessler,**  
Port Campbell, Victoria



**Area:**  
150ha (two properties)


**Enterprise:**  
Beef

**Livestock:**  
200 Angus steers

**Pasture:**  
Perennial ryegrass/  
clover mix

**Soil:**  
Variable, ranging from  
light sand with underlying  
heavy clay

**Rainfall:**  
900mm

 Richard Nessler  
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com.au

### LESSONS LEARNED

- > Low-stress stock handling affects eating quality.
- > Quality beef begins with quality genetics.

# MSA drives business decisions

**N**orthern NSW beef producers Tom and Cathy Amey have spent almost 20 years refining their breeding herd based on feedback from Meat Standards Australia (MSA).

One of their calculated changes has been switching from Charolais to Murray Grey sires over their composite cows, which are half-Brahman and a quarter each of Murray Grey and Friesian.

This move delivered the extra carcase fat cover needed to more reliably hit MSA grading, without significantly denting weight gains.

Business decisions such as these saw Tom and Cathy receive the 2019 MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Award for Most Outstanding MSA Producer in NSW for Band 2 (producers consigning smaller volumes).

The Ameys achieved 100% compliance to MSA requirements and an average MSA Index of 63.15 across 2017–2019.

## Compliance

Ever since Tom became a registered MSA producer in 2000, he's drawn on MSA feedback sheets to steadily grow his beef operation's profitability.

"MSA keeps me focused on quality. It helps with the selection of cattle I breed from and the feed choices I make to finish my yearlings," Tom said.

The Ameys turn weaners off at 9.5–10.5 months, average carcase weight of about 210kg. Most go to McCaughey Meats in Casino.

Calves are given access to a custom-mix grain ration on a creep-feed basis two months before they're processed, a relatively minor cost that is repaid in extra weight gain and finish. Tom said it gives him the benefit of a carcase that has some grain input.

"The calves have done most of their



Tom Amey (right) and his son Callum.

growing but the grain helps finish them off as the mother's milk supply starts to drop off," he said.

Tom also places a strong emphasis on temperament and low-stress stock handling techniques, which can influence pH levels at the time of slaughter.

"The mothers of these yearlings are half-Brahman. If you have Brahman cattle you become a good stock handler because you have to appreciate them and take cues from them – they can be brilliant to handle or they can be very difficult," Tom said.

"I muster with my ute, but usually it's as simple as driving into a paddock, calling out and they run to the front gate – it's something I've trained them to do.

"When I have the yearlings in the yards waiting for the truck, I have a trough there and they have access to a ration that they've been eating from feeders out in the paddock.

**"It's about consistency and keeping the animals as calm as possible."**

Tom said there's a lot for producers to gain by being part of the MSA program, as it helps drive business decisions and profitability.

"You have to be across all the key areas: to be profitable you need an animal that has a sufficient growth rate, has the ability to finish under the conditions you've got them and a good temperament. MSA provides you with feedback to help manage this," Tom said.

"If producers can make business decisions based on MSA compliance, they're going to be winners." ■

✉ Tom Amey  
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💻 For more information about MSA, visit: [mla.com.au/msa](http://mla.com.au/msa)

To look at your own carcase feedback and use the MSA Index calculator, visit: [mymsa.com.au](http://mymsa.com.au)

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > Use MSA feedback to guide breeding and feeding decisions.
- > Temperament and low-stress stock handling influence pH levels at the time of slaughter.
- > Maintain consistency and keep animals calm by providing the same ration in the yards as they receive in the paddock.

## SNAPSHOT: Tom and Cathy Amey, Dyraba and Mummulgum, NSW



**Area:**  
600ha  
across two  
properties

**Enterprise:**  
Beef cattle

**Livestock:**  
700 composite  
cattle

**Pasture:**  
Range from Rhodes  
grass, paspalum,  
kikuyu, clover, siratro  
and glycine, winter  
forage program  
(ryegrass and oats)

**Soil:**  
Range from  
alluvial soil flats  
to silty loam and  
clay loam hills

**Rainfall:**  
1,000mm



MARKET INFORMATION 

# Inside Vietnam's supply chain

## SNAPSHOT: Dan Lynch

'Tara', Cloncurry, Queensland

'Stapleton', Katherine, NT



**Area:**  
20,000ha

**Area:**  
160,000ha

**Enterprise:**  
Brahman and Brangus breeding operation, steers grown out to feeder weights

**Enterprise:**  
Brahman breeding operation, steers grown out to live export feeder weights

**Livestock:**  
1,400 breeders (normally 2,000)

**Livestock:**  
3,000 breeders

**Pasture:**  
Mitchell, Flinders, blue, button, feathertop grasses

**Pasture:**  
Mitchell, plume sorghum, ribbon, kangaroo, silky browntop, cockatoo, desert bluegrass, soft spinifex, native couch, pigeon, purple spike, annual sorghum and wanderrie

**Soil:**  
Black, red, self-mulching clay, pulled gidgee country

**Soil:**  
Deep red clay loams, red sandy and gravelly desert soils, ironstone ridges and hills

**Rainfall:**  
400mm

**Rainfall:**  
860mm

**A**ccording to northern beef producer Dan Lynch, Vietnam – Australia's second largest live cattle export market – has huge potential for producers if key supply chain challenges can be overcome.

Dan (pictured), who recently visited Vietnamese feedlots and processing plants to provide a producer's perspective of the market, said Australia is in the box seat to capitalise on the developing nation's growing protein demand.

However, unless significant supply chain challenges are met (particularly in Vietnamese feedlots), he's concerned Australian beef could "miss the boat".

One such challenge is optimising carcass value to increase profits, rather than just cutting production costs.

"Labour and feed are cheap; it costs about one-third of what it costs in Australia to lot-feed cattle for 90 to 100 days, and they have processors capable of producing high-quality product. However, locally, there's resistance to change," Dan said.

Dr Michael Patching, MLA's Livestock Services Manager Asia Pacific, said his team is working with local representatives in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to

encourage the Vietnamese supply chain to 'mature' and benefit Australian producers.

"Vietnam has a fast-growing economy, an expanding appetite for consistent, quality product and a protein vacuum caused by African swine fever," Michael said.

He explained that, to take advantage of this, his team is working on identifying the barriers to change and creating a point of difference for Australian cattle.

Michael and Dan agreed that, while the challenges posed by Vietnam's small farming and trading systems are significant, they do present some opportunities.

"Locally produced animals are different shapes and sizes – there's no commercial production or consistency of supply, compared to Australian cattle at a consistent quality and price," Michael said.

Other key threats are animal welfare, keeping animals inside the supply chain, and competition from Brazil, which looks likely to enter the live export market.

Dan is an advocate of the adage, 'you can't manage what you can't measure'. He believes guiding the use of scales and measuring live weight gain in feedlots may be the key to unlocking more opportunity.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > Vietnam is a fast-growing economy with an expanding appetite for quality beef, but there are challenges.
- > Measuring live weight gain in Vietnamese feedlots would demonstrate economic benefits of longer feed programs.
- > Longer feed programs could enable northern Australia to export year-round.

“We’ve seen this work so well in Indonesia and other Asian countries. There’s no reason why it couldn’t work here,” he said.

He said new opportunities could also open up for northern Australia to supply year-round, rather than only from the wet season to June, if Vietnam’s feedlots could extend the length of time cattle are on feed.

“It’s pretty much impossible to have fat cattle past June in northern Australia unless they source them from southern Queensland, and then the added transport costs begin to make us uncompetitive.

“Vietnam’s price tolerance for slaughter cattle is US\$3/kg landed. If we exceed that, they look for other options within Asia or elsewhere.”

Despite the challenges Dan saw first-hand, he encouraged industry to support MLA’s effort in Vietnam.

“It will take time to develop but the market there has huge potential,” he said.

Read more about MLA’s activities in Vietnam on page 48. ■

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## INVASIVE SPECIES

# Reporting back on rabbits

**O**ver the next few editions, *Feedback* is putting the spotlight on invasive animals and the tools available to help manage them.

First up is rabbits. To ensure a coordinated approach to ethical pest control, MLA’s investment in rabbit management is largely through its support of the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions.

### Industry action

Australia has invested in successful rabbit biocontrol programs for more than 70 years, with benefits estimated at \$70 billion. The program evolution has included:

- 1950 – release of myxoma virus
- 1996 – release of first rabbit calicivirus (RHDV1 – Czech strain)
- 2017 – release of calicivirus (RHDV1 K5 – Korean strain)
- 2018 – investigation of exotic calicivirus strain (RHDV2 – discovered in Australia in 2015) and its potential to complement and boost impact of existing strains.

Biological control is by far the most cost-effective large-scale management option to stay on the front foot with rabbit control, but it can’t be relied on in isolation.

The viruses and their hosts constantly co-evolve, so conventional control methods (baiting, warren ripping, fumigation, shooting and trapping) are also needed for long-term results.

Biocontrol is best timed for around February and March, as there are more vectors to transmit the disease and fewer young rabbits, which are less susceptible to the disease. For more information on planning your rabbit control strategy, download PestSmart’s *Glovebox Guide for Managing Rabbits* (see ‘tools and resources’ on right).

### Report your rabbits

Producers are encouraged to record and map rabbit activity, plus on-farm and community control activities, via the rabbit section of the FeralScan app or website.

This will help improve the effectiveness of future control programs.

The RabbitScan website or app can also be used to report evidence of potential rabbit disease in your area via the Rabbit Biocontrol Tracker.

If you find a dead rabbit you suspect has died from a virus, record the details on the app, request a sample kit, then freeze the dead rabbit until the kit arrives.

This will help researchers understand how viruses are spreading and which ones are proving most effective in your area, providing valuable information to help them get the most out of current and potential biocontrol agents. ■

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📄 Centre for Invasive Species Solutions: [invasives.com.au](http://invasives.com.au)

### Tools and resources

1. RabbitScan app and website, including the Rabbit Biocontrol Tracker: [feralscan.org.au/rabbitscan](http://feralscan.org.au/rabbitscan)
2. For tips on improving your rabbit control, visit: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search ‘how to use RabbitScan’
3. PestSmart has a rabbit control toolkit at: [pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/european-rabbit](http://pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/european-rabbit)
4. Download PestSmart’s *Glovebox Guide for Managing Rabbits* to help plan your rabbit control strategy: [pestsmart.org.au](http://pestsmart.org.au) and search ‘glovebox guide’



# Tools for healthier soils

**P**roducers are getting their hands dirty learning how to diagnose and manage soil and pasture health issues in a new feedbase project.

Through the MLA-funded project, 11 'Healthy Soils Club' groups across southern Australia are investigating challenges such as soil acidity, waterlogging and soil variation so producers can prioritise investment.

Project coordinator Lisa Miller from Southern Farming Systems said the program gives groups the freedom to design their own activities around specific soil issues.

"Producers choose their topics of interest then the group facilitators bring in technical experts to support them to develop skills and test solutions in the paddock," Lisa said.

Although the Healthy Soils Club is a pilot project under MLA's Feedbase Adoption Plan, MLA Project Manager Mick Taylor said strong interest means the program will continue in the south

and will be rolled out further north.

"When we launched the project, we were over-subscribed, so MLA will be making a second call in 2020," Mick said.

Groups are expected to get together about six times over two years and, at the end of the project, Mick said members could move into the coaching-based Profitable Grazing Systems soil decision-making course.

## Tools

The Healthy Soils Club project will develop a tool for producers to assess soil condition, using visual indicators.

This guide will outline more than 40 common soil conditions as well as common weed species, so producers can assess their own paddock and identify the best time to manage soil health and what tests are available to confirm each condition.

Other resources include case studies explaining how Healthy Soil Club members are managing soils (page 35). Each club will host field days which non-members can attend. ■

## Feedbase future-proofing

The Healthy Soils Clubs are part of MLA's feedbase program, which began with the \$22 million Feedbase Investment Plan 2013–17.

This program included extensive collaboration with producers through research sites designed to improve livestock productivity.

In late 2016, MLA brought participants together to map out a strategy for driving adoption of all that had been learned as part of the Feedbase Investment Plan; the result was the Feedbase Adoption Plan, which officially began in 2018.

The Feedbase Adoption Plan

comprises awareness activities, training and supported learning programs across four areas:

- soil health
- pasture weeds
- plant nitrogen (specifically sub-clover management in southern areas)
- pasture persistence.

Phase 1 of the plan is underway and includes activities such as the Healthy Soils Club project.

Phase 2, for northern Australia, is in development and will expand on the key areas identified in the southern model. ■

## RESEARCH IN REVIEW

### PROJECT NAME

The Healthy Soils Package

### RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

Southern Farming Systems, overseeing 11 soil discussion groups:

Meningie – Field Livestock & Pasture Group; Agriculture Kangaroo Island; Holbrook Landcare Network; Tableland Farming Systems; Coolac Farmers Group; Flinders Island Productivity Group; Tamar Natural Resource Management; Perennial Pasture Systems; Grassland Society of Southern Australia – Goulburn Broken Branch; Southern Farming Systems – Gippsland branch; Cavendish BestWool/BestLamb/Pasture Tech/Hamilton SFS Branch

### FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

MLA

### GOAL

To provide practical information and actions to producers and advisors on managing common soil issues impacting pasture production.

### BUDGET

\$446,950

### DURATION

October 2018 – December 2022

### KEY FINDINGS TO DATE

- Poster of visual indicators of soil condition developed.
- Seven of 11 pilot soil discussion groups commenced.

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Lisa Miller  
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📺 More Beef from Pastures, module 2: pasture growth  
[mbfp.mla.com.au](http://mbfp.mla.com.au)

# Soils for the future

**T**asmanian beef producers **Tim and Katherine Reed** are seeing the rewards from an increased but more targeted investment in soil management.

It's part of their commitment to leaving a healthier farm for their young sons, and was a motivation to join the Tamar Natural Resource Management Healthy Soils discussion group as part of an MLA pilot project (page 34).

The Reeds (pictured) bought 'Wenlock', 25km north-west of Launceston, five and a half years ago and are halfway through a farm pasture renovation.

Their challenges include managing high soil variation across the property and waterlogging in some paddocks in winter.

"We joined the soils group for a better understanding of what we've got, how to utilise it the best we can and how to look after it," Tim said.

"We have two boys and we want to be able to pass on something healthier than what we started with."

Wenlock is among 18 properties represented in their local Healthy Soils discussion group. Tim has taken part in four farm visits to date, including hosting a public field day at Wenlock.

"The field day focused on the issues we have managing variation, and looked at property mapping and fencing plans to help mitigate it," Tim said.

"We looked at three adjacent paddocks that all exhibit different soil characteristics, plus one paddock that has completely different pH and nutrient levels from one side to the other, even though it's been treated exactly the same for the past five years."

## Management changes

Tim and Katherine have already made a couple of management changes as a result of what they've learned in the group.

"We've doubled the amount of soil sampling we do and are now using a variable-rate fertiliser application," he said.

"We're still building up our nutrient levels, so rates are fairly high, but rather than a blanket amount across the property, we're considerably reducing rates on some parts."

For example, on some paddocks he now applies 300kg/ha of fertiliser (NPK 0:6:17) on one side of the paddock and only 200–250kg on the other.

"The extra soil sampling is expensive, but our aim is to keep nutrients at desirable levels so we don't develop toxicity problems." ■

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📄 MLA's 'Five Easy Steps' phosphorus tool:  
[mla.com.au/ptool](http://mla.com.au/ptool)

More Beef from Pastures:  
[mbfp.mla.com.au](http://mbfp.mla.com.au)

**SNAPSHOT:**  
**Tim and Katherine Reed, 'Wenlock', Launceston**



**Area:**  
93ha

**Enterprise:**  
Self-replacing beef cattle and forestry

**Livestock:**  
50 Angus breeders

**Pasture:**  
Improved pastures with a mix of about 10 species of grasses and legumes

**Soil:**  
Sandy loam, ironstone gravel, black silty river flats

**Rainfall:**  
750–800mm

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > Soil microbial activity is important for farm productivity.
- > You can visually assess your pasture but what is happening underneath is what really matters.





# Fine-tuning skills

**M**LA has supported the careers of 19 emerging livestock consultants over the past five years, and now two new programs are opening up opportunities for existing livestock professionals.

Here's a look at the programs which form part of MLA's strategy to ensure producers can easily access expert knowledge and advice relating to research outcomes:

## 1. Livestock Advisor Updates

Livestock Advisor Updates are regionally relevant, one-day technical workshops held Australia-wide. The workshops help livestock advisors, leading producers and professional extension consultants to:

- learn about the latest red meat research and development issues
- gain skills, tools and knowledge to increase their value to clients
- network with their peers.

Three Livestock Advisor Updates were delivered by Macquarie Franklin in Brisbane, Sydney and Perth late last year.

Extension professionals and producers, including representatives from MLA's Regional Consultation groups, helped develop the programs to ensure content was relevant and timely.

Feedback from the first round of events will be used to help build the 2020 program, which will feature four updates in regional locations.

## 2. Red meat Industry Professionals Program (RIPPer)

RIPPer, a new national pilot program, connects MLA-funded research and development outcomes (such as information and tools) with the people who can use them to improve the profitability and sustainability of red meat businesses.

Livestock advisors, agronomists, agents and extension officers contributed to RIPPer through a survey to identify what they need to better service producers.

MLA will use this information to engage with advisors, help boost their skills and build their knowledge.

## 3. Support for new consultants

As well as experienced industry professionals, MLA also supports the Livestock Consulting Internship program, which is designed to equip emerging livestock consultants with the practical skills and networks needed to accelerate their careers.

The program is a partnership between MLA Donor Company and participating consulting firms, managed by Meridian Agriculture.

MLA project manager Clara Bradford said the program was established to help address the decline in public sector extension services, removing some of the financial and time-constraint barriers private firms face in training young staff and, as a result, boosting the number of new livestock consultants.

"The interns already have technical skills in agricultural science or agribusiness training.

"By providing intensive training in the 'soft' skills of consulting – communication, relationship building, people management and so on – and helping interns establish networks, the program fast-tracks their development."

Round 3 of the program begins in February and includes a new secondment strategy designed to fill skills gaps identified by participating employers. Interns will go to another business or organisation for four weeks to gain extra skills. ■

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🗨 **MLA professional development programs:**  
Livestock Advisor Updates:  
[mla.com.au/advisor-updates](http://mla.com.au/advisor-updates)  
Livestock Consulting Internship:  
[meridian-ag.com.au/lci3](http://meridian-ag.com.au/lci3)  
[mla.com.au/rural-professionals](http://mla.com.au/rural-professionals)

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# Fast-tracking an invaluable network

**T**ara Graetz was set on becoming an agriculture teacher before she took part in a university work placement that introduced her to the world of agribusiness consulting.

Tara (pictured) works for SA-based consultancy Rural Directions and was part of the second class of interns to complete MLA's Livestock Consulting Internship program.

Tara was studying agriculture at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, when she heard about the program.

"This program is invaluable for anyone with an interest in developing their career as a consultant in the livestock space," Tara said.

"It allowed me to build my skills and knowledge in consulting, as well as my network.

"I now have great contacts within MLA and with the other interns and their employers.

"To have established those networks and relationships on our own would have taken years and years, but we were able to pack it into two." ■

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# Bridging the research gap



Brett Smith is a firm believer in using the tools/resources available to improve management and boost profitability.

**Q** ueensland livestock producers are set to see the benefits from a new project linking research outcomes and best practice management to improve on-farm profitability.

Delivered by a partnership between MLA Donor Company and Elders, the three-year pilot project will provide producers with easier access to MLA's research outcomes, tools and resources and could pave the way for similar programs nationally.

St George producer and

Elders Walgett branch manager Brett Smith (pictured) can see the advantages from all sides.

He not only understands first-hand how his family's wool and sheepmeat enterprise will be in a better drought-recovery position if they use as many MLA resources as possible, but also sees how this information can benefit others.

"Livestock and merchandise agents have very close relationships with clients. We're not only sounding boards for their ideas, we also provide guidance on marketing options and production advice to help

them meet those markets," he said.

"By upskilling these roles, we'll be able to share valuable research outcomes and business management strategies to help people who can really benefit from them.

"From a livestock perspective, I hope we can help more people to fast-track their drought recovery to take maximum advantage of the strong restocker demand we expect to follow."

## Fodder for thought

Brett said the Elders project was already kicking goals with wool and sheep producers, who are using MLA resources and workshops to:

- improve ewe reproduction rates
- condition-score more accurately
- match key production events with feed availability
- improve reproduction rates
- encourage better utilisation of fodder crops.

"On our family farm, which is fairly typical for the area, we've made significant production and profit gains by planting fodder crops," he said.

"Historically, we grew dryland crops, but over the years our rainfall has proven too unreliable, so we've invested our time, energy and resources

into planting fodder crops to improve our wool and sheepmeat production."

The Smiths sow 120–170ha of forage oats during March and April, planting a mix of proven and new varieties.

These paddocks become the gifts that keep on giving. They're grazed by ewes and lambs after lamb marking in early June, by weaner lambs in July, and wethers are also finished on them to capture high out-of-season mutton prices in July.

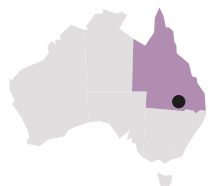
"From a pasture-management perspective, these crops also allow us to rest our grazing country through running higher stocking rates on smaller areas.

"Any kind of rain or moisture is so precious here, we've got to do something with it, and fodder crops are a great way of making use of it," he said. ■

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🖥️ Making More From Sheep  
[makingmorefromsheep.com.au](http://makingmorefromsheep.com.au)  
More Beef from Pastures:  
[mbfp.mla.com.au](http://mbfp.mla.com.au)  
MLA's EDGE network:  
[mla.com.au/edge](http://mla.com.au/edge)  
Feed budget and rotation planner:  
[mla.com.au/feedbudget](http://mla.com.au/feedbudget)

## SNAPSHOT: Brett Smith, St George, Queensland



**Area:**  
417ha

**Enterprise:**  
Wool and sheepmeat

**Livestock:**  
1,000 Merino ewes; 2,500 Merino wethers

**Pasture:**  
Predominantly buffel, as well as native remnant vegetation

**Soil:**  
Red loam with stony ridges

**Rainfall:**  
525mm

# Match-making pasture grows business



Matt Nield believes producers learn best by taking advantage of the experience and knowledge of others.

Image: Caroline Telfer

**Improved carcase compliance and better feedbase production are two of the clear outcomes WA's Matt Nield and Emma Pinnick have gained from MLA's Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) training.**

According to Matt, if producers aren't always learning, they're not going forward. He believes one of the best ways to learn is to take advantage of the experience and knowledge of others.

The couple run a self-replacing flock at Karridale near Augusta and recently completed the Grazing Matcher™ program through PGS. They're now part way through the Benchmarking for Profit and Production program.

### Continuous improvement

Matt and Emma have taken a strategic approach since setting up their business from scratch five years ago. Their business plan focuses on building resilience and continually improving performance.

The desire for resilience led to them participating in Grazing Matcher, an initiative of animal production advisor Jeisane Accioly, who partnered with former dairy researcher Martin Staines and agronomist Dan Parnell to help producers improve grazing management and business performance.

Matt said the collaborative nature of the 12-month program was exceptionally valuable.

"The way the training was structured as group and one-on-one learning – including going to other participants' farms and discussing what has worked for others – was a big benefit because it allowed me to get the most value for the investment and time I was putting in," Matt said.

"When you spend money to go and do something like this, you want to get the best return."

### Grass management

Grazing Matcher supports producers to match grazing inputs with outputs and, through skills-based learning, helps participants set a strategy using feed budgeting. This strategy is established by monitoring and managing pastures and animal condition.

Producers also learn skills for farm mapping, seeding, applying fertiliser, making

seasonal adjustments, understanding the cost of production and improving market compliance.

Matt said he came away with stronger skills to better manage their grass through strategic rotational grazing.

"Before, we were hit and miss – we'd shift sheep in a haphazard fashion with no science behind those decisions.

"Now we look at plant growth rather than food on offer to make decisions. Plant growth is measured through leaf stage. We graze at three leaf, then let it return to that stage before grazing again."

Matt said after implementing strategic grazing, their wool cut was up, lambs were 2kg heavier at weaning and there was more grass later in the season.

"All this was achieved in a year when we were feeding at lambing, which is usually unheard of. Last year's break came seven weeks after the average time," he said.

"While we consider this a very good result, we take the view this is not something you do in just one year, but rather is gradually implemented over time, as there is capital expenditure involved, so the benefits will be ongoing."

## SNAPSHOT: Matt Nield and Emma Pinnick, Karridale, WA



**Area:**  
530ha  
leased

**Enterprise:**  
Wool and  
prime lambs

**Livestock:**  
6,500 Merino ewes and  
wethers (2,000 joined to  
Merino sires; 2,000 joined  
to Poll Dorset sires)

**Pasture:**  
Ryegrass  
and clover

**Soil:**  
Variable –  
sandy, gravel  
and karri loam

**Rainfall:**  
950mm  
(800  
growing  
season)

### The bottom line

Matt and Emma are now working through the PGS Benchmarking for Profit and Production program, delivered by Ed Riggall of AgPro Management.

This program supports producers to build skills to:

- identify current livestock business goals
- create future business goals and allow scenario planning
- understand and complete the benchmarking process and results
- use comparative analysis data to identify goals, strengths and weaknesses
- identify and understand what high-performing businesses are doing, and how it can be incorporated into their own business.

Four groups have completed the program in WA, with another five currently undertaking the program.

“We’re looking to find out what we’re doing well, what we can do better and basically where the holes in our system might be,” Matt said.

**“We want to be putting effort, time and money into what will actually make more money.”**

“It’s not so much about comparing ourselves

with others, but finding where we have scope to improve, based on years of information collected.”

For example, Matt and Emma recently decided to carry Merino wethers through to two-and-a-half years old to increase stocking rates and productivity. This also builds in a buffer for tough seasons, as they can off-load dry sheep first. ■

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🖥 Profitable Grazing Systems:  
[mla.com.au/pgs](http://mla.com.au/pgs)  
Making More From Sheep:  
[makingmorefromsheep.com.au](http://makingmorefromsheep.com.au)

### LESSONS LEARNED

- > If you’re not always learning, you’re not going forward.
- > Gradual, long-term change drives sustained benefits.
- > Don’t focus on the 1% – put effort, time and money into what will actually make more money.



Image: Caroline Telfer

## The complete package

**Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) is MLA’s innovative platform for producer learning. Using a coaching model, it takes small groups of producers through the development and practise of skills, focusing on improving performance.**

The program can be delivered in two ways by a coach:

- using an MLA-approved pre-existing package (such as Pasture Principles or Lifting Lamb Survival)
- developing a training package which aligns with the PGS core curriculum and offers measurable skills development and outcomes.

PGS programs cover the specific needs of groups of producers and can cover genetics and reproduction, the value chain, feedbase or people and business management.

Each program is:

- whole-farm focused, to drive improved profitability, productivity, sustainability, efficiency and social outcomes
- flexible, and can be managed in response to the group’s needs, location and conditions; delivery is generally a mix of small group learning and one-to-one coaching, and uses formats including on-farm workshops, webinars and telephone hook-ups
- a user-pays model, with part-funding for producers from MLA
- designed to bring together like-minded producers and experienced coaches.

### How do I get involved?

Get in touch with your state coordinator to find out what packages are being delivered in your area or how you can get involved.

#### Queensland

Jill Alexander  
E: [jillalexander@bigpond.com](mailto:jillalexander@bigpond.com)

#### NSW

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#### Victoria

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#### Tasmania

Leanne Sherriff  
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#### WA (south)

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Rebecca Mohr-Bell  
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# SUPPLY CHAIN

DELIVERING VALUE

## Sniffing out new markets

**C**onsumers around the world are starting to rethink the humble tin of pet food.

Now, they're demanding quality, fresh, raw ingredients for their furry friends, presenting a growing opportunity for Australia's red meat industry.

Pet food isn't a new category of use for red meat, but it's underrated and under-valued, according to Michael Lee, MLA Donor Company Manager of High Value Food Frontiers (pictured below).

"Now's the time to reimagine pet food to benefit Australian producers," Michael said.

A project funded by the MLA Donor Company has identified new opportunities for the red meat industry to capture value not currently capitalised on by local producers and brand owners.

"Pets are increasingly seen as part of the family," Michael said.

"People want their dog or cat to be given the best – perhaps eating better than they do themselves."

Some pet food costs more than \$50/kg.

The MLA research found that, globally, the pet food market is projected to reach a value of US\$128.4 billion by 2024, growing at a rate of 4.5% from 2019 to 2024.

The Australian market is also expected to grow from US\$2.4 billion to US\$2.8 billion at 4.6% annually through to 2023.

"We wanted to search for high-value opportunities for red meat within the pet food market segment," Michael said.

"This means understanding the changing consumer and seeing opportunities where we can win with Australian red meat.

"Consumers increasingly want to live sustainably and they want their pets to do the same. Food waste has a big role to play here."

Michael said there's no conflict between providing food for humans and providing food for pets.

Despite a recognised protein shortage and the problem of food waste, these factors combine to create an opportunity to upcycle products by blending low-value cuts with food waste to make pet products.

"Products that don't qualify as food-grade products for human consumption can be used to make pet food products at increased value and in premium formats that the pet owner relates to," he said.

"There's untapped potential in pet food categories within Australia and internationally – we need to now look at product and business model innovations to succeed."



## RESEARCH IN REVIEW

### PROJECT NAME

Pet Food Insights2Innovation Review

### RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

MLA

### FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

MLA

### GOAL

To identify new high-value opportunities for the Australian red meat industry in the pet food market.

### BUDGET

\$72,500

### DURATION

May 2019 – October 2019

### KEY FINDINGS TO DATE

- The pet food market is growing at more than 4% a year.
- Consumers demand raw and fresh pet food products with 'real' ingredients that are free of preservatives and synthetic additives.
- Companies who are willing to build rapid prototypes and pursue new ventures stand to benefit most.

Just as MLA market insights have identified 'ageing consumers' as a growing market for red meat consumption, ageing pets could also drive purchasing trends.

"Pets are living longer, which presents opportunities. For example, a high-protein supplement for older dogs with arthritic joints has been developed using hides that were previously wasted."

Michael said finding and capitalising on opportunities such as this is a step towards bringing increased market share to Australian red meat producers. It is also a step towards new value chains to grow red meat demand. ■

✉ Michael Lee  
E: [mlee@mla.com.au](mailto:mlee@mla.com.au)

📄 MLA Insights2Innovation pet food report  
[mla.com.au/petfood](http://mla.com.au/petfood)

# FINE DINING FOR PETS

## Is there a place for Australian red meat in the US's premium pet food market?

Michael Lee, MLA Donor Company Manager of High Value Food Frontiers, posed this question to a Chicago-based pet food company that is making waves.

Shameless Pets is tapping into a specific demographic within the huge US premium pet food market that has potential for ethically produced Australian red meat (page 40).

"Our point of differentiation is around sustainability," Shameless Pets founder and director James Bello said.

"Fighting food waste is our ultimate mission.

"We go looking for ingredients that aren't being used – ones that were going to landfill or compost – and we 'rescue' those ingredients and upcycle them to healthy pet food that meets key attributes for animal health."

Shameless Pets is a new company but is on track to be in 2,500 retail stores by January 2020, as well as online through its own e-commerce site and Amazon.

MLA and Shameless Pets are working together on a two-part project.

"Firstly, we're testing the value proposition of Australian red meat in the American pet food market – what does the consumer think of it?" James said.

"The other part of the project is developing new products, which has us rethinking where potential waste points are in the processing chain."

The project has already seen new products containing Australian red meat.

Shameless Pets developed a new treat flavour, Beef and Reef, containing Australian beef.

In December, the biggest month for pet treat sales in the US, 5,000 packs of Beef and Reef were distributed through subscription boxes. These boxes of pet food treats are ordered online and delivered to customers once a month.

As well as featuring the Australian flag, the Beef and Reef packaging incorporates questions asking the purchaser what they think of Australian meat, providing a survey component to guide the project.

Within the next months, the results of this market test and survey will be collated, which could well open a whole new suite of opportunities for Australian red meat. ■

## RESEARCH IN REVIEW

### PROJECT NAME

MLA TERRA Corporate Accelerator (Food)

### RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

Shameless Pets

### FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

MLA

### GOAL

Test the US premium pet food market's interest and acceptance of Australian red meat.

### BUDGET

\$43,500

### DURATION

May 2019 – March 2020

### KEY FINDINGS TO DATE

- New pet treat being developed ready for distribution in December 2019.

✉ James Bello, Shameless Pets, Chicago, USA  
[james@shamelesspets.com](mailto:james@shamelesspets.com)

📄 [shamelesspets.com](http://shamelesspets.com)

# TOUR TAPS INTO MENA MARKET

**T**he complex, diverse nature of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) sheep markets was brought into focus for a group of WA sheep producers and industry representatives when they toured Qatar, Jordan and United Arab Emirates (UAE) recently.

MLA co-funded the tour, which was part of a WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) project aiming to build resilience in WA wheatbelt farming systems.

DPIRD project manager Tanya Kilminster said the tour, which included seven producers, two DPIRD project members including herself (both also producers), MLA staff and a stock agent, illustrated the diversity and complexity of MENA – a target market for many WA producers.

“The sheep industry in WA is very export-focused and only about 15% of slaughtered sheepmeat is consumed locally,” Tanya said.

“Most of our Merino product is exported to the Middle East but it’s not a homogenous market.

“Qatar markets want lighter, leaner animals but their carcase size is increasing.

“The major importers want to continue live sheep trade with Australia.

“There are issues with getting chilled meat to the markets on a consistent basis due to problems with air freight. We need to look at research and development opportunities to improve shelf life.”

MLA’s Program Manager – Value Chain Research, Development and Adoption, Dr David Beatty, said the MENA sheepmeat market is currently dominated by chilled product (60.7%).

The remainder is made up of frozen meat (28.9%) and live sheep (10.4%).

David said live animals represent an opportunity to market a range of carcasses based on weight and quality.

“The vast majority of food in the region is imported, so the markets crave security of supply and consistency of product,” he said.

David said an unexpected highlight of the tour was discovering how keen consumers were to know where the sheep came from and their affinity for Australian product.

“People we met by chance in supermarkets were genuinely interested and considered Australian sheepmeat to be a high-quality, safe product,” David said.

However, the tour saw Australian sheepmeat sitting alongside Romanian, Welsh and New Zealand product, reinforcing that without consistent supply, customers would look elsewhere to fill demand.

Tanya said she was impressed with the relationships MLA and Australian government agencies have built with the supply chain in the Middle Eastern markets.

“We saw first-hand the value of the work that is being done to open up and build markets,” she said. ■

## RESEARCH IN REVIEW

### PROJECT NAME

Identifying investment opportunities in the sheepmeat supply chain for flexible adaptation of eastern wheatbelt farm businesses

### RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), MLA, Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group, in collaboration with the Far East Agricultural Research Group

### FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

MLA Donor Company, DPIRD and producers

### GOAL

To identify investment opportunities in the sheepmeat supply chain for flexible adaptation of eastern wheatbelt farm businesses.

### BUDGET

\$865,380 (including in-kind contributions)

### DURATION

2016–2019

### KEY FINDINGS TO DATE

- The Middle East is a complex and diverse market which shouldn’t be considered as a whole.
- The market craves sustainable and consistent supply to meet the needs of increasing demand.
- Australia is well regarded as a trusted source of protein in the Middle East.
- MLA’s presence in the Middle East underpins the market’s trust in Australian sheepmeat (and beef) products.

✉ David Beatty  
E: [dbeatty@mla.com.au](mailto:dbeatty@mla.com.au)

🖥️ MLA Middle East and North Africa market snapshot:  
[mla.com.au/MENA](http://mla.com.au/MENA)

Tour members were impressed with the condition of sheep held in Middle Eastern feedlots.  
Image: Tanya Kilminster

WA producer Jessie Davis (left) and agricultural economist Lucy Anderton during the MLA-supported tour of MENA sheepmeat markets.

Image: Tanya Kilminster



# On-ground MENA insights

**W**A sheep producer Jessie Davis has a better understanding of global markets for Australian red meat after she headed to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as part of an MLA-supported industry tour.

Jessie, who runs a mixed enterprise in the wheatbelt with her parents Murray and Vicki Dixon, said there were lots of surprises during the tour.

“The supermarkets in these countries were amazing, with full carcasses on display to purchase and viewing windows into the coolroom, even at the high-end supermarkets.”

Insights such as seeing hundreds of people coming into public meat houses to haggle for carcasses also highlighted unique aspects of the MENA supply chain.

“They seem much more connected to their meat products, but I think we’re starting to see it more here – people are wanting to see more about where their food is coming from,” Jessie said.

As a producer, Jessie was interested to see Australian sheep in feedlots in

the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, along with sheep from other countries, waiting for the cultural festivals of Eid and Ramadan.

These festivals occur on different dates each year, so the culturally significant slaughter times also move. In 2019, Eid fell during the Australian live sheep export ban during the northern summer, so sheep needed to be maintained for three months while waiting for slaughter.

“Dubai and Qatar were hot when we were there so it was timely to go in the middle of summer to experience what our sheep would experience over there.

“They were being fed a maintenance ration and they looked great.”

Jessie said conditions in Jordan were very different, with temperatures only reaching the mid-30s (°C) by day, and cooler overnight. She would like to see more research into how long it would take sheep to recover here, if they travelled through the Gulf when it was hot.

One of the biggest take-home messages for Jessie was the diversity of Australia’s overseas markets, even within the same region.

“Each country needs to be treated differently; each country needs its own parameters and its own conditions. It’s not one market.”

MLA’s Program Manager – Value Chain Research, Development and Adoption, David Beatty, said it was encouraging to see producers take an interest in the whole supply chain.

“They’re taking responsibility for more than just what happens on-farm by understanding how their product is handled and marketed beyond the farm gate,” he said. ■

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > The Middle East and North Africa sheepmeat market is diverse and complex.
- > Consumers are very connected to their food and its origins.
- > Australian sheep in Middle Eastern feedlots were in excellent condition.

✉ Jessie Davis  
E: jessie.davis@zoho.com

## SNAPSHOT: Jessie Davis, Murray and Vicki Dixon, Narembeen, WA



**Area:**  
4,000ha

**Enterprise:**  
Wheat and sheep

**Livestock:**  
1,500 Merino ewes mated to Suffolk rams for prime lamb production

**Pasture:**  
Improved pastures

**Soil:**  
Mixed

**Rainfall:**  
Around 300mm

# WHEN TURF MEETS SURF

**R**ed meat set sail when MLA's Corporate Chef Sam Burke and Retail Training Facilitator Kelly Payne boarded a P&O cruise to help chefs put more beef and lamb on ship menus.

P&O Australia's three ships are floating food destinations, serving around 37,000 meals a day in casual dining outlets and premium restaurants, including celebrity chef Luke Mangan's Salt grill.

"Operators such as P&O influence the meal decisions of consumers, so MLA aims to increase their knowledge and use of quality red meat," Sam said.

Sam and Kelly joined forces with cruise chefs on board the *Pacific Explorer* to present 12 innovative recipes using Australian red meat.

**They served up 2.5 tonnes of beef and lamb to 2,500 passengers during the four-day cruise.**

The workshop gave culinary and restaurant staff basic butchery skills to build their awareness of Meat Standards Australia (MSA) and carcass utilisation, as well as the chance to try new recipes using secondary red meat cuts.

"We usually deliver workshops to chefs who then take the menu inspirations back to their own kitchens, but on this cruise, we worked alongside the culinary team," Sam said.

"It was the ultimate pressure test, as cruise ships are huge floating hotels which face unique challenges when it comes to keeping thousands of passengers well fed."

## Dining out at sea

P&O Australia's Corporate Executive Chef Uwe Stiefel said factors such as cut and cooking method are an important part of menu development on cruises.

"Purchases for cruise ships take months to plan and include a food tender process, product sourcing and testing, as well menu development," he said.

"For example, the grocery list for the *Explorer* has up to 1,400 different food items, so thorough planning is vital to make sure that by the time the ship sets sail, nothing is forgotten and the products are of the right quantity and quality."

He said the new red meat dishes needed to be easily replicated across thousands of meals, using economical cuts such as beef brisket, beef cheeks, beef blade, lamb leg and lamb shoulder, and using cooking methods such as slow braising to maximise yield.

"Having had Sam and Kelly onboard the cruise was an exceptional experience for the culinary and restaurant teams – they learned a lot, including tips and cooking techniques and useful insights about Australian red meat, especially the selected cuts we focused on during the voyage," Uwe said.

Uwe said the red meat dishes introduced as a result of the cruise had a great response and feedback from the guests. For example, passengers devoured 800 Korean beef bao buns and around 1,000 Philly cheesesteak sandwiches during lunch across two days. ■

✉ Sam Burke  
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🖥️ [pocruises.com.au](http://pocruises.com.au)

Here are some insights into what it takes to feed cruise passengers:



The three ships in P&O's fleet (*Pacific Explorer*, *Pacific Aria* and *Pacific Dawn*) serve an average of **37,000 meals a day** to guests.



Daily consumption of red meat on the *Pacific Explorer* alone is around **400kg of beef and 80kg of lamb**, depending on the menu.



In 2019, **350t of beef and 80t of lamb** were consumed on P&O Australia's three ships.



Australian red meat makes up **25–30% of cruise menus**.



The *Pacific Explorer* serves **15,000 meals a day, in 20 restaurants and food outlets**, for up to 2,400 guests and 960 crew, staff and officers.



There are **120 chefs**, including bakers, butchers and pastry chefs, and **50 kitchen hands, plus 150 restaurant staff onboard the three ships**.

## What's for dinner?

As a result of the MLA culinary immersion, the menu on the *Pacific Explorer's* onboard restaurant, *The Pantry*, now features:

- Slow-cooked Texan BBQ beef brisket
- Adobo-style beef cheeks
- Philly cheesesteak sandwich (recipe on page 51)
- Korean beef bao buns
- Beef cheeks bourguignon
- Sichuan-style lamb leg
- Harissa lamb shoulder
- Vietnamese beef and herb salad with tamarind.

# Keeping red meat on menus

You've seen MLA's TV commercials promoting Australian red meat, but what really goes on behind the scenes?

MLA's TV commercials such as 'Australian Beef. The Greatest.' and 'Share the Lamb' are memorable, engaging and drive growth in red meat consumption, but there's more to them than meets the eye.

Beyond the screens is an enormous range of additional brand activities. From foodservice to high-end restaurants, endorsements and sponsorship deals, MLA maximises the value of levy dollars channelled into growing market share.

Meet Graeme Yardy (pictured), MLA's Domestic Marketing Manager, the man tasked with influencing what customers cook, what they eat when they dine out, and generally how red meat is sold.

"Anyone that serves red meat is a customer of ours," Graeme said.

"Customers aren't just the home cook, but are also restaurants, butchers, supermarkets, stadiums, aged-care facilities and catering groups."

With such a wide range of customers, it might be hard to find any commonalities, but Graeme said one persistent challenge his team faces is the perception of red meat's affordability.

"We have to constantly remind people that red meat is worth it," he said.



"It has great nutritional benefits and it delivers on taste, but as the price goes up, you have to keep reminding them, because there are cheaper options."

Graeme is fascinated by how people make decisions about food and what it means to them.

"For some people, food is their life; others are just trying to get it on the table every night. How do we take this huge range of people and satisfy them?"

"My role sets me up to think about the strategies we can use to influence people to eat a good balanced diet, and the team shares this purpose."

"Producers work so hard and take huge risks and, through the work we do, we have a chance to support them."

Turn the page to meet the rest of MLA's Domestic Marketing team and take a look behind the scenes to learn how they keep red meat on tables across Australia. ■

✉ Graeme Yardy  
E: [gyardy@mla.com.au](mailto:gyardy@mla.com.au)

🌐 [australianbeef.com.au](http://australianbeef.com.au)  
[australianlamb.com.au](http://australianlamb.com.au)  
[raremediummag.com](http://raremediummag.com)  
[raremedium.com.au](http://raremedium.com.au)

# The team behind the campaigns

You've watched the ads on TV and you've seen all of the beef and lamb-branded material at the local butcher – but who's behind Australian red meat's campaigns and how do they spend their working weeks? Meet a few members from MLA's Domestic Marketing team.

## BEEF:

**Samantha Warfield-Smith**

MLA Senior Brand Manager – Beef

Price plays a key role when consumers consider their choice of protein, so this year our focus is to show consumers that beef is worth paying more for.

We have wonderful stories about red meat provenance and sustainability, and we collaborate with *Rare Medium* e-magazine and MLA's community engagement team to adapt those stories for consumers.

Through our Australian beef partnership with the Australian Olympic and Paralympic teams, we talk about healthy meal solutions with our athlete ambassadors, who share how they plan and train.

This partnership is about so much more than the Olympics and Paralympics. It aligns so well with our brand purpose, 'to inspire greatness in everyone', and the people responsible for producing an amazing product. It's a fantastic opportunity to talk about beef as part of a healthy, balanced meal and the journey to greatness.

We align our beef campaign with MLA's retail activities to ensure a consistent message.

## LAMB:

**Anna Sharp**

MLA Brand Manager – Lamb

MLA's consumer insights research shows that younger consumers lack confidence when cooking lamb. People also have less time to cook, so convenience and confidence are their main considerations when purchasing.

Reality TV shows such as *MasterChef* have lifted people's expectations about what food should look like and what they should be eating, so we focus on activities to build people's cooking confidence.

For example, MLA's 'Too Easy' spring lamb campaign highlighted different cuts – lamb loin chops, mince for koftas – to showcase versatile, easy recipes. We're seeing good engagement through our TV, outdoor, digital and social media channels.

A new strategy is using broadcast radio and outdoor digital displays near retailers to help inspire consumers to cook confidently with lamb, so we can measure and monitor the results to better understand Australian consumers.

To cut through the 'noise' of advertising, we have to be bold, cheeky and topical, but in a way that's positive and less controversial.

We have to strike a chord and make consumers think. We want them to watch the ads for entertainment value, but also have it spark a conversation and ultimately share lamb.

Our 'New Australia-Land' summer campaign was well received.

NZ's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and actor Russell Crowe commented on the campaign, and Pure NZ created a 'New Australia-Land' tourism campaign in response, which increased PR coverage and extended the conversation.

This campaign won a Bronze Lion award at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity and gained an 11% uplift (almost \$8 million) in sales nationally.



Lamb campaign



Beef campaign

## Consumer journey

From the comfort of home to the local supermarket, MLA campaigns set out to ensure beef and lamb remains 'front of mind' for consumers no matter where they may be throughout the day.

### AT HOME

TV advertisements



Social and digital



### OUT AND ABOUT

Advertisements in shopping centres



**FOODSERVICE:**

**Sam Burke**

**MLA Product & Business Development Manager and Corporate Chef**



*MLA Master Butcher Kelly Payne and MLA's Corporate Chef Sam Burke prepare beef at a MSA Good Food Masterclass.*

I'm MLA's culinary ambassador for Australian red meat, which involves growing demand for our product across the \$5 billion foodservice industry.

These are the pubs, quick service restaurants (QSRs), hotels, commercial catering companies, offices, boarding schools, airlines, cruise ships, football stadiums, aged care – all the big end users that shift substantial volumes of product.

A week for me could involve anything from designing menus to meeting with large organisations to listen to their challenges with keeping red meat on menus, labour and cost of supply. Or, I could be working in the MLA kitchen with corporate chefs or advocating red meat at a field day or conference.

**My proudest moments are working with big QSRs such as The Coffee Club and seeing MLA's dishes advertised on the menu board.**

At the end of the day, producers don't have the capacity to market their product on the scale that MLA can.

Our job is to be the advocate for producers to ensure we continue to get red meat on menus, and I take it very seriously.

**Mary-Jane Morse**

**MLA Foodservice Program Manager**

The foodservice sector is a powerful indicator of global food trends and drives future retail and in-home dining trends, so it's essential we influence the influencers to ensure beef and lamb remain on the plate now and into the future.

In January 2018, we launched the *Rare Medium* e-magazine to communicate directly with foodservice by engaging, educating and inspiring chefs to keep red meat relevant against competitive products.

Each issue hosts a guest chef editor and champions Australian beef and lamb from paddock to plate.

We've had 100,000 users since the launch and 1.5 million views of associated video content. We're well on our way to reaching all of Australia's 300,000 chefs.

But it's not just about educating chefs – the *Rare Medium* program opens

up a channel for conversation and provides unique insights into Australia's top restaurants.

**By influencing the influencers, we ensure red meat remains relevant. We raise its profile and we position ourselves as the trusted source for red meat information.**

Fostering the next generation of foodservice leaders is also a key pillar of the *Rare Medium* program and we work with young chefs to ensure the future of red meat on menus.

**RETAIL:**

**Elisha Moran**

**MLA Shopper Activation Manager**

I work with our beef and lamb brand teams to take the latest MLA consumer data and insights and use them to create sales-boosting programs in the retail sector.

**There are big opportunities for red meat in the convenience space. Everyone is time poor and consumers are looking for ease and convenience when deciding what to have for dinner, especially those Monday to Thursday dinners when most people are looking for easy everyday meals.**

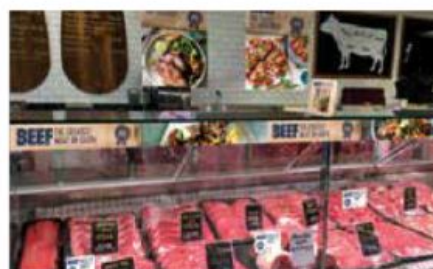
The retail sector has the perfect solutions to this problem: value-added products, cooked meals, mini roasts and seasonal meal kits to suit each customer base. My job is to work with retailers to bring these projects to life and help our customers get the most out of Australia's amazing beef and lamb. ■

**Print campaigns**



**IN STORE**

**Point of sale**



# ADDING VALUE IN VIETNAM



MLA has worked to develop the skills of staff in Vietnam processing plants.

**V**ietnam has become Australia's second largest live cattle market in just five years, presenting some unique challenges – and opportunities – along the way.

Amid consumer concerns around food safety and animal welfare, MLA works alongside importers and processors in Vietnam to create value for both the Vietnamese and Australian beef supply chains.

Dr Michael Patching (pictured), MLA's Manager of Livestock Services in Asia Pacific, has been based in Vietnam since 2015, just after Australia started exporting live cattle there in 2014.

He's seen Vietnam evolve from a fragmented market, but says the traditional supply chain still doesn't fully

capitalise on the potential to value-add to beef during processing, which limits abattoir and supply chain profitability.

"Vietnam is one of the world's fastest-growing economies, with a rapidly increasing middle class of consumers, continued urbanisation and modernisation, and a stable one-party Government.

"Vietnamese consumers are also evolving and if the Australian livestock export industry isn't positioned to capture their demand for quality, Australian beef could be replaced by cheaper or less regulated products from competing nations," Michael said.

This is one aspect where MLA is focusing activities and achieving clear outcomes for the Australian live export supply chain.

"MLA's strategy in Vietnam aims to 'disrupt' these supply chain models by addressing barriers to change," Michael said.

"This includes maintaining Australia's competitiveness in the face of increasing global competitors by supporting Vietnamese processors to transition to modern slaughter practices, regulation and distribution."



## Here's a snapshot of how MLA is taking a collaborative approach to strengthen supply chains in Vietnam.

### Developing capability

MLA supported the appointment of three supply chain business development managers in January 2019 to work within Vietnamese commercial supply chains for 12 months.

The managers helped companies deal with commercial obstacles to market development, such as addressing technical issues by improving staff capability and infrastructure to produce a consistent product.

For example, one business development manager worked with a Vietnam abattoir which processes Australian cattle to overcome staff resistance to replacing traditional ground processing methods with more modern slaughter systems.

As a result, the abattoir increased throughput from five head a night to 140 head per night and has invested in additional modern technology because the staff now don't want to go back to the old processing techniques.

MLA has also just finished a project to transfer knowledge about processing, butchery and retail from the Australian beef industry into the Vietnamese supply chain (page 32).

### Improving efficiency

MLA is working with a Vietnamese importer and multiple Australian exporters to consolidate their local supply chain.

The importer currently supplies cattle to 30 abattoirs in northern Vietnam, which incurs significant compliance costs and doesn't provide a sustainable supply chain for Australian cattle.

With input from MLA, the importer will consolidate their supply to six abattoirs, all processing 50 head

per night, with a reliance on Australian cattle. This requires specific investment in technology and skills such as replacing ground processing with rails.

Supporting fewer, more efficient businesses improved product consistency and quality, creating an advantage for Australian cattle and improving the ability to ensure positive animal welfare outcomes.

This program will allow the importer to move from supplying 30 abattoirs which collectively processed 70,000 head of cattle per year to just six facilities, which will process a combined 100,000 head per year.

### Future opportunities

While Vietnamese consumers have a strong preference for fresh meat, which continues to support growth of the live cattle export industry, increasing consumer preference for quality, safe food products creates opportunities for Australia to explore the higher-end segments of boxed beef and higher-quality beef produced locally from Australian cattle exports.

Ellen Rodgers, MLA International Business Manager – Southern Asia, said research by MLA reveals stronger than average economic growth in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, compared to other cities in the region.

"Over the next five years, Vietnam is likely to create more consumers with greater disposable income, increasing the target

audience for premium food products," she said.

"Strong modern retail and cold supply chain infrastructure make this an attractive region for exporters. MLA is working closely with Austrade on market-access issues for boxed beef, as well as supporting foodservice and modern retail businesses in Vietnam with research insights about consumer preferences."

She said Vietnam's modern retail infrastructure is developing quickly from a small base and there's a small but strong hypermarket and supermarket presence which could open up more opportunities for Australian red meat in the mid-to-long term.

The foodservice sector presents more challenges; for example, Vietnamese consumers spend less per capita on dining out than other nations in the region, and although the number of foodservice outlets is set to grow, fine dining has a small share of the overall market.

To address these challenges and actively engage with the Vietnamese trade sector, MLA will host a True Aussie Academy in Ho Chi Minh City in May for chefs, foodservice managers and retail butchers.

The event, which has been held in Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines, provides information about Australian red meat production systems, Meat Standards Australia and market insights, as well as practical butchery sessions. ■

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🖥 [mla.com.au/prices-markets/overseas-markets/](https://mla.com.au/prices-markets/overseas-markets/)

## VIETNAM



### Vietnam population

2019: 96.5 million

2023 projection:  
99.7 million

### Australian beef exports to Vietnam

Volume: 11,503t shipped weight (swt)

Value: \$90 million

### Australian sheepmeat: exports to Vietnam

Volume: 1,254t swt

Value: \$12 million

### Vietnam consumption:

Beef consumption in Vietnam is 4.6kg/person/year. Although consumption is less than pork, poultry, fish and seafood, beef is widely used in Vietnamese cuisine, notably in pho bo and bun bo (rice noodle soup with beef). Lamb remains a niche component in the Vietnamese diet.

### Trade agreements with Australia

Australia and Vietnam have two free trade agreements, the ASEAN–Australia–New Zealand free trade agreement and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. There is no tax for live and imported beef products.

🖥 Want to know more? Check out [mla.com.au/market-snapshots/](https://mla.com.au/market-snapshots/) for a more in-depth look at key markets.



# Spreading the nutritional good news



**V**eronique Droulez may have been born in South Africa to French parents and spent her university years in Paris, but she's passionate about keeping Australian red meat on the plate.

The Sydney-based dietitian has moved from clinical practice to community health to nutrition research, and along the way cut her 'red meat' teeth on the Australian Meat & Livestock Corporation's (AMLC) iron campaign of the 1990s.

Now, as manager of MLA's Food and Nutrition Program, Veronique helps stakeholders understand Australian red meat's role in a healthy, balanced diet.

Here, she talks to *Feedback* about the importance of spreading the good news about beef, lamb and goatmeat.

**Q:**  
**How did you make the move from practising dietitian to a career in the red meat industry?**

It's taken a few steps to end up at MLA. I started in clinical practice in Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney and moved to community health before working with the Heart Foundation. I first started working for the meat industry with the former AMLC on their famous iron campaign. I joined MLA to manage the nutrition research program from 2002–2004. I returned again in 2008 and I've been here ever since.

**Q:**  
**Why is your role important for the red meat industry?**

The program helps communicate consistent and trusted messages about red meat and healthy eating. My job is to promote the role of red meat in the Australian diet by generating data and insights and working with key stakeholders to translate these into relevant, credible information and resources.

**Q:**  
**What is the best part of your job?**

It would have to be the multi-faceted and engaging nature of red meat. There are so many interesting aspects to red meat – more than any other food – which makes it intellectually stimulating to work with.

**Q:**  
**What is a typical day like for you?**

My workday includes managing research projects, developing communication programs targeting general practitioners (GPs) and dietitians, and managing issues as they arise, such as preparing responses to media enquiries about red meat nutrition.

Every day is different, but the role involves a lot of listening, understanding and making sense of data about red meat consumption and its nutritional value and nutrition science.

I then translate this information into easy-to-understand key messages for different stakeholders. This includes nutrition education resources for GPs and dietitians to help their clients eat healthy, balanced diets, as well as information to support MLA's beef and lamb brand marketing and to share with industry stakeholders.

**Q:**  
**When you're not at work, where would we find you?**

I love being outdoors. My favourite kayak route is across the heads from Vaucluse Bay to the Quarantine Station. My husband and I love doing multi-day bush walks. Of course, I love food and cooking. When it comes to red meat, I love a good steak and I am a big fan of slow-cooked meals. ■

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🖥 Read more about the health and nutrition attributes of red meat at: [goodmeat.com.au/health-nutrition](http://goodmeat.com.au/health-nutrition)

# Sandwich steak-out

Philly cheesesteak were on the menu when MLA's foodservice team took to the high seas recently to serve up beef and lamb to P&O cruise diners (see page 44). You can find more easy meal ideas using beef at [australianbeef.com.au](http://australianbeef.com.au)

## Philly cheesesteak

Serves: 4

600g oyster blade steak,  
trimmed and very thinly sliced  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1 onion, thinly sliced  
1 red capsicum, thinly sliced  
4 long bread rolls  
150g provolone cheese,  
thinly sliced  
Chilli sauce, to serve

1. Preheat a large frying pan over a high heat. Mix the meat with 1½ tbsp olive oil and coat well. Cook the slices in a single layer for a minute on each side or until cooked through. You will need to do this in several batches. Set aside on a plate.
2. Wipe out the pan, place over a moderate heat and gently cook the onion and capsicum in the remaining oil for 10 minutes or until soft.
3. Meanwhile, roughly chop the cooked steak and stir it through the softened vegetables to warm through. Season well with salt and pepper.
4. Cut the rolls in half and fill with the meat and vegetables. Top with the cheese slices and chilli sauce (if using).

### TIPS

You can substitute provolone cheese with Swiss or Cheddar cheese.





# Extra, extra read all about it

You don't have to wait for the next edition of *Feedback* magazine to get all your red meat industry news.

MLA has a range of free e-newsletters which deliver updates, resources and market information direct to your inbox.

To sign up go to [mla.com.au/enews](http://mla.com.au/enews) and select the e-newsletters of interest to you.

Here's what's on offer:

#### **FRIDAY FEEDBACK:**

News, views and advice from MLA delivered straight to your inbox every Friday. It covers relevant and seasonal topics, industry news, producer case studies and on farm tools.

#### **PRICES & MARKETS:**

The latest news, analysis and trends for domestic and export markets each week, including information on buyer and competitor activity and trends.

#### **INTEGRITY MATTERS:**

Quarterly news and updates regarding the red meat industry's crucial safety, traceability and assurance integrity systems.

#### **GLOBAL MARKETS UPDATE:**

Distributed monthly, it offers the latest international marketing news and insights from Australia's key red meat and livestock export markets.

#### **GOATS ON THE MOVE:**

The latest developments in MLA's goat program and the goatmeat industry delivered on a quarterly basis.

#### **THE QUARTERLY FEED:**

MLA's specialist e-newsletter for lot feeders with news and insights from MLA's feedlot research, development and adoption program.