Final report

Leadership Team Member – Profitable Grazing Systems

Project code:	L.PGS.2008
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Abstract

The overarching objective of the Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) program is to encourage and support red meat producers to improve their management skills, to increase profit. This contract was for Cam Nicholson (Nicon Rural Services) to provide leadership support to the PGS program.

Covid-19 restrictions were in place in Victoria for most of the contract period, making it very difficult to promote and deliver PGS courses as originally intended. Despite this, four PGS courses were delivered, with further courses in planning and two new PGS packages created.

Further insights and suggestions are provided into the future delivery of the PGS program. These include likely demand for future (feed based) PGS courses, producer willingness to pay and the possible use of the PGS content in other ways.

Executive summary

Background

Meat and livestock Australia (MLA) recognise the importance of building producer skills and confidence to underpin lasting practice change that leads to sustained improvement in profit. The Profitable Grazing Systems program (PGS) is intended to build these skills through a model of knowledge sharing and practice, with the training acting as a coach. It also recognises these skills are best developed through a combination of group based activities and one on one interactions with a skilled trainer. Given this type of support is new to MLA, a PGS leadership group was formed to inform the delivery of the PGS program.

Objectives

The objectives of the PGS leadership team were to:

- Deliver feeder and recruitment activities on behalf of delivery network deliverers (these will be arranged by the state & national coordinators)
- Support state or national coordinators in reviewing supported learning projects developed by MLA or deliverers, as required
- Deliver supported learning projects under the proposed adoption program banner (minimum of one per year)
- Provide support to the PGS national coordinator by providing feedback and recommendations for overarching program improvement and individual supported learning project progress
- Act as a champion for PGS
- Support good governance of PGS

Methodology

Delivery for this project has been primarily through 1 to 1 interaction, participation in group meetings and providing support as requested. Covid-19 limited the intended activities for much of this contract. While alternative means were applied e.g. video links, the restrictions on face to face activities in Victoria severely hampered overall delivery.

Results/key findings

The PGS workplan aligned with this project was completed, despite Covid restrictions. Four PGS Paydirt courses were completed, with a further 2 Paydirt courses are being discussed. Three additional deliverers have been trained in South-West Vic and South Australia to deliver Paydirt in the future and two new PGS courses (pasture manipulation and pasture resowing) are being finalised. A survey of producers in Southern Australia (through another MLA project L.FAP.2104) also provided useful information on producers willingness to pay.

Benefits to industry

PGS is a bold program unlike anything that has been delivered by MLA before. Understandably there have been challenges in the implementation however the impact to industry is being demonstrated by the evaluation data, showing PGS is providing MLA with the greatest ROI.

Future research and recommendations

- Urgently create Category A and B activities to support the existing PGS packages. The current feeder activity concept needs to be integrated into this thinking.
- Revisit the costing model considering the results coming from L.FAP.2104.
- Rethink how the content of PGS packages could be used in other ways.

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1. Background

PGS Vision

A financially sustainable adoption program aligned to the MLA 2020 targets that extends MLA R&D outputs and achieves increased producer skills and capability, practice change and whole farm business improvement through increasing producer understanding of:

Business profit = management capability + evidence + value chain approach

Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) is MLA's new flagship adoption program which will drive measurable, improved business performance outcomes for participating red meat producers. The program will use a supported learning methodology to develop the skills of red meat producers and support implementation of these new skills into businesses, improving profitability and productivity. Profitable Grazing Systems builds on previous red meat industry extension and adoption programs including Making More from Sheep and More Beef from Pastures and will have a focus on achieving adoption through high quality delivery underpinned by robust monitoring evaluation and a commercial approach.

2. Objectives

2.1 Overarching Project Objectives

The overarching objective of the PGS program is to encourage and support red meat producers to improve their management skills, to increase profit. The program objectives to be completed by 2022 are:

1. To increase the average profitability of participating red meat producers by 2.5% ROAM by improving their skills and capability.
2. A commercial model which involves user pays for the private good component of the activity (generally the delivery), with MLA contributing a maximum of 30% of the delivery cost of supported leaning projects.
3. 5,000 producers attend feeder activities with 10 -15% of them going on to participate in a supported learning program.
4. 2,900 producers participate in supported learning programs to increase their skills and knowledge:
    a. 2150 producers increase their skills and knowledge above a skills audit score of 75% (competent);
    b. 50 deliverers have increased capability to a point where they can deliver effective high quality supported learning programs;
    c. Increase the average confidence rating of participating producers to use key skill sets or do key tasks to greater than 8/10;
    d. At least 70% of participating producers have made practice changes underpinned by a change in skills.

2.2 Leadership Team Objectives

The key role of the leadership team is to provide support to the national and state coordinators in delivering their roles and mentor deliverers to build their capacity. Core principles of the role:

1. Deliver feeder and recruitment activities on behalf of delivery network deliverers (these will be arranged by the state & national coordinators)
2. Support state or national coordinators in reviewing supported learning projects developed by MLA or deliverers, as required
3. Deliver supported learning projects under the proposed adoption program banner (minimum of one per year)
4. Provide support to the PGS national coordinator by providing feedback and recommendations for overarching program improvement and individual supported learning project progress
5. Act as a champion for PGS
6. Support good governance of PGS

3. Methodology

Delivery for this project has been primarily through 1 to 1 interaction, participation in group meetings and providing support as requested. Covid-19 limited the intended activities for much of this contract. While alternative means were applied e.g. video links, the restrictions on face to face activities in Victoria severely hampered overall delivery.

Despite these limitations the following was delivered:

- Face to face meeting with leadership team Sydney -Nov 2019
- Participation in 2-day workshop in Darwin to promote/motivate deliverers in Northern Australia - March 2020
- Support in the design of a Northern Paydirt PGS with Jill Alexander, including discussion around skills audits and M&E
- Interview panel for selection of replacement new PGS Project Manager.
- Feedback on M&E and KASA data collection, including discussion with Lee Beatie.
- Numerous MLA staff discussions (Angela, Elizabeth, Tamara, Alan Peake) and John James, AWI.
- Promotion and supported delivery of the *Paydirt* PGS course in South-West Victoria.
- Negotiated the contracting of 2 PGS courses to come from the use of the *Pasture Paramedic* tool (pasture resowing and pasture manipulation).
- Discussion with Lydon Kubeil about running train the trainer courses.
- Reviewed Northern Paydirt for Jill Alexander.
- Included PGS in a video and survey to gauge interest and willingness to pay for PGS packages.

4. Results

4.1 Delivery against latest workplan (Sept 2021 to April 2022)

The delivery against the final workplan is presented (Table 1).

Table 1: Sept 2021 to April 2022 workplan.

Task	Timeframe	Due date	Progress ✓ **Completed** ● **On-track** ● Not due ● **Overdue**	Details
Project Feedback				
Leadership Team member proposals and overarching ideas	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022.	On track	
Final report	6 months	01 June 2022	Completed	
PGS LT team communication activities *(phone hook-ups, face to face meetings, etc.)*				
	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022	On track	Meeting with Tammy / Sally, Alan Peake, Feb 22 leadership meeting
SLP deliverer promotion, recruitment & mentoring *(tasks associated with recruiting potential SLP deliverers)*				
Deliverer promotion	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022	On track	Promoting Pasture Manipulation, Pasture Resowing and Paydirt training packages in Southern Australia through survey – results discussed below. Presenting at Advisor update in wagga wagga in August 2022.
Deliverer recruitment	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022	On track	Exploring opportunities to deliver training in Paydirt, Pasture Manipulation and Pasture Resowing.
Deliverer mentoring	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022	On track	Continued supporting 3 people in delivery of ongoing *Paydirt* courses in SW Vic and SA.

				Possibly mentor new deliverers of the Pasture Manipulation and Pasture Resowing if they require assistance (two current co-developers of these courses will be capable of delivering these without mentoring).
SLP assessment *(SLPs under development / being assessed)*				
Feedback on potential SLP's	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022	On track	No requests.
SLP recruitment *(to be completed for each SLP being recruited for – includes recruitment plan, feeder activities, other communications etc.)*				
Advice/feedback & intel to NT & SC	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022	On track	10 pilot activities are currently being developed to be delivered by June 30 to groups in Southern Australia. This is intended to feed into the Paydirt, pasture manipulation and Pasture resowing courses.
M&E activities *(approvals for M&E materials, data due from deliverers, producer interviews, submission of data sets to National Coordinator, providing feedback to deliverers, etc.)*				
Feedback as to efficacy, efficiency and perceived value of M&E.	Ongoing	Up to 01 June 2022	Completed	Discussions with Lee Beatie, project team and also helped Jill Alexander with Paydirt Nth skills audit.

4.2 Insights from Southern Australian Farming Group Survey

A project surveying members of seven farming groups in Southern Australia (L.FAP.2104) has provided insights into the interest in some PGS products and a producers willingness to pay for PGS activities.

While the results are only from a milestone report (milestone 4), it includes responses from 337 producers and advisors. Most of these individuals have not previously been engaged with MLA products or services.

The producers answering the survey manage more than 535,000 ha of land, run approximately 935,000 sheep and 72,000 cattle. The offerings of greatest interest were feed base related, suggesting that PGS type courses would be appropriate.

The three PGS courses specifically described were Paydirt, Pasture manipulation and Pasture resowing. More Beef from Pastures and Business EDGE were also included.

The number of producers / advisors "extremely interested" or "very interested" in the courses is presented (table 2).

Table 2: Farmers / Advisors interested in PGS and other courses

Product	Extremely interested	Very Interested
PGS - Paydirt	14%	21%
PGS - Pasture manipulation	9%	8%
PGS - Pasture resowing	8%	12%
More Beef from Pastures	8%	14%
Business EDGE	7%	18%

The willingness to pay was tested around five offerings if respondents indicated they were "extremely interested" or "very interested". The amount respondents said they were willing to pay was marginally higher if they indicated "extremely interested" compared to "very interested" (table 3).

Table 3. Willingness to pay for five MLA courses

Product	Extremely interested	Very Interested
PGS - Paydirt	$ 602	$ 391
PGS - Pasture manipulation	$ 1,133	$ 777
PGS - Pasture resowing	$ 1,019	$ 658
More Beef from Pastures	$ 352	$ 284
Business EDGE	$ 337	$ 314

The current price of PGS courses is set by the deliverer, with a maximum contribution by MLA of 30% of the total delivery cost (up to $900 per business) and a minimum of 20% paid by producers (the remaining 50% is paid by the producer or through sponsorship).

The first four PGS *Paydirt* courses are being delivered so far, with the total cost of delivery budgeted at $2,550 per business, meaning producers would need to pay between $510 and $1,785 per business (for 10 businesses). The exact costing will be refined once the final one on one coaching sessions have been completed and the time commitment is better understood. No PGS Manipulation or Resowing courses have been delivered, although the initial costing estimates are $3,090 and $2,940 per business respectively, meaning producers would need to pay between $620 and $2,160 per business for the Manipulation course and between $590 and 2,060 per business for the Resowing course.

The *More Beef from Pastures* course is delivered in Victoria through the Better Beef Network (Agriculture Victoria). In the past there has been no charge because it was subsidised by MLA. Business edge is offered by Meridian Agriculture at a cost of $1,500 per person ($2,500 for 2 participants per business).

4.3 PGS courses delivered

Four PGS Paydirt courses are nearing completion (final 1 on 1 coaching underway). A further 2 Paydirt courses are being discussed but would require sponsorship to proceed. Three additional deliverers have been trained in South-West Vic and South Australia to deliver Paydirt in the future.

5. Conclusion

Covid-19 restrictions in Victoria made it very difficult to promote and deliver PGS courses as originally intended. These restrictions were in place for most of the contract period. For example, the first sessions of four Paydirt had been completed between the first and second lockdowns, but further covid restrictions prevented the second sessions from being run. These sessions were rescheduled and cancelled a further 3 times due to snap lockdowns before being delivered 17 months later.

When restrictions were lifted (late 2021), there was an initial reluctance to attend group events. Only in the last few months (from February 2022) have attendances been approaching pre pandemic levels.

Despite this, some useful progress was made in consolidating the PGS program and understanding barriers to participation, albeit only around information for the Paydirt, Pasture manipulation and Pasture resowing PGS courses). Three thoughts are worthy of discussion.

Firstly there is a relatively small number of people who are interested in PGS type courses at present (see table 2). However, there are 2 to 3 times more interested in participating in short workshops or events on these topics where the MLA information is explained and they get a 'taste' for the content (what might be described as Category A and Category B type activities) – data not shown. Therefore, to build interest in PGS, creating 'feeder' type activities would be worth considering.

Secondly there is a gap between the cost of delivering these three pasture feed based PGS packages and what producers are willing to pay (see table 3). This means significant 'sponsorship' is required under the current funding model. To decrease delivery costs and close the gap, the level of coaching

would need to be reduced, which potentially diminishes the value proposition of PGS. However, the willingness to pay may change if producers were more aware of the content through participating in feeder activities.

Finally, I have had several approaches from private agronomist and the retail sector to deliver PGS courses for their clients and customers. They are willing to provide the one-to-one support (which may or may not be coaching as PGS requires) without charge, but are not interested in collecting the M&E data for MLA or having the producer pay 20% of the total cost. In other words, they wish to use the PGS content, but without the PGS delivery requirements. The *More Beef from Pastures* course has shared content online, with people 'building their own adventure'. Is this a possible complementary approach to PGS so the content created in PGS is more widely accessible (and therefore providing a better return on MLA investment)?

6. Future research and recommendations

The main challenges are discussed in section 5. Further consideration / discussion needs to be given to;

- Urgently creating Category A and B activities to support the existing PGS packages.
- Revisiting the costing model considering the results coming from L.FAP.2104.
- Rethink how the content of PGS packages could be used in other ways.