

96/S03



Producer Research Support

Willalooka producers move to meet market specifications

Willalooka Farm Management Group

The project

The Willalooka Farm Management Group had identified a common problem in meeting market specifications and was keen to better understand how price grids worked.

According to project contact Kevin Johnson, understanding market specifications is essential in avoiding price penalties when cattle are slaughtered outside weight or fat cover specifications.

"The objective of this Producer Research Support project was to improve members' skills in livestock assessment and broaden their knowledge of available markets so as to be able to profit from fewer penalties and greater market options," Mr Johnson said.

Objective

Improve group members' skills in livestock assessment and broaden their understanding of available markets to consistently meet quality specifications.

What was done

The two-year project started with a survey of members of the Willalooka Farm Management Group, to gain an understanding of the numbers of livestock involved, the methods of marketing stock and the areas of interest members had for future activities.

Mr Johnson said a final survey at the end of the project revealed that, for most members, the aims of the project had been successfully fulfilled. They had "increased their knowledge of animal assessment, marketing opportunities and management techniques in an enjoyable environment".

On five occasions members were provided with 'hands on' assessment of live or slaughtered animals.

Two interstate visits were arranged over the duration of the project. The first tour to the Riverina in August 1996 exposed the members to the extensive holdings and large feedlots operating in that part of NSW.

A second tour in August 1997 to Geelong and the Western Districts of Victoria, detailed to members quality controlled meat processing, corporate farming and new value adding alternatives for primary production.

Regular meetings held on participating members' properties were well attended.

Property tours followed by discussion sessions proved enlightening and enjoyable to all concerned, Mr Johnson said, and were considered an important group activity.

The marketing of fruit, vegetables, flowers and fish, together with the production of lamb, beef, pork, wool and timber were subjects covered by an intense two-day tour of Victoria made by members of the Willalooka Farm Management Group.

The tour was one of two conducted under their Producer Research Support program.

Key points

- Group members' skills in livestock assessment were improved.
- There was a broadened understanding of available beef markets.
- There is a large new knowledge base gained from local farm and abattoir visits, coupled with interstate trips to feedlots, farms, abattoirs and workshops with guest speakers.

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Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to \$15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

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Contact Gerald Martin
Producer Research Support Coordinator.

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Discussion

The Riverina Tour conducted in August 1996 took in the Rockdale feedlot, which at the time had a capacity of 40,000 head.

Long fed Angus and Murray Grey steers are fed for 240–250 days on a ration consisting of 70% grain. Average growth rate is 1.25 kg/day.

Short fed cattle were on feed 120 days and destined for the domestic market. Steers and heifers with a maximum of 25% European blood gain 1.35 kg/day on a 90% grain ration.

The Australia Meat Holdings Prime City feed yard was also inspected.

The tour to south-east Victoria included a visit to the Melbourne markets. According to group member Neil Hagger, most supermarkets now buy their supplies through contracts with growers and 'spot buy' only to top up supply.

He said any increase in contract growing would mean less produce sold through the market and reduced competition.

More supermarkets would mean fewer green grocers, which again could reduce competition.

The Melbourne Fish Market also suffered lack of competition because only three 'provedore' buyers operate. Commission is charged at 10–12% on standard 32 kilogram boxes of fish.

According to another group member Bruce Michael, the Melbourne flower market appeared "very unorganised".

He observed that wholesalers travel to growers' properties and buy flowers before bringing them to the market. Some buy from retailers, split the flowers and sell to other retailers. No agents are involved.

He said there was no official bunch size: "it depends on how big the hand is that wraps the flowers". There was no specific sale lot size.

The tour also took in quality assurance management at the domestic meat processing plant operate by M.C. Herd at Geelong; cell grazing, pastures, sire evaluation and cattle management at Victoria's largest beef herd (9,000 head) at Werribee Agriculture.

A self-replacing Coopworth prime lamb flock and pasture and silage production featured at Melville.

"Tours of this kind are certainly popular with the group members," Mr Johnson said.

"Although varied and easy, these tours are considered to be good educational and mind-expanding projects which help to shed a new light on the members' own farming activities."