

Final report

Leadership Team Member – Profitable Grazing Systems

Project code: L.PGS.2009
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Date published: 1 June 2022

PUBLISHED BY

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PO Box 1961
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

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Abstract

The PGS Leadership Group has been appointed to support the roll out of MLA's Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) extension platform. The PGS platform is based on following a supported learning model for extension and adoption. Supported learning goes beyond the delivery of technical information and supports producers with building skill and capability to implement beneficial practice change. The PGS Leadership Group involves consultants, advisors, and extension professionals that have experience across conventional and supported learning extension formats.

The PGS Leadership Group is in place to support the transformational change that the shift from traditional extension to supported learning requires. Supported learning involves the delivery of a series of coaching sessions that support skill development following the delivery of the theory or technical information. The coaching sessions provide practice and repetition in key skill development areas and the goal is to objectively increase capability and measure this through skills audits.

Executive summary

Background

Members of the PGS Leadership Group have a role in encouraging engagement from other consultants and advisors with the MLA PGS platform. This role includes being available as a mentor to emerging PGS deliverers to support them in the coaching skills required to effectively deliver supported learning programs. One on one mentoring engagements are structured as a variation to the contracts for involvement on the PGS Leadership Group.

The leadership group are also important to encourage positive advocacy for the PGS platform across industry.

Members of the PGS Leadership Group participate in face to face and video conference meetings with the national PGS team which includes the national PGS Project Manager and the PGS State Coordinators.

Objectives

To grow and expand the delivery network of PGS deliverers across each state and be positive advocates for the value proposition associated with engaging with MLA's Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) platform. Encourage the value proposition for engagement from both new PGS deliverers/trainers and producers in supported learning packages (SLP's) delivered under the PGS platform.

The following demonstrate that this objective has been achieved;

- The delivery network of PGS trainers in South Australia has grown over the life of the project.
- The brand awareness, program knowledge, and engagement in PGS activities has also grown over the last 5 years.

Methodology

The methodology involved members of the PGS Leadership Team:

- Making themselves available as mentors for emerging PGS deliverers/trainers
- Identifying opportunities to develop or contribute to feeder activities that encourage producers to engage with PGS supported learning packages in their region
- Being a positive advocate for the PGS platform and supported learning packages amongst industry peers, colleagues, and consulting networks
- Direct delivery of SLP's encouraged
- Reviewing new SLP's relevant to areas of technical expertise

Results/key findings

The delivery network has grown over the last 5 years, as has the brand awareness and engagement by producers in Supported Learning Packages delivered under the PGS platform.

Benefits to industry

MLA's PGS platform offers many benefits to industry. It is a transformational approach to extension and adoption. It is transformational because it goes beyond sharing technical information to actually supporting the adoption of beneficial practice change through group based, in-field coaching sessions. The opportunity that this provides to overcome teething issues and create peer to peer learning in a supported environment is massively beneficial to the practice change process.

Involvement by producers with high quality supported learning packages builds producer skills in key profit drivers and beneficial adoption and practice change. Participating in a series of coaching sessions, delivered on-farm, has many benefits. These benefits include:

- Beneficial peer to peer learning between participating producers and businesses
- A capacity to work through adoption teething issues in field with a group of peers and an experienced coach
- The opportunity to see the application of best practice management or cost-effective solutions to common farm management challenges on different properties
- The opportunity to see different production models and business models on different producer properties
- The opportunity to question, challenge, learn, and grow in a supported environment

Future research and recommendations

Consistent positive advocacy for PGS and the development and delivery of high impact supported learning projects is important to continue to build the profile and overall level of positive engagement by producers in the MLA PGS platform.

My experience with the PGS platform over the last 5 years is that producers are very positive about it. Unfortunately, the strongest level of criticism often comes from a subset of consultants and advisors rather than from producers. I'm puzzled by the subset of consultants and advisors that choose to be critical. This is where a strong leadership team that understand the true merit of the PGS platform is important, together with upskilling emerging deliverers to be both competent at delivery and industry advocates for PGS.

The role of mentors in providing support to emerging PGS deliverers/trainers in a mentor/mentee relationship is really important to the long-term success of the PGS platform and associated delivery capacity. There is an on-going need to develop additional future delivery capacity.

Recommendations related to mentoring include:

- Recognising that livestock consulting requires the development of expertise across a range of technical areas
- Being open minded to multiple years of mentoring for emerging PGS deliverers and a mentor/mentee relationship that is funded beyond an initial 12-month arrangement. This can build greater capacity depth to mentees and assist with fast tracking the skill development required to become a capable and well-rounded livestock consultant and advisor. The current mentoring approach involves a single 12 month mentoring arrangement between a mentor and mentee and once mentees have been mentored in the delivery of one supported learning project they are ineligible for co-funding to be mentored for an additional 12 months or in a different technical area. This is potentially limiting to what

could be achieved. Mentees value the mentoring relationship and have provided the feedback that additional mentoring to continue to build their skill, confidence, and capability would be helpful.

Other recommendations include:

- Keeping the standard and quality of SLP's delivered high and directly linked to a beneficial whole of business productivity and profitability outcome

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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 learning 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. 2,150 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

These objectives have been successfully achieved over the five year life of the project so far. It was unfortunate timing that COVID has disrupted the last two years of PGS delivery. It has been encouraging however to see PGS delivery increasing again now that borders are opening up and group delivery is becoming easier. The disruptions to PGS delivery from COVID were real and significant throughout 2020 and 2021. Increasing confidence and comfort with online delivery or engagement via video conference platforms has been a beneficial outcome from the COVID disruption.

3. Methodology

The methodology involved members of the PGS Leadership Team:

- Making themselves available as mentors for emerging PGS deliverers/trainers
- Identifying opportunities to develop or contribute to feeder activities that encourage producers to engage with PGS supported learning packages in their region
- Being a positive advocate for the PGS platform and supported learning packages amongst industry peers, colleagues, and consulting networks
- Direct delivery of SLP's encouraged
- Reviewing new SLP's relevant to areas of technical expertise

A key component to the methodology in achieving the PGS Leadership Group objectives for me has been positive advocacy of the merit of the PGS platform and the benefits of well-constructed supported learning projects. This has also involved recognising speaking opportunities that can be utilised as feeder activities to promote the PGS platform to producers.

This then leads into the need for the development in delivery capability and capacity of emerging SLP deliverers/trainers. Identifying suitable future deliverers and growing their skill set in coaching and supported learning delivery is central to the long-term outlook for the PGS platform.

4. Results – Success in meeting milestone and objectives

4.1 PGS Leadership Team workplan

Table 1. Workplan

State:	South Australia	Workplan timeframe – start:	15/09/2021
State Coordinator:	Merri Tohill / Ben Hebart	Workplan timeframe – end:	01/06/2022
Leadership Team Member:	Simon Vogt		

Task	Timeframe	Due date	Progress	Details
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Completed ● On-track ● Not due ● Overdue 	
Project Feedback				
MLA go / no go decision		15/10/2021		
Draft final report submitted to MLA		01/05/2022	✓ Completed	
Final report reviewed and approved by MLA		01/06/2022	● On-track	
PGS LT team communication activities (<i>phone hook-ups, face to face meetings, etc.</i>)				
Engage With Ben Hebart as the new South Australian state coordinator		15/10/2021	✓ Completed	
PGS state coordinator and leadership team meetings		On-going	● On-track	

SLP deliverer promotion, recruitment & mentoring (tasks associated with recruiting potential SLP deliverers)				
Follow-up on mentoring contract with Tammy and Katelyn		30/09/2021	✓ Completed	Mentoring arrangement in place with Olivia Woodiwiss, Ashley Evans, and Nathaniel Modra as mentees. The mentors are Basil Doonan, Jason Lynch, and myself for these three mentees.
Continue to keep an active radar for opportunities to introduce the MLA PGS platform to producers and industry groups that may not yet have been exposed to what is available and on offer		On-going	• On-track	<p>I spoke at the MLA Excellence in Eating Quality Awards in Robe on the 15th March 2022. There were approximately 60 producers, industry participants, and advisors in the room. In conjunction with the theme that I was asked to speak on (the link between eating quality and whole of business profitability) I also utilised this opportunity to discuss MLA's Profitable Grazing Systems platform. I also arranged for Michael Cobiac, a Pasture Principles graduate and PGS advocate to be the producer speaker for the evening.</p> <p>I'm also going to be speaking at the GenAngus Future Leaders Program in early June 2022. I will find an opportunity in my presentation to discuss the benefits of involvement in MLA's Profitable Grazing Systems platform,</p>
SLP assessment (SLPs under development / being assessed)				
To be assessed as/if required				
SLP recruitment (to be completed for each SLP being recruited for – includes recruitment plan, feeder activities, other communications etc.)				
Supporting Caroline McGrath with the delivery of the 2021/2022 Hamilton Vic Pasture Principles group. Seeking an extension to the contract end date given COVID disruptions and border closures.		31/12/2022	• On-track	The delivery for this group has now been transferred to Tara Graetz and Nathaniel Modra...as Caroline McGrath has pursued another opportunity in corporate agriculture. I'll be mentoring Nathaniel Modra in the delivery of each of the Pasture Principles coaching sessions. With a background in ruminant nutrition, Nathaniel Modra is an excellent emerging deliverer of PGS SLP's.

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.)				
Follow-up submission of M&E data and first invoice for the 21/22 Hamilton Vic Pasture Principles group. Also follow-up for Royce's 2021 Lower SE group which is underway.		30/09/2021	✓ Completed	

4.2 Progress towards meeting objectives

Table 2. Key Performance Indicators

Area of Participation	Number	Comment (nature of work done and outcomes achieved)
Support Coordination team/deliverers to recruit producers and deliverers		It has been great to support Royce Pitchford and Tara Graetz become capable and confident PGS deliverers. Royce did a great job in recruiting his 2021 Lower SE Pasture Principles group and it was great to see a large group come together following an extensive recruitment campaign.
Support State Coordinators to review SLPs		Limited support provided on this front.
Mentor Deliverers in development and delivery of SLPs		This is on-going and has been a key focus. It has been great to see Royce Pitchford and Tara Graetz develop and emerge as capable and strong deliverers of the Pasture Principles SLP. Very much looking forward to mentoring Nathaniel Modra and he is well positioned to be an excellent future deliverer of PGS SLP's. His background in ruminant nutrition means that he is primed to become an excellent PGS deliverer/trainer.
Developing/Delivering SLPs		I will be involved in the co-delivery of the Hamilton Vic Pasture Principles group in 2022.
PGS coordination team advisory activities		I have actively participated in PGS video link-ups with the PGS delivery team when possible.
Representation/Awareness		Delivered a session at the MLA Excellence in Eating Quality Awards in Robe SA in March 2022. I explored the benefits that flow from producers engaging in supported learning programs and the Profitable Grazing Systems platform. I'll also be speaking to two cohorts of the GenAngus Future Leaders Program in June and will create an opportunity to discuss MLA's PGS platform.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Key findings

The delivery of high impact SLP's that develop producer skill in areas that have clear alignment to whole of business profitability is a successful extension model. Productivity gains are driven by a combination of knowledge and implementation capability. Supported Learning Projects (SLP's) provide scope to close the gap between knowledge and successful implementation.

5.2 Benefits to industry

MLA's PGS platform offers many benefits to industry. It is a transformational approach to extension and adoption. It is transformational because it goes beyond sharing technical information to actually supporting the adoption of beneficial practice change through group based, in-field coaching sessions. The opportunity that this provides to overcome teething issues and create peer to peer learning in a supported environment is massively beneficial to the practice change process.

Mentoring new deliverers also results in a beneficial increase in industry capacity, reflected by a growing group of advisors with competence to deliver supported learning packages that involve a robust on-farm coaching element and process.

Involvement by producers with high quality supported learning packages also builds producer skills in key profit drivers and beneficial adoption and practice change. Participating in a series of coaching sessions, delivered on-farm, has many benefits. These benefits include:

- Beneficial peer to peer learning between participating producers and businesses
- A capacity to work through adoption teething issues in field with a group of peers and an experienced coach
- The opportunity to see the application of best practice management or cost-effective solutions to common farm management challenges on different properties
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6. Recommendations

Consistent positive advocacy for PGS and the development and delivery of high impact supported learning projects is important to continue to build the profile and overall level of positive engagement by producers in the MLA PGS platform.

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Recommendations related to mentoring include:

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- Being open minded to multiple years of mentoring for emerging PGS deliverers and a mentor/mentee relationship that is funded beyond an initial 12-month arrangement. This can build greater capacity depth to mentees and assist with fast tracking the skill development required to become a capable and well-rounded livestock consultant and advisor. The current mentoring approach involves a single 12 month mentoring arrangement between a mentor and mentee and once mentees have been mentored in the delivery of one supported learning project, they are ineligible for co-funding to be mentored for an additional 12 months or in a different technical area. This is potentially limiting to what could be achieved. Mentees value the mentoring relationship and have provided the feedback that additional mentoring to continue to build their skill, confidence, and capability would be helpful.

Other recommendations include:

- Keeping the standard and quality of SLP's delivered high and directly linked to a beneficial whole of business productivity and profitability outcome