



finalreport

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Prepared by: Anne Collins, Rural Solutions SA
and Geoff Duddy, Sheep
Solutions
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Producer and stock agent survey of draft grass seed feedback form

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Abstract

The Leadership Group for the National Grass Seeds Action Plan has agreed on a standard format for the grass seed report that is intended to be introduced as a national standard feedback report to producers. Before this is adopted as the standard feedback report nationally, it was important for the format to be trialled with end users to ensure that the information provided is meaningful and useful.

A survey of 55 lamb producers and finishers in NSW and SA, and 32 livestock agents from NSW, Victoria and South Australia was undertaken.

A recommendation for an improved version of the report is included.

Executive Summary

As part of the National Grass Seeds Action Plan, the Leadership Group had agreed on a standard format for the grass seed report that is intended to be introduced as a national standard feedback report to producers when penalties are applied at processing due to seed contamination of the carcass.

It was important to trial the format of the report with lamb producers, finishers and their agents to ensure that the information received is meaningful, robust and useful.

A survey was conducted of producers and livestock agents in South Australia and New South Wales. Input was sought on how easy the report was to understand and whether it was easily able to be interpreted correctly.

Several issues with the original report were identified and recommendations made for improvement.

This improved version will be recommended for adoption by the National Grass Seed Leadership Group at their next meeting.

Additional information was gleaned through the survey including the level of awareness of the Program amongst those surveyed and the preferred resources for follow up to producers following receipt of a positive seed kill report.

Key recommendations to arise from the survey were:

1. Changes to the layout of the standard report, incorporating explanations of how and when the penalty is applied.
2. Processors should be encouraged to provide a feedback report to producers when seed is present in carcasses even if they are not at high enough levels to warrant penalties. In addition, the option of processors reporting for lines that are seed free should be explored.
3. The National Grass Seed Strategy should approach with some urgency the need to develop and implement a national training, accreditation and recording package for slaughter floor managers in relation to a standard language and reporting system for grass seeds.
4. Greater efforts are required nationally to increase industry-wide awareness of the program.
5. The National Grass Seed Strategy should continue to place emphasis on developing hard copy and web based resources as well as delivery of skills development and practice change workshops.

The national adoption of a standard language and reporting format for the assessment and reporting of seed contamination in lamb carcasses has considerable potential benefits for the Australian lamb industry. These include:

- improved communication along the supply chain
- greater transparency of transactions
- improved consistency of reporting and penalising seed contamination both between and within works
- improved understanding by producers of the issue, enabling them to put in place management changes
- the potential for greater efficiencies in the lamb supply chain due to reduced losses from seed contamination.

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1 Background

In November 2013, the Leadership Group for the National Grass Seeds Action Plan, agreed on a standard format for the grass seed report that is intended to be introduced as a national standard feedback report to producers (see Appendix 2). Before this is adopted as the standard feedback report nationally, it was appropriate that the format was trialled with lamb producers, finishers and their agents to ensure that the information received is meaningful, robust and useful. It is important to establish if the report will provide the right information for lamb producers and also to gain some understanding of what type of resources producers would find useful as a follow up to such a report.

2 Project objectives

The objective of this project is to develop a recommendation for a standard report that will be adopted nationally by processors for use when they are providing feedback to producers who have consigned lambs with seed contamination of the carcass.

3 Methodology

In March 2014, Geoff Duddy, *Sheep Solutions* and Anne Collins, *Rural Solutions SA*, conducted a survey of 55 lamb producers and finishers in NSW and SA and 32 livestock agents from NSW, Victoria and South Australia. This included a mix of producers and agents who had attended the "Getting Serious About Grass Seeds" awareness forums in October 2013 and those who had had little to no direct contact with the National Grass Seeds Action Plan. Some lamb finishers (pasture and grain-based) were included in the survey. Producers and agents in NSW and Victoria were surveyed in group situations, whilst the South Australian producers and agents were interviewed one-on-one. Surveys were conducted face-to-face and over the phone.

Using an agreed standard set of questions (Appendix 1), the following issues were explored:

- Does the feedback report make sense and provide meaningful/useful information?
- Should there be a report when seed is present but no penalties are applied, or when lambs are seed free?
- What resources would be useful in the follow up to a positive seed report?

The example feedback sheet used in all initial surveys is in Appendix 2. Some modifications were made to this format (Appendix 3) and Geoff Duddy subsequently used this version of the feedback report when surveying the last 50% of NSW producers.

Prior to the conduct of the survey, discussions were held with four key processors who had indicated their intention to implement the standard feedback.

4 Results

Of the four processors spoken to prior to the conduct of the survey, none had gone ahead and adopted the new standard format. Comments received included:

- Waiting until a standardised assessment system was operational
- There had been little grass seed incidence to report
- Works is predominantly a service kill and could not readily implement the feedback report or penalties

- One works was currently in discussion with MLA re the development of an electronic reporting system that would be part of a general animal health feedback format

4.1 Awareness of National Grass Seed Action Strategy

There was a much higher awareness of the Strategy amongst those surveyed in South Australia compared to New South Wales (approximately 70%, compared to approximately 30%). This is a function primarily of how the survey respondents were selected, but also a function of the history of grass seed awareness programs in South Australia and the significantly higher attendance numbers at the awareness forums in late 2013.

Recommendation: Greater efforts are required nationally to increase industry-wide awareness of the program

4.2 Usefulness of information provided in Draft Feedback Report

Agents surveyed in NSW rated the feedback sheets 'usefulness' as 3.8 out of 5, while in South Australia the average rating was 4.6 with the majority rating it 5 out of 5. Producers did not rate the usefulness as high, with NSW producers' responses averaging 3.1 and SA producers, 3.4. Some NSW producers were shown an improved version of the report, similar to that in Appendix 3. Their average rating of the "improved" version was 3.6.

Agents are often the intermediaries between processors/buyers and producers when there is an issue at processing. It is therefore not a surprise that they rate the usefulness of a standard reporting system for grass seed contamination highly. Some of their comments included:

- Very good feedback to the producer – will help them understand the cost to industry and how to help maximise returns
- Very useful to make producers aware of seed problems. Some producers don't realise the carcass damage from grass seeds
- Will encourage processors to be accountable for penalties and trim.
- Uniform report of benefit to all. Inconsistency between and within works is the main problem

Recommendation: Greater focus on agent awareness and involvement within the National Grass Seeds Strategy (principally through Skill Development workshops and via ALPA and associated agents)

4.3 Is the level of seed contamination clear in the example report?

At least 50 percent of producers in both SA and NSW thought it was not clear what the level of seed contamination was in the example report. For the NSW producers that were subsequently shown the revised report (Appendix 3), there was still some level of confusion, but approximately two thirds now indicated that it was clear what the level of seed contamination was in the example.

The following comments offered by respondents illustrate their confusion:

- Needs more explanation
- Not clear without photos
- Report doesn't state how much contamination
- 2/3 and 1/3 – Does this indicate that 100% of the lot is affected?
- I can see the carcass portion is divided into thirds
- Not clear which area of the carcass is affected
- Does it mean that contamination in less than 1/3 of the portion does not attract the discount?

- Unclear how many are actually affected

Some suggestions for improvement include:

- Fractions of the lot are confusing. Maybe percentages would be clearer
- There should be a range quoted *ie.* 0 – 30%
- Make it clear how percentage of the lot is established
- Need to know what determines when penalty is or isn't applied.

Recommendation: The 'boxed' explanatory information incorporated in the revised Feedback Report (Appendix 3) should be included

4.4 Is it clear how the discount penalty has been applied in the example?

At least half of producers shown the original version of the feedback report had some uncertainty as to how the penalty is applied. Some of the comments that illustrate this uncertainty include:

- Needs clarification
- Seems the maximum penalty is the one that is applied
- Not clear that penalty is applied to the whole lot
- Not exactly clear how penalty applies between low impact and high impact
- Is penalty applied across the lot or is it only applied to affected carcasses?
- Is penalty a fixed rate or a percentage of price?
- Confused by 2/3@20c and 1/3 @30c. Are these combined or how are they applied?
- Should there be an extra 20c penalty for the low impact?
- Not clear if highest individual penalty is applied rather than penalties added together.
- Need information about the criteria for when a penalty is applied or not applied

Of the producers who were shown the revised version of the report, 75 percent felt it was clear how the penalty was applied.

Between 40 and 50 percent of agents surveyed felt it was clear how the penalty was applied on the original version of the report.

Recommendation: The 'boxed' explanatory information incorporated in the revised Feedback Report (Appendix 3) should be included

4.5 Preference for when and how report is received

Respondents were asked if they would like to receive this information even when there is no evidence of seed contamination and whether they would prefer to see this information as a separate report or as part of a general animal health statement.

Approximately 30 percent of producers in both SA and NSW said they would prefer not to receive a report when seed was not present. Those who did not support a report of 'seed free' felt it would just be extra unnecessary paper work. 70 percent of NSW producers and 50 percent of SA producers indicated that they would like a report even when seed was not present. Many respondents were in support of a grass seed report being received when a consignment has seed present that is not enough to attract a penalty.

Many livestock agents were in support of this suggestion and, in addition, a number of producers who indicated they would like a report of zero seed qualified this by highlighting the value of a report only when there is seed present that does not attract a penalty. Comments included:

- Would seem unnecessary (a report if seed free). Only useful if some seed detected and no penalty applied so that producer is aware of potential problem

- This would be one way of encouraging awareness amongst producers and would 'put it on their radar' and act as some sort of warning that they have the potential for a problem.
- Only if there is slight seed that is not penalised - may encourage awareness.

A suggestion for a revised penalty matrix which may be suitable to use on the feedback sheet and which allows for reporting of the portion of a consignment that had "low" seed incidence is presented in Appendix 4.

The question about the general animal health statement led to some confusion. It is clear that producers are not generally receiving feedback related to animal health issues. However, in South Australia the Enhanced Abattoir Surveillance program does provide some feedback from one processor when a problem arises, via the State government department. However, this is often two weeks after slaughter and so to include this grass seed information with that report would affect the timeliness. The intent of the grass seed report is for the producer to receive it via email on the day the animals are slaughtered.

There was clearly some support amongst producers for the idea of receiving feedback about all health issues, but most agreed that a separate report when a seed penalty was applied, that is sent on the day of slaughter, was the best option.

Recommendation: Processors should be encouraged to provide a feedback report to producers when seed is present in carcasses but not at high enough levels to warrant penalties. Further discussion is required as to whether this would be most easily done through a totally separate report format, or if it could be incorporated into the report currently under discussion.

Explore with processors the option for reporting even for lines that are "seed free".

Explore with NGSAP Leadership Group the 'revised penalty matrix' shown in Appendix 4.

4.6 Any extra information that should be in the report

Around 25% of producers said that they would like the type of seed identified, however the problems of doing this on the slaughter floor are well known. Many emphasised the importance of the accompanying photographs and the importance of them being clear. Several requested that a photo of the PIC also accompany the report.

Recommendation: All reports of seed that attract a penalty should be accompanied by clear photographs.

When practical a photograph of the PIC should be included.

Investigate the possibility of future research into seed identification on the slaughter floor, the timing of infection and/or factors that affect seed uptake and passage time through the skin and carcass.

4.7 Other general comments

Concern was expressed by many respondents around the level of integrity of the assessment of the degree of seed contamination and the need for this to be a standardised and auditable assessment. The assessment needs to be consistent and repeatable both between works and within works.

Some producers felt that penalties should be applied based on the absolute number of carcasses affected rather than portions of a lot.

Other producers felt that they would like to know the amount of seed in the whole consignment *i.e.* if two thirds was medium impact what was the status of the balance of the lot? Was it seed free or low seed with no penalty applicable?

Livestock agents, in particular, were very enthusiastic about the adoption of uniform reporting of the seed problem. Many saw great value in the feedback to producers and the potential benefit to all in the industry. Several saw inconsistency between and within works as a major problem. They also felt it would encourage processors to be more accountable for penalties and trims.

Some felt that processors should have to send a trimming report so that any excessive trimming is reported and explained and any condemnations are fully reported.

The issue of reporting on seed contamination in saleyard lots was raised.

Recommendation: Develop and implement a national training, accreditation and recording package for slaughter floor managers in relation to a standard language and reporting system for grass seeds

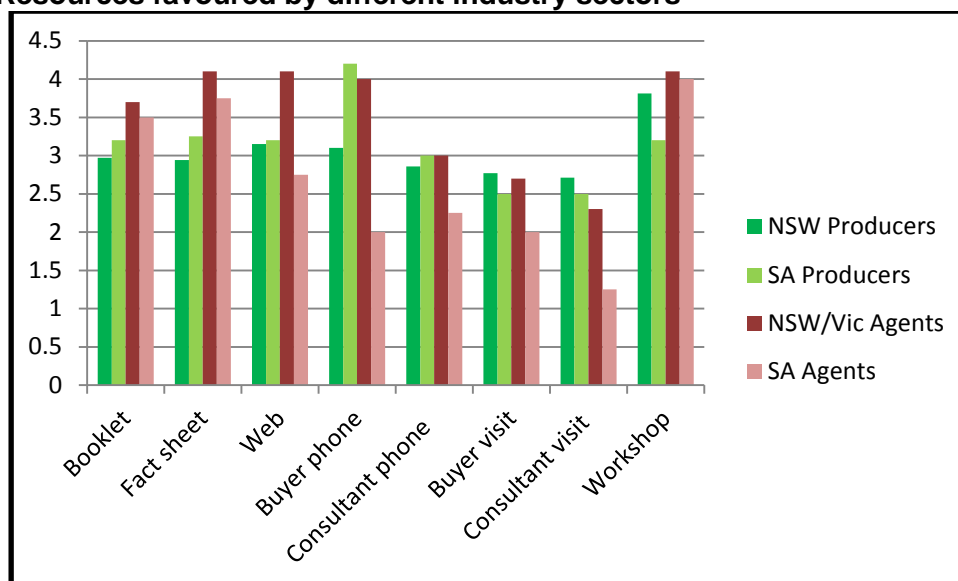
4.8 Preferred resources as follow-up to grass seed report

Survey respondents were asked to rank from 1 to 5, what they would consider would be useful as follow up to a report of grass seed contamination. Options presented were:

- Hard copy of seed management booklet
- Hard copy of seed management fact sheet
- Web based information
- Phone call from processor/buyer
- Phone call from independent consultant
- Property visit from buyer
- Property visit from independent consultant
- Workshop for producers and livestock agents.

Responses varied according to the group but are summarised in Figure 1. There was generally a strong interest in workshops targeting producers and /or agents. There was no clear preference for web based information or hard copies of information. However, both these options rated higher than the use of consultants, or property visits from buyers and/or consultants. All sectors except SA agents saw good value in a phone call from the buyer to the producer.

Figure 1: Resources favoured by different industry sectors



Recommendation: The National Grass Seed Strategy should continue to place emphasis on developing hard copy and web based resources as well as delivery of skills development and practice change workshops.

5 Discussion / Conclusion

Whilst a number of producers and processors were happy that they were able to accurately interpret the information as presented in the draft of the feedback report, many of those surveyed were somewhat confused by the information presented and were not able to accurately interpret the intent of the report.

To this end, a revised version of the report, including information on how penalties are applied, has been developed for consideration by the National Grass Seeds Leadership Group (Appendix 3).

Other statements that could possibly be added to this new draft to enhance it further are:

- *“Meat Buyers’ meat works adhere to the National Code of Practice and audit process for assessment of seed contamination in lamb carcasses”*
- *“If you wish to view your lamb carcasses in the chiller, please call Buyer 1 urgently.”*

Alternately such an invitation could be included in the covering email sent with the report.

Many producers and agents were keen to receive a report when a consignment has seed present even when it is not sufficient to attract a penalty. A suggestion for an alternate penalty matrix which may be suitable to use on the feedback sheet and which allows for reporting of the portion of a consignment that had “low” seed incidence is presented (Appendix 4).

Many producers were keen to see reporting on individual carcasses. This is logistically not possible currently for most works, however should be an option for consideration in the future. Options for the provision of a full trimming report, covering all issues that warrant significant trimming should also be investigated.

6 Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1

Grass Seed Contamination Feed Back

A survey of lamb producers and livestock agents in NSW and SA, conducted by Rural Solutions SA and Sheep Solutions on behalf of Meat and Livestock Australia

Contacts: Rural Solutions SA - Anne Collins 0427 486 115
 Sheep Solutions – Geoff Duddy 0427 007 490

All responses to this survey are in strictest confidence. No information identifying individual responses will be reported or published.

Name Date

Location of business:

Contact details:

Type of enterprise: Breeder Pasture finisher
 Feedlotter Livestock Agent

➤ Are you aware of the National Grass Seed Action Strategy? Y / N

Comments:

➤ How useful is the information provided in this grass seed report?

1 (of no use)	2	3	4	5 (extremely useful)

Comments:

➤ Is it clear to you what the level of seed contamination is in this example lot? Y / N/ Maybe

Comments:

➤ Is it clear to you how the discount penalty has been applied? Y / N / Maybe

.....

➤ Would you like to receive this report even when there is no evidence of seed contamination? Y / N/ Maybe

.....

➤ Would you prefer to receive information on grass seed contamination as a separate report, or as part of a 'General Animal Health Statement'? Y / N/ Maybe

.....

➤ Is there any extra information that you would like to see in the report? How could the report be more useful to you?

.....

➤ What resources would be useful as follow up to a report of seed contamination?

	Value (1 – 5)*	Comment
Hard copy of seed management booklet		
Hard copy of seed management fact sheet		
Web based information		
Phone call from processor/buyer		
Phone call from independent consultant (eg. agronomist, livestock officer)		
Property visit from buyer		
Property visit from independent consultant		
Workshops for producers and livestock agents		
Other		

* 1 = of no value, 5 = of great value

6.2 Appendix 2

We Support the
National Grass Seeds Action Plan

Processor
Logo

Meat Buyers Grass Seed Report
Lambs processed at Un-named Abattoir

Date: 12/01/14 Works Lot No. 13

Owner Lot No. 321 No. Processed 47

Producer Watts Props NVD No. ABC12345

Trial Kill Yes / No PIC No. 2456378

	Impact on carcase value					
	Low Impact (Belly, Flank)			High unacceptable Impact (BRISKET, Shoulder, Loin, Leg)		
Portion of lot affected	1/3	2/3	3/3	1/3	2/3	3/3
2013/14 penalty discount (\$*)	0.10	0.20	0.30	0.30	0.60	1.00
Penalty (\$/kg HSCW)				30c/kg		

*Indicative industry penalty

Comments: _____

Please find attached photos of your consignment of lambs processed today.

In the event of queries, or in need of further resources please contact your local Meat Buyers buyer:

Buyer 1 1234 567 890

Buyer 2 0321 456 78

For information about the National Grass Seed Action Plan (NGSAP) or grass seed management options visit: www.mla.com.au/grass-seeds

6.3 Appendix 3

We Support the
National Grass Seeds Action Plan

Processor
Logo

Meat Buyers Grass Seed Report
Lambs processed at Un-named Abattoir

Date: 12/01/14 Works Lot No. 13
 Owner Lot No. 321 No. Processed 47
 Producer Watts Props NVD No. ABC12345
 Trial Kill Yes No PIC No. 2456378

The carcasses from this consignment of lambs that were processed today were contaminated with seeds and a penalty has been applied to the c/kg quoted price. A penalty is only applied when the level of seed contamination is sufficient to cause disruption on the slaughter floor through increased labour requirements, slowing of the processing chain or movement of the carcasses to the retain rail.

If contamination occurs in two categories, as listed below, the higher of the two penalties is applied. The penalty is applied to the entire lot. Photos of example carcasses from your consignment of lambs are attached.

Location of seed	Moderate Impact <i>(Belly, Flank)</i>			High Impact <i>(Brisket, Shoulder, Loin, Leg)</i>		
	0 – 33%	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 33 – 66%	66 – 100%	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 0 – 33%	33 – 66%	66 – 100%
Percentage of lot affected	0 – 33%	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 33 – 66%	66 – 100%	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 0 – 33%	33 – 66%	66 – 100%
Penalty discount (c/kg)	10	20	30	30	60	100
Penalty (c/kg HSCW)	30c/kg					

Comments: _____

In the event of queries, or if in need of further resources please contact your local Meat Buyers buyer

Buyer 1 1234 567 890

Buyer 2 0321 456 78

For information about the National Grass Seed Action Plan (NGSAP) or grass seed management options visit: www.mla.com.au/grass-seeds

6.4 Appendix 4

The table below is a suggestion for a revised penalty matrix table. Many producers and agents are keen to know when they have consigned animals that may contain seed that is not sufficient to trigger a penalty. Even though, when a lot is penalised for seed, the penalty is applied to the entire lot, the use of this table enables the producer to receive feedback on the seed status of all of the animals. It effectively allows him to know whether the whole lot had some seed present or not.

	Penalty discount (c/kg HSCW)		
Portion of lot affected	Low Impact <i>Low seed levels present</i>	Moderate Impact <i>(Belly, Flank)</i>	High Impact <i>(Brisket, Shoulder, Loin, Leg)</i>
Less than 1/3	Nil	10c/kg	30c/kg
1/3 to 2/3	Nil	20c/kg	60c/kg
2/3 to 3/3	Nil	30c/kg	100c/kg
Penalty applied	30c/kg		