



final report

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Feedlot technology adoption groups scoping study

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ABSTRACT

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) was interested in determining whether there was interest from the feedlot sector in establishing technology adoption groups. Young producer groups have been successful in the dairy and grain industries. MLA was keen to understand how and why these groups were successful and whether their models were applicable to the feedlot sector. If applicable, MLA was keen to establish the interest in setting up *Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups* in the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.

The key finding was that, if a successful group is to be established, it is critical that the concept/need is driven by the farmers, not by the industry or government. Groups should be built “from the bottom up, not the top down”, and supported by a paid facilitator. Twelve feedlot operators were surveyed and seven were interested in the concept of a Feedlot Producer Group. The main barriers to the development and longevity of groups were seen as regional feedlot density, competitive factors around information sharing, and defining group eligibility criteria.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, FSA Consulting suggested to Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), the Condamine Alliance (CA) and the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) that the lotfeeding sector might benefit from the development of feedlot producer groups. MLA, CA and ALFA supported the concept. However, lotfeeders were experiencing tough market conditions at the time and MLA was uncertain whether the industry would place priority on development of the project.

In February 2012, MLA revived the feedlot producer group concept as project B.FLT.0152 – Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups Scoping Study. MLA believed that the success of the young dairy and grain industry groups should be investigated to determine if their models could be applied to the feedlot sector, and used as the basis for development of *Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups* in the Darling Downs region of QLD and the Riverina region of NSW. The objectives of this project were to:

- Establish the critical factors that have led to the successful implementation of the Technology Adoption and Young Producer Group concepts within the dairy and grain industries.
- Assess the current information gathering and networking avenues being employed by small-medium feedlots within the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.
- Assess the demand for and any issues/barriers associated with the establishment of Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups within the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.

A combination of phone surveys with industry personnel and internet research were used to identify the critical factors that have led to the successful implementation of the Technology Adoption and Young Producer Group concepts within the dairy and grain industries. The key finding was that it is critical that the concept/need is driven by the farmers, not by the industry or government. Groups should be built “from the bottom up, not the top down”; supported by a paid facilitator that understands the administrative activities of operating a producer group; and has established networks in order to seek funding.

Experience from the dairy and grain industries shows that groups tend to fail and/or participation declines if the producers relinquish ownership, or allow industry or government to influence the strategic direction.

Twelve feedlot operators were surveyed to establish whether there was interest in the concept of Feedlot Producer Groups in the Darling Downs and Riverina regions. Seven respondents were interested in the concept of a Feedlot Producer Group and five respondents indicated they had no interest. Of the seven respondents that were interested in the group concept:

- four were from the Riverina and three from the Darling Downs
- four were in the 18-40 years age bracket and three were >40 years of age

The five respondents not interested in being part of a group were all >40 years of age and their main reason was they believed they already had all the knowledge they required to operate their feedlot businesses.

The majority of feedlots surveyed access industry knowledge on best practice for feedlot operation and management, and day-to-day troubleshooting from paid consultants. In most cases the most influential consultant was either the feedlot veterinarian or nutritionist. Two respondents reported they access most knowledge from publically available online resources and these two operators were in the category of >40 years of age.

The feedlots indicated that the main barriers to the development of groups would be:

- feedlot density to enable sufficient people to maintain a group (Riverina region only – to assist with this it was suggested that feedlots from northern Victoria could be considered as potential members of a Riverina group)
- competitive factors based on information sharing between custom feeding and vertical integrated feedlot businesses
- defining criteria around who should be allowed to be involved in a group e.g. accredited or approved feedlots only and groups should not be restricted to “young” lotfeeders.

The next phase requires MLA/ALFA to empower a motivated group of producers (develop some critical mass) to drive the concept and define a series of objectives for the group(s) to achieve. The objectives should then be evaluated using support from the industry to determine if they have / are already being achieved through other projects. If not, industry would need to consider how to support the establishment of a formal group(s) to achieve its objectives.

If the lotfeeding industry wants to develop the concept of a Feedlot Producer Group then the industry should exploit the experiences, knowledge and publications developed by the dairy and grain industries.

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1 BACKGROUND

In 2008, FSA Consulting suggested to Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), the Condamine Alliance (CA) and Australian Lot Feeders Association (ALFA) that the lotfeeding sector might benefit from the development of feedlot producer groups. MLA, CA and ALFA supported the concept. However, lotfeeders were experiencing tough market conditions at the time and MLA was uncertain whether the industry would place priority on development of the project. Without this support, it would be difficult to leverage funding from industry levies. MLA indicated that the concept needed to consider other funding sources such as the National Landcare Program and the need for an experienced, paid facilitator to drive the concept and gain traction with lotfeeders. Consequently, the idea was placed on-hold.

In February 2012, MLA revived the feedlot producer group concept as project B.FLT.0152 – Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups Scoping Study. MLA believed that the success of the young dairy and grain industry groups should be investigated as part of this project to determine if their models could be applied to the feedlot sector, and used as the basis for development of *Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups* in the Darling Downs region of QLD and the Riverina region of NSW.

Through discussions with the feedlot sector, MLA identified that a percentage of small-medium sized feedlots felt that levy funded projects always targeted and/or sought the involvement of the large, commercial operations. Consequently, one of the objectives of the project was to assess the level of interest of small-medium sized, non-ALFA member feedlots in being involved in *Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups*.

2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project were to:

1. Establish the critical factors that have led to the successful implementation of the Technology Adoption and Young Producer Group concepts within the dairy and grain industries.
2. Assess the current information gathering and networking avenues being employed by small-medium feedlots within the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.
3. Assess the demand for and any issues/barriers associated with the establishment of Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups within the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.
4. Provide recommendations on the likely viability of the concept within the feedlot sector, including an outline of the attributes of a successful group and the major elements to be addressed to ensure successful establishment of the groups.

3 METHODOLOGY

The project methodology was developed in consultation with MLA and the investigation included the following elements:

- Collection, review and distillation of the key messages from any formal evaluations of Technology Adoption and Young Producer groups within the dairy and grain industries.

- Interviews with a range of participants within current dairy and grain groups, including producers, facilitators and fund providers.
- Development of a phone survey to enable successful capture of information from small-medium feedlot operators in the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.
- Conduct of a phone survey of small-medium feedlots within the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.
- Collation of the information collected and preparation of a report for MLA.

4 RESULTS

This report outlines:

- the key steps and framework required for successful group establishment based on objective evidence and experience from dairy and grain industries.
- a summary of phone survey outcomes.
- an indication of the level of interest for the implementation of Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups in the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.
- recommendations for the key steps and framework required to establish and maintain a successful producer group.

4.1 GRAINS AND DAIRY INDUSTRY SURVEY

A combination of survey and internet research was used to identify the critical factors that have led to the successful implementation of the Technology Adoption and Young Producer Group concepts within the dairy and grain industries.

Appendix A shows the questions that were used to complete the phone surveys of several people within the dairy and grain industries. Potential survey candidates were selected based on online identification and then assessment of well established industry groups and also using referrals from existing FSA Consulting industry contacts.

FSA Consulting identified the following groups and personnel to complete the phone survey:

- Verity Ingham – DairySA Executive Officer. Verity was contacted on 27 July 2012, but not interviewed, as she suggested contacting Ross Bawden from Dairy Australia who was responsible for the management of the regional dairy development programs.
- Ross Bawden – Regional Development Programs Business Manager at Dairy Australia (DA). Ross was contacted on 27 July 2012 and provided comment from a strategic perspective on developing and maintaining an industry group. He declined to complete the survey. Instead he suggested contacting Danielle Auldish and Bill Dullard for a regional perspective. Dairy Australia provides funding for the regional dairy development programs, as well as some of the established young dairy farmer groups.
- Danielle Auldish – GippsDairy Executive Officer, surveyed on 27 July 2012.
- Vivienne McCollum –Young Dairy Network (YDN) Project Manager, surveyed on 20 August 2012.

- Bill Dullard –Young Dairy Development Program (YDDP) State Coordinator, surveyed on 24 August 2012.
- Susan Hall – Grower Group Alliance (GGA) Project Leader, surveyed on 24 August 2012.

A desktop assessment of the Birchip Cropping Group (BCG) was also included in this project. Other grains industry groups were considered, but after surveying Grain Grower Alliance (GGA) and researching BCG, it was clear that their experience and longevity provided the most up-to-date information regarding the successful establishment and ongoing viability of producer groups within the grains industry.

Appendix B provides the contact details of the dairy and grain industries personnel.

4.2 GRAINS AND DAIRY INDUSTRY GROUPS – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section provides context around how the groups were formed. It supports the survey responses in Section 4.3 by providing an understanding of when the groups were established, their purpose and how they have evolved over time.

4.2.1 GRAIN GROWER ALLIANCE

GGA is a not-for-profit, farmer driven organisation connecting grower groups, research organisations and agribusiness in WA. GGA formed in 2002 and it consists of 40 individual grower groups from five agricultural regions across WA. The individual grower groups are mainly grain-only enterprises with a small number of mixed grain and sheep enterprises. The Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) funds GGA. GGA employs two full time staff.

The GGA aims to:

- expand the network of grower groups and their partners to allow the exchange of knowledge, ideas and research results between members.
- enhance the participation of grower groups in collaborative projects developed between grower groups, research providers and industry.
- support grower groups to work towards becoming more efficient and effective as a group.

Benefits for growers include:

- support from a state wide network.
- improved sharing of information and resources between groups.
- identification of collaborative project opportunities with researchers and industry.
- increased ability to address important local and regional issues.
- skill development through tailored training.

Benefits for partners include:

- access to a state wide grower group network.
- a central point of contact to reach grower groups.
- coordinated participation by groups in research projects.
- opportunity to add value and impact to research and extension activities.
- raised profile of existing work.

4.2.2 YOUNG DAIRY NETWORK

YDN consists of six groups of young dairy farmers in QLD and northern NSW. It was formed in 2006. YDNs purpose is to enhance the future viability of the dairy industry through supporting its young people. The group has approximately 400 members including young innovative farmers who are adopters and seekers of information. Typically, YDN members are also members of Subtropical Dairy. This development program for the dairy industry covers the region from Kempsey NSW north to Atherton Qld.

4.2.3 YOUNG DAIRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

YDDP was established to support the development of young dairy farmers and service providers and the group targets members aged between 18-40 years. It started in Gippsland in 2001 and extended to northern and western Victoria in 2007 as a result of a joint initiative between the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria and the Gardiner Foundation. YDDP currently only represents Gippsland and western Victoria. Murray Dairy left YDDP a couple of years ago and now represents itself and it still supports young dairy farmers.

YDDP is a grass-roots organisation that meets the identified needs of its young dairy farmer members. There are over 1500 members including over 1000 young dairy farmers. Membership of YDDP has increased every year since its inception.

YDDP mission statement is to develop:

- young dairy farmers and service providers by building their knowledge, skills and leadership opportunities.
- the dairy industry by improving the information flow and understanding of the industry by young people, in terms of issues and leadership roles within the industry.
- dairy communities by building social networks and increasing the participation of young people in their communities.

4.2.4 GIPPSDAIRY

GippsDairy formed in 1996 as a not-for-profit research, development and extension organisation led by Gippsland dairy farmers. It services 1500 dairy farmers and delivers over \$5 million of projects that focus on improved profitability and sustainability of dairy farms. Dairy Australia and the dairy service levy fund GippsDairy. GippsDairy employs two full time and two part time staff.

GippsDairy is one of eight regional development programs that operates under a framework developed by Dairy Australia. GippsDairy receives core funding from Dairy Australia that is used in collaborative projects or solely funded projects.

4.2.5 BIRCHIP CROPPING GROUP

BCG formed in 1992 as a not for profit agricultural, research and extension organisation led by farmers from the Wimmera and Mallee regions of Victoria. BCG has a membership base of 420 farming businesses and 20 full time staff. It is seen as a very successful model for independent farmer research and information transfer to the agricultural community.

In 1998 BCG established a sub-group called 2020 Vision that targeted young members under the age of 35. The group objectives of 2020 Vision were to bring together young people working in the agricultural industry (farmer and industry service providers) who share similar interests and concerns about their future. It aims to encourage and motivate participants to stay passionate about agriculture and work together to build their local communities. As part of 2020 Vision's activities, they conduct an industry study tour every couple of years to expose young members to other agricultural industries, practices and to create new networks.

4.3 GRAINS AND DAIRY INDUSTRY SURVEY OUTCOMES

This section reports the outcomes from surveys conducted with the groups identified in Section 4.1. The survey responses are reported in qualitative format, rather than a statistical quantitative interpretation, because the survey respondents provided lengthy discussion around the majority of the survey questions:

1. *What were the initial needs / drivers that led to the development of the "Technology Adoption Group" or "Young Producer Group"?*

All responses were similar and they can be categorised by the following statements:

- producers to access new and innovative management practices.
- producers wanted to be able to initiate local research and development (R&D).
- interest in improved distribution of local and industry knowledge.
- farmers wanted to socialise with like-minded people that may be experiencing similar business and personal issues.
- producers wanted to more efficiently use funding from either state or commonwealth governments (prevent duplicating R&D that is relevant to several regions/states).

2. *What led to the formation of the group?*

Section 4.2.1 of this report expands on the reasons that led to the formation of the groups.

- GGA is a not-for-profit, farmer driven organisation connecting grower groups, research organisations and agribusiness in WA. The alliance formed in 2002 and it

now consists of 40 individual grower groups from five agricultural regions across WA. The GGA aims to:

- expand the network of grower groups and their partners to allow the exchange of knowledge, ideas and research results between members.
- enhance the participation of grower groups in collaborative projects developed between grower groups, research providers and industry.
- support grower groups to work towards becoming more efficient and effective as a group.
- YDN was formed in 2006. A dairy farmer from the Darling Downs drove its establishment because they wanted to share ideas, improve the local dairy industry and create a social outlet for like-minded people.
- YDDP was established in 2001 after the state government ran out of funds to support the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) – young farmer groups. YDDP was set up exclusively for the dairy industry, whereas the VFF managed young farmer groups included members from a mix of agricultural industries.

3. What critical factors led to the successful implementation of the group?

Based on feedback from the groups surveyed:

- It is critical that the **concept/need is driven by the farmers**, not by the industry or government. The industry and government provide vital support during the implementation and ongoing management especially funding, but the passion and need has to come from the farmers. One respondent said the group should be built “from the bottom up, not the top down”, inferring it needs to be driven by the farmers, not the bureaucrats.
- **Density of producers** is important. There needs to be a critical mass to initially drive the concept/need. Once the group is established the density and distance between producers is also very important in ensuring that group members do not have to travel too far to attend either daytime or night events. Travel distance and suitable timeframes to run events were more critical in the dairy industry because of daily milking, so the most suitable timeframes are 10 am-2 pm or 6.30 pm-9 pm. Dairy farmers are less likely to attend if they have travel more than 45-60 minutes. These two factors are the reason why there are ten young dairy farmer groups in Victoria’s three main dairying regions.
- **Road testing the concept/need** is necessary to ensure it is not already being met through another group; and secondly **considering objective criteria that the concept/need could potentially address in order to leverage seed funding and/or in-kind support**. For example, proposing a group that has identified project or research objectives to address a measurable goal/target from an agricultural industry, council, government or catchment management authority strategic plan is more likely to be successful.
- **A paid facilitator** that understands the administrative activities of operating a producer group or not for profit organisation, and who has established industry, state and commonwealth networks in order to seek funding. The coordinator also needs to maintain contact with the group during their busy operational periods (e.g. seeding,

harvest, silage and hay production) and ensure that the groups' management and objectives do not lose traction during these periods.

- **Leveraging funding** to support the group and providing the capacity to employ an experienced facilitator.
- **A Strategic Advisory Committee (SAC)** that incorporates people covering a wide range of qualifications/skills/ages. The SAC role is to assist with defining the group's objectives and developing governance.
- **A Local Advisory Committees (LAC)** for the regional groups made up of producers. For example the YDDP has two Victorian regional facilitators in the GippsDairy and western Dairy regions. Within the GippsDairy region there are three separate YDDP groups, and each has its own LAC which communicates directly with the regional facilitator. The LAC enforces the "from the group" concept by communicating the needs of the regional group to the facilitator and SAC.
- **Establishment of governance for the group**, including setting objectives and time-bound dates for reviewing the performance and strategic direction of the group at least annually.

4. *Has technology adoption been formally assessed? If established, what were the critical factors that led to the successful implementation of technology adoption within the group?*

None of the groups surveyed have formally evaluated "technology adoption" or "practice change" that may have resulted from participation in the group. Nevertheless, the respondents were clear that a percentage of group members had adopted new technologies and implemented practice change. However, it is not clear if that adoption or change is a direct result of being involved with a group.

Many group members also source information from online resources and industry magazines so the adoption or change could be partly attributed to these knowledge resources.

Attendance at group events is recorded and this is provided to industry funding bodies such as Dairy Australia and GRDC. Only basic evaluation occurs at the conclusion of individual events such as workshops, field days etc. The typical evaluation form is one-two pages with 5-10 questions such as:

- Was the information relevant to your business?
- What was the most interesting topic covered?
- What other topics would you suggest for future events?
- Could the delivery method be improved? If yes, how?
- What information or practices are you likely to implement on your farm as result of attending this workshop/field day? (The dairy industry respondents acknowledged that while this is an important question that is often asked, the responses have never been collated and formally evaluated.)
- Was the venue/farm suitable?

The majority of groups receive a percentage of their funding from private industry sponsors such as companies selling chemicals, fertiliser, machinery etc. and this is used to fund group events. The YDDP and YDN said that their private sponsors evaluated their funding contributions simply based on the number of attendees at an event and that there was no formal evaluation of uptake of products or services, or cost/benefit calculated based on the sponsorship dollars provided.

Steady State Consulting (Read 2009) completed a qualitative evaluation of GGA in 2009. The objective of the evaluation was to assess the performance of the group to date, and indicate the potential effectiveness and direction for further investment in GGA. The evaluation process included focus group workshops and interviews with groups and related partner research organisations. Relevant findings from the evaluation are summarised below:

- The majority of interviewees considered there to be significant information and knowledge sharing between the regional grower groups and GGA, and this allowed GGA to disseminate applicable research outcomes to other member grower groups within the GGA.
- GGA improved governance and developed practical operational procedures that were utilised by other grower groups, as opposed to each of the 40 individual groups developing their own.
- The responses from interviewees were strongly divided as to how much profitability could be attributed to GGA. However, all recognised that the processes of networking and sharing information are important for development of more profitable farming systems.
- Self-evaluation of group involvement and research is undertaken effectively by larger groups with clear objectives, including remaining relevant to member needs.
- The social benefits of grower groups are considered to be very significant. GGA contributes to these benefits.
- The value of past investment in GGA is considered to be high. Future investment could enhance the significance of GGA within the rural sector of Western Australia.

5. Once established, what were the critical factors that led to the ongoing uptake of technology adoption and participation within the group?

As identified in the response for Question 4, there has been no formal evaluation of “technology adoption” or “practice change” that may have resulted from the participation in any of the groups surveyed.

Ongoing participation

Based on feedback from the groups surveyed:

- The respondents indicated that the ongoing success, continued participation and increase in membership in the groups was mainly due to the opportunity for social interaction for like-minded people. Feedback collected by the group facilitators shows that face-to-face delivery methods are the most effective, however this trend is

influenced by the fact that the group members rank social interaction as a key driver to attending the group events.

- YDDP members highly value the opportunities to socialise with like-minded individuals of a similar age but also value exposure to relevant industry networks, resources and up-to-date information. Some people spend a lot of time working independently during their day-to-day work activities, so the social element is considered the primary driver in attracting new attendees and ensuring the continued participation of existing members (Danielle Auld, pers. comm., 27 July 2012)

Funding

All respondents highlighted the critical importance of funding to establish a group but also to maintain a viable group in the long term. GGA started as a two-year pilot project funded by the GRDC until the end of 2004. Since then GGA has secured three-year contracts and their existing contract concludes at the end of the 2012-13 financial year.

Dairy Australia collects milk levy funds on behalf of the industry and the eight regional development programs, which include three regions in Victoria (western Victoria, Murray Dairy and GippsDairy). YDDP receives approximately 50% of its funding including in-kind support from its regional development program (essentially milk levy funds) and the rest from private industry sponsors. Industry and private funding is usually only secured one year in advance.

YDDP offers a range of sponsorship packages to secure their private sponsors. Prospective sponsors are assessed prior to engagement to ensure their involvement is not heavily biased to selling a product, likely to lead to a conflict of interest or inconsistent with the strategic goals of the group. Prior to the commencement of each funding year the YDDP negotiates the level of exposure for each sponsor e.g. opportunities to speak at events, display promotional items, provide major sponsorship of annual conferences etc. with bronze, silver and gold class packages available.

The issue of leveraging and maintaining funding for YDDP and broader dairy industry support groups is discussed further in the response to Question 6.

6. How has the group responded to internal and external factors that affect its viability and / or relevance over time?

Funding

Mr Bill Dullard of YDDP made a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into Farm Sector Work Forces Participation in 2011 and requested ongoing government financial support for the YDDP to enable continuing support for young dairy farmers who represent the future of the dairy industry and local dairy communities. The key recommendation of the submission was for the state government to provide ongoing funding of 50% of the annual budget of the YDDP up to a maximum of \$100 000 per annum.

Mr Dullard also proposed that all commodity groups should organise their own networks based on the same model as the YDDP. These groups should then be linked under a statewide Victorian Young Farmers Steering Committee. Mr Dullard argued that this new structure should be set up by industry, but funded by the state government. This would then overcome the problem of having disparate youth networks and would also have the security

of ongoing funding. Recommendation 35 from the inquiry was that the state government examine the YDDP with a view to facilitating application of such a development program to other food and fibre production sectors (Victoria Parliament Rural and Regional Committee – (VPRRC) 2012).

From a strategic dairy industry perspective, Mr Ross Bawden of Dairy Australia indicated that he would like to change the state-based Young Dairy Programs to a government funded model so they could provide more focus on issues specific to the dairy industry and remove any hidden agendas or bias from the private businesses/corporates that currently sponsor groups. A national program would promote a united front and would assist in leveraging funding, rather than individual groups or states competing against each other. This would also build into the industry's other existing knowledge and leadership resources e.g. National Centre for Dairy Education Australia, Young Dairy Leadership Program and Career Coordinator (Ross Bawden, pers. Comm., 27 July 2012).

Financial hardship / Mental health

All respondents commented that it is important to ensure that the groups are committed to their strategic direction. However, there will inevitably be times of exceptional circumstances when the groups focus shifts to the wellbeing of its members and R&D takes a back-step. Uncontrolled, external factors such as drought and depressed commodity prices have a significant financial and emotional effect on primary producers. The dairy industry groups made direct reference to the importance of the “getting together” during tough times to socialise with people experiencing similar difficulties. Hence, it is important that some flexibility is built into the group to be able to address unpredictable factors that are likely to affect all primary producers at some stage during their working life.

Volunteer burnout or loss of Committee members

The dairy industry respondents highlighted the ongoing need to address volunteer/committee member burnout. YDN governance mandates selecting new committee members based on a 1-2 year sitting period. This type of rolling committee brings new ideas/skills/qualifications to assist the strategic direction of the group and minimise overloading individuals.

Ms Danielle Auldist of GippsDairy presented an interesting argument to the Parliamentary Committee that the success of networks and development programs can ultimately cause their own failure. In her view, networks and programs fall into decline when the people initially involved in them develop their skills and move on, taking their enthusiasm and motivation with them and leaving a vacuum that is seldom filled. She has found that it is important that the “engine” (i.e. committee or facilitator, or both) be funded. If committees are operated on a voluntary basis for a couple of years, they may fall over because those people who developed that early platform for the group have learnt what they needed, and now wish to seek other information or resources (VPRRC 2012)

4.4 FEEDLOT AND SURVEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.4.1 SURVEY PARAMETERS AND FEEDLOTS SURVEYED

An assessment of the current information gathering and networking avenues being used by small-medium feedlots within the Darling Downs and Riverina regions was undertaken. It

also collected information on the demand for and any issues/barriers associated with the establishment of Feedlot Technology Adoption Groups within the Darling Downs and Riverina regions.

The physical boundaries of the Darling Downs and Riverina were defined by adjoining local government areas/localities that are known to be part of the “Darling Downs” and “Riverina” from historical local government electorates. An internal FSA Consulting database was then used to identify feedlots in these regions. Potential survey candidates were those recorded as operating feedlots with a designed or licensed pen capacity of ≤ 6000 Standard Cattle Units (SCU). Where possible FSA Consulting selected a range of feedlot sizes (≤ 6000 SCU), and tried to capture feedlot operators that were active within existing industry groups, and those who were not active within industry groups or members of ALFA. FSA Consulting tried contacting operators during business hours, and also between 7-9pm, messages were left after several attempts resulting in no direct contact.

Appendix C shows a copy of the questions used to complete the phone surveys with Darling Downs and Riverina feedlot operators.

Table 1 describes the type of information collected from the surveyed feedlots including:

- the feedlot design or licensed capacity
- numbers of cattle on feed at the time of the survey
- age of the feedlot operator (either owner or manager)
- most effective knowledge resource regarding best practice feedlot operation and management, and day-to-day troubleshooting
- ALFA membership status
- other group memberships/subscriptions.

TABLE 1 – FEEDLOTS SURVEYED

Feedlot ID	Design or licensed pen capacity (SCU)	Head on feed at time of the survey	Age bracket (years)	Most effective knowledge resource	ALFA member	Member of other group
Riverina 1	1000	300	>40	Free online info/data	Yes	NSW Farmers Assn.
Riverina 2	999	500	18-40	Paid vet or nutritionist	Yes	Simmental Australia
Riverina 3	6500	3000	18-40	Paid vet or nutritionist	Yes	NSW Farmers Assn.
Riverina 4	6000	5000	>40	Paid vet or nutritionist	Yes	NSW Farmers Assn.
Darling Downs 1	30000	670	>40	Free online info/data	No	-
Darling Downs 2	1600	400	>40	Paid vet or nutritionist	No	AGForce QLD
Darling Downs 3	1000	1000	>40	Paid vet or nutritionist	No	Landcare
Darling Downs 4	8100	6000	18-40	Paid vet or nutritionist	Yes	AGForce QLD, Kondinin
Darling Downs 5	1000	1000	18-40	Paid vet or nutritionist	Yes	AGForce QLD, Kondinin
Darling Downs 6	450	450	>40	Paid vet or nutritionist	No	-
Darling Downs 7	1550	1500	>40	Paid vet or nutritionist	Yes	-
Darling Downs 8	3600	0	>40	Paid vet or nutritionist	Yes	AGForce QLD, APL, NT Cattlemen's Assn.

4.4.2 RIVERINA REGION

The database identified 26 feedlots in the Riverina region with pen capacities of between 200 and 53 300 SCU. Some further interrogation of the database showed there were 18 feedlots with a pen capacity of ≤ 6000 SCU. Ten feedlots were contacted and four feedlot operators surveyed. One of the feedlots surveyed had a pen capacity of 6500 SCU (this was determined after the survey was completed).

The database showed 12 feedlots with a pen capacity of <1000 SCU and the feedlot operators that were surveyed indicated that it was likely that the majority of these were not feeding cattle due to low profitability at the time of survey (surveys completed in late August-early September 2012).

4.4.3 DARLING DOWNS REGION

The database identified 203 feedlots in the Darling Downs region with pen capacities of between 43 and 34 000 SCU. Further interrogation of the database showed there were 185 feedlots with a pen capacity of ≤ 6000 SCU and 107 feedlots with a pen capacity between 200-6000 SCU.

The database does not have contact information for approximately 75% of the feedlots with pen capacities between 200-6000 SCU. FSA Consulting used online search tools such as Google and the White Pages phone directory to find feedlot contact details where possible. Twenty-five feedlots were contacted and eight feedlot operators were surveyed.

4.4.4 EFFECT OF CURRENT INDUSTRY VIABILITY ON ATTRACTING SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

FSA Consulting suspects that the current low returns and poor industry morale significantly reduced the willingness of feedlot operators to be involved in this project. There were several feedlot operators that were contacted but declined to be surveyed and this may be due to frustration with the current low returns from lotfeeding. FSA Consulting acknowledged the state of the industry and was sympathetic to their concerns. It was explained to potential survey candidates that the project was assessing interest in developing Feedlot Producer Groups and that the concept may take years to develop (if supported), so please take a long term view, and try and put aside the immediate profitability issues that the industry is facing. Unfortunately, the strategic context provided did not increase survey participation.

4.5 FEEDLOT SURVEY OUTCOMES

This section reports the outcomes from surveys conducted with the feedlots listed in Table 1

1. How do you access industry knowledge?

The majority of respondents access industry knowledge on best practice for feedlot operation and management, and day-to-day troubleshooting from paid consultants. In most cases the most influential consultant was either the feedlot veterinarian or nutritionist. Two respondents reported that they access most knowledge from publically available online resources and these two operators were in the category of >40 years of age.

2. How often do you seek advice?

Those surveyed were asked to determine how often they sought information on the following topics based on a weekly, quarterly, half yearly, annual or other frequency. The most common frequencies reported were:

- environmental / manure management – annually
- animal husbandry and nutrition – quarterly
- business analysis / benchmarking – monthly
- marketing – quarterly
- new technology and equipment – quarterly

3. Have your methods for accessing industry knowledge, best practices, troubleshooting day-to-day operating and management issues changed in the last 5-10 years?

The overwhelming response was that internet access, internet speed/connection reliability and smart phones have had the greatest impact on the ability to access knowledge and new management practices.

4. How could your access to industry knowledge and/or resources be improved?

- Internet speed/connection reliability was considered a barrier for two feedlots, adversely affecting their access to industry knowledge.
- One respondent suggested the development of a new website as a “one stop shop” for feedlots to gain access to all the information categories listed in Question 2 including environmental / manure management, animal husbandry and nutrition, business analysis / benchmarking, marketing, new technology and equipment. The respondent emphasised that the website would need to be updated at least weekly and possibly have links that refresh grain/hay/cattle prices daily.
- One respondent suggested better linkages with other industries such as grain, livestock grazing etc. to share existing knowledge / findings rather than paying someone else to reinvent the wheel; or repackage, then resell to lotfeeders.

5. Are you a member of a group(s) or subscriber to a service?

Several feedlot operators were also members of other agricultural industry, land stewardship or stud breeding groups including NSW Farmers Association, AGForce QLD, Kondinin Group, Simmental Australia and Landcare.

6. What are the main benefits of that group / subscription for you and what format does the group / subscription involve?

Respondents that are members of either NSW Farmers Association or AGForce QLD indicated that the main benefits were being part of a wider agricultural lobby group that provides representation across many agricultural enterprises. The combined Kondinin Group and AGForce QLD members also operated cattle grazing and grain growing enterprises in conjunction with their feedlots and believed these groups provided access to new and innovative technology, and exposure to the latest issues that affect their businesses and assisted in managing the impact of those issues.

Of the groups listed above, feedlot respondents do not attend meetings and they said they were kept informed by email and/or hard copy newsletters that are circulated monthly-quarterly.

7. Have you adopted new technologies / practices as a result of learning's from Group events / the subscription?

The only response was from the feedlots that subscribe to the Kondinin Group. They use the machinery and technology comparisons to guide their purchases for precision agriculture in their grain growing enterprise e.g. auto-steer tractor guidance.

8. What is the main driver to you being a member of the group / maintaining the subscription and is your willingness to attend group events influenced by the opportunity to socialise and meet other likeminded people?

The main drivers for the feedlots being members of the groups were to support agricultural lobbying, access to staff/resources to assist in understanding employer responsibilities regarding WorkCover and individual employment contracts, and exposure to other agricultural enterprises.

The respondents rarely attended events organised by the other groups. They valued the ability to have access to the resources on demand, more than social interaction that would result from attending an event.

9. If you are not a member of a group or subscriber to a service how do you maintain access to industry knowledge?

Respondents that are not a member of a group or service subscriber maintain access to industry knowledge through publically available information on the internet.

10. Have you stopped participating in an industry group or subscribing to an industry service?

The only response was that one feedlot had ended their subscription to the Australia Fodder Industry Association because they did not believe they were receiving value for money through their membership.

11. Would you be interested in being a participant in a Young Feedlot Producer Group?

Seven respondents were interested in the concept of a *Feedlot Producer Group* and five respondents indicated they were not interested in the concept.

- Of the seven respondents that were interested in the group concept:
 - four were from the Riverina and three from the Darling Downs
 - four were in the 18-40 years age bracket and three were >40 years of age
 - one who was >40 years of age strongly suggested the removal of “Young” from the group concept because it may deter the involvement of a large percentage of people in the lotfeeding sector. This comment was provided during the third survey, so after this all future surveys discussed the concept of “*Feedlot Producer Groups*” and removed the reference to “Young”.
- The five respondents not interested in being part of a group were all >40 years of age and their main reason was that believed they already had all the knowledge they required to operate their feedlot businesses.

12. How far would you be willing to travel?

Feedlot operators would be willing to travel 150-200 km to attend an event and this estimate was based on the typical distances they travel to attend other industry events such as

workshops run by ALFA. They all commented that the content and perceived value of the topics on offer would influence their willingness to travel. If staff were going to be sent on behalf of the feedlot owner/manager there would be preference for events that didn't require an overnight stay (as this would be an additional cost to the feedlot).

13. How often would you like to meet?

Similar to the responses discussed in Question 12, the content and perceived value of the topics on offer would influence their willingness to meet. The most reported frequency was every 2-3 months for a 2-3 hour meeting/event, with the understanding that there may be an annual workshop/event that would take a whole day.

14. What method of contact would you prefer to be informed about scheduled meetings / events?

The preference was email, followed by text message.

15. What delivery format(s) would you prefer the group to use?

Face-to-face meetings/events was the preferred delivery method at a neutral location (e.g. hall or sporting club). Some respondents would be interested in visiting other feedlots and receiving an electronic newsletter as a means of staying in touch if they could not attend an event.

- One respondent said that visiting feedlots can be very rewarding and informative, but it also can prevent discussion about sensitive issues because some people may think they could offend a feedlot by asking a specific question. At a neutral location the question can be asked and interpreted in a general context, without the risk of potentially offending someone.
- One respondent commented that webinars can be very useful and do not require leaving the property, but there is also the temptation to complete other work whilst they are being broadcast. Attending a face-to-face event usually results in more attention being paid to the presentation/discussion forum.

16. Do you see any barriers to the development of Young Feedlot Producer Groups?

The feedlots indicated that the main barriers to the development of groups would be:

- **feedlot density** to enable sufficient people to maintain a group (Riverina region only)
- **competitive factors based on information sharing** between custom feeding and vertical integrated feedlot businesses
- **defining criteria around who should be allowed to be involved in a group.**

Feedlot density in the Riverina region

As part of this project FSA Consulting identified 26 feedlots in the Riverina region with pen capacities of between 200 and 53 300 SCU. The database showed 12 feedlots with a pen capacity of <1000 SCU and the feedlot operators that were surveyed indicated that it was

likely that the majority of these were not feeding cattle due to low profitability at the time of survey (surveys completed in late August-early September 2012).

One respondent from the Riverina region suggested that feedlots from northern Victoria should also be surveyed and, if interested in the concept, be considered as part of the group establishment. The limited number of operating feedlots in the Riverina may prohibit the formation of a group, thus MLA should seek to extend the boundaries beyond the Riverina.

Competitive factors

One respondent from the Darling Downs commented that some feedlots may not be willing to share knowledge/site specific operating data and therefore may not be willing to be involved in a group. This respondent said that some custom feed operations might feel that they are exposing sensitive business data that may be exploited by other custom feed operations. The respondent that raised this potential barrier said that they often shared or benchmarked operating data with other vertically integrated feedlot businesses and this has provided many benefits to both feedlots.

Defining criteria around who should be allowed in a group

One accredited feedlot operator would prefer to be involved in a group that only included accredited feedlots (National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme) or feedlots with council approval to operate. This respondent indicated that they were aware of many “paddock lotfeeders” that operate opportunistically. They believe the “paddock lotfeeders” would see an advantage in being involved in a group to extract free information on feeding nutrition and basic animal health, but not support industry best practice. This operator is frustrated by “paddock lotfeeders” who can command similar returns, but who do not respect the reputation of the lotfeeding industry, or the importance and/or cost of compliance to be an accredited feedlot.

One respondent who was >40 years of age strongly suggested the removal of “Young” from the group concept because it may deter the involvement of a large percentage of people in the lotfeeding sector. This comment was provided during the third survey, so after this all future surveys discussed the concept of “*Feedlot Producer Groups*” and removed the reference to “Young”.

17. Do you see any barriers to technology adoption within a Young Feedlot Producer Group?

The consensus from all the feedlots is that capital will ultimately determine whether / when a major technology will be adopted into their feedlot businesses. The most recent practice change has been improved animal handling practices being passed on through staff training.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 KEY FINDINGS FROM ESTABLISHED DAIRY AND GRAIN PRODUCER GROUPS

The following summarises the critical factors that led to the successful establishment of producer groups in the dairy and grains industry (discussed in Section 4.3)

- It is critical that the concept/need is driven by the farmers, not by the industry or government.
- There needs to be enough producers in an area to initially drive the concept/need, and to ensure that group members do not have to travel too far to attend events.
- Road testing the concept/need is necessary to ensure it is not already being met through another group; and it is also necessary to consider how the concept/need fits with seed funding opportunities and/or in-kind support.
- A paid facilitator that understands the administrative activities of operating a producer group or not for profit organisation, and who has established industry, state and commonwealth networks in order to seek funding.
- Leveraging funding to support the group and providing the capacity to employ an experienced facilitator.
- A Strategic Advisory Committee (SAC) that incorporates people covering a wide range of qualifications/skills/ages. The SAC role is to assist with defining the group's objectives and developing governance.
- A Local Advisory Committees (LAC) for the regional groups made up of producers. The LAC represents the local producers and its main function is to communicate the needs of the regional group members to the facilitator.
- Establishment of governance for the group, including setting objectives and time-bound dates for reviewing the performance and strategic direction of the group at least annually.

The following summarises the critical factors that has led to ongoing participation and viability of producer groups in the dairy and grains industry (discussed in Section 4.3)

- Funding is important for establishing a group but also in maintaining a viable group in the long term.
- Government funding is often sought because it provides financial security from outside the industry; avoids the hidden agendas or bias that may arise when there are sponsorship arrangements with commercial entities; and would stop different groups competing against each other for commercial funding.
- The groups surveyed recognise and value the social benefits of the groups. They also recognise that the processes of networking and sharing information are important for development of more profitable farming systems.
- None of the dairy or grain groups surveyed have formally evaluated "technology adoption" or "practice change" that may have resulted from participation in the group although practice change had occurred, possibly partly as a result of being involved with a group.
- The dairy industry highlighted the ongoing need to address volunteer/committee member burnout through adoption of a rolling committee. This also brings new ideas/skills/qualifications to assist the strategic direction of the group.

5.2 FEEDBACK FROM FEEDLOT OPERATORS

5.2.1 BARRIERS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FEEDLOT PRODUCER GROUPS

The feedlots indicated that the main barriers to the development of groups would be:

- feedlot density to enable sufficient people to maintain a group (Riverina region only)
- competitive factors based on information sharing between custom feeding and vertical integrated feedlot businesses
- defining criteria around who should be allowed to be involved in a group e.g. NFAS or approved feedlots only. Perhaps the groups should not be restricted to “young” lotfeeders.

Note: It was suggested that feedlots from northern Victoria could be considered as potential members of a Riverina group.

5.2.2 SUGGESTIONS TO COMPLEMENT THE FEEDLOT PRODUCER GROUP CONCEPT

One feedlot respondent suggested the idea of developing a program to support feedlot staff training that provided opportunities to visit and work at other feedlots in other regions to share knowledge and expose them to other likeminded people. The lotfeeding industry could draw on the experiences of the BCG 2020 Vision sub-group that aims to conduct an industry study every couple of years to expose young members to other agricultural industries, practices and to create new networks.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 SHOULD THE LOTFEEDING INDUSTRY ESTABLISH FEEDLOT PRODUCER GROUPS?

The results from feedlots surveyed show there is some interest in the concept of establishing Feedlot Producer Groups in the Darling Downs and Riverina regions. The next phase requires MLA/ALFA to empower a motivated group of producers (develop some critical mass) to drive the concept and define a series of objectives for the group(s) to achieve. The objectives should then be evaluated using support from the industry to determine if they have / are already being achieved through other projects. If not, industry would need to consider how to support the establishment of a formal group(s) to achieve its objectives.

The key findings from this project highlight that it is critical that:

- the **concept/need is driven by the farmers**, not by the industry or government. The group should be built “from the bottom up, not the top down”
- the group is **supported by a paid facilitator** that understands the administrative activities of operating a producer group and has established industry, state and commonwealth networks in order to seek funding.

6.2 EXPLOIT THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES OF EXISTING PRODUCER GROUPS

Experience from the dairy and grain industries shows that groups tend to fail and/or participation declines if the producers relinquish ownership, or allow industry or government to influence the strategic direction.

There is a wealth of knowledge and experience within the “grey-matter” of the people contacted as part of this project. If the lotfeeding industry wants to develop the concept of a Feedlot Producer Group then the industry should exploit the experiences, knowledge and publications that have been developed by the dairy and grain industries. For example, GGA provides several publically available resources on its website to assist industries in establishing producer groups. Two key resources include:

- The Grower Group Toolkit is a compilation of the knowledge the GGA has gathered over the years to answer questions for both new and developed groups and is a valuable resource for new staff or members taking on a role in a producer group. The Toolkit also includes useful templates, such as:
 - Sponsorship
 - Strategic plan template
 - Submission writing template
 - Executive Officer job description template
- The Grower Group Event Handbook is a comprehensive guide for running a successful event, be it a field day, crop update, trial review or workshop. The booklet also contains the following handy templates:
 - Event management risk assessment sheet

- Management plan: service of alcohol
- Presenter briefing note
- 13 ways to advertise your event for FREE
- Communication strategy: spreading the word
- Writing a winning media release
- Evaluation

7 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A – QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE DAIRY & GRAINS INDUSTRIES

QUESTION	NOTES TO ASSIST THE PHONE DISCUSSION
1. How do you access industry knowledge? (For example best practices, troubleshooting day-to-day operating and management issues.)	a. member of industry or producer group b. online – free web resources, paid subscription c. paid consultant – vet, nutritionist, grain / hay buyer d. industry colleague or mentor e. government department f. MLA website g. ALFA member h. other – please specify
2. If you access knowledge using more than one method selected in Q1, which do rank as the most effective and valuable to your business?	
3. How often do you seek advice? Consider the following categories: a) environmental / manure management b) animal husbandry and nutrition c) business analysis / benchmarking d) marketing e) new technology and equipment	a) each week, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, other b) each week, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, other c) each week, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, other d) each week, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, other e) each week, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months, other
4. Have your methods for accessing industry knowledge, best practices, troubleshooting day-to-day operating and management issues changed in the last 5-10 years? (If yes, please explain how and why. Consider the impact of smart phones, text messaging etc.)	
5. How could your access to industry knowledge be improved?	
6. How could your access to resources be improved?	
7. Are you a member of a group(s) or subscriber to a service? (If yes, provide the name of the group / subscription.)	
8. What are the main benefits of that group / subscription for you?	
9. What format does the group / subscription involve?	a) meeting – weekly, monthly, 3 months, 6 months, other b) email – weekly, monthly, 3 months, 6 months, other c) hard copy – weekly, monthly, 3 months, 6 months, other d) combination of meetings and electronic information e) combination of meetings and hard copy information
10. Have you adopted new technologies / practices as a result of learning's from Group events / the subscription? (If yes, please specify what you have adopted)	
11. What is the main driver to you being a member of the group / maintaining the subscription?	
12. Is your willingness to attend group events influenced by the opportunity to socialise and meet other like minded people?	a) no b) partly c) strongly d)

13. If you are not a member of a group or subscriber to a service how do you maintain access to industry knowledge?	
14. Have you stopped participating in an industry group or subscribing to an industry service? (If yes, please indicate the group / subscription and your reasons.)	Name of the group / subscription a) cost b) not deemed relevant – the content, speakers c) time commitment d) too far to travel e) lack of similar aged people f) other – please specify
Consider the following questions from a hypothetical context	
15. Would you be interested in being a participant in Young Feedlot Producer Group?	a) yes b) no
16. How far would you be willing to travel?	
17. How often would you like to meet?	
18. What method of contact would you prefer to be informed about scheduled meetings / events?	a) phone call to landline b) fax c) mail out flyer d) call to mobile e) text message f) email g) other – please specify
19. What delivery format(s) would you prefer the group to use? (Rank if several selected)	a) face-to-face meeting b) webinars c) email newsletter d) feedlot visits e) other
20. Do you see any barriers to the development of Young Feedlot Producer Groups?	a) regional feedlot density b) time to attend c) lack of young people employed in regional feedlots d) no known feedlot mentor / champion e) other – please specify
21. What would be required for Young Feedlot Producer Groups to adopt new technology / practices?	
22. Do you see any barriers to technology adoption within a Young Feedlot Producer Group?	a) participant aptitude b) reliable internet access and / or speed c) insufficient funds to implement technology d) other – please specify

APPENDIX B – GRAINS AND DAIRY INDUSTRY CONTACT DETAILS

Organisation / Company	Position	First Name	Last Name	Location	Ph No.	Mobile	Email	Date Contacted	Comments
Young Dairy Network	Project Mngr	Vivienne	McCollum	QLD	07 4697 9311	0428 718 620	vivienne@dairyinfo.biz	20 August 2012	
DairySA	Executive Officer	Verity	Inham	SA	08 8766 0127		verity@dairysa.com.au	27 July 2012	Contact Ross Bawden - DA
Gipps Dairy	Executive Officer	Danielle	Auldist	VIC		0400 503 938	executiveofficer@gippsdairy.com.au	27 July 2012	Contact Bill Dullard - YDDP
Young Dairy Development Program	State Coordinator	Bill	Dullard	VIC		0448 969 337	yddpsc@gippsdairy.com.au	24 August 2012	
Dairy Australia	Dairy Australia Regional Development Programs Business Manager	Ross	Bawden	VIC	03 9694 3777		rbawden@dairyaustralia.com.au	27 July 2012	
Grower Group Alliance	Project Leader	Susan	Hall	WA	08 6488 7937	0400 889 036	susan.a.hall@uwa.edu.au	24 August 2012	
Grower Group Alliance	Project Officer	Rebecca	Wallis	WA	08 6488 3410		rebecca.wallis@uwa.edu.au	17 August 2012	Contact Susan Hall - GGA

APPENDIX C – QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE FEEDLOT PARTICIPANTS

QUESTION	NOTES TO ASSIST THE PHONE DISCUSSION
1. What were the initial needs / drivers that led to the development of the "Technology Adoption Group" or "Young Producer Group"?	Lack of confidence / knowledge from the broader bodies e.g. Dairy Australia, State Farmer Federation / Organisation; industry downturn and greater efficiencies required, knowledge / age gap of the remaining pool of producers
2. What led to the formation of the group?	<p>When did the group form?</p> <p>Where is the group based?</p> <p>Was there an industry champion(s) behind the formation of the group?</p> <p>What was its initial purpose?</p> <p>Initiated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industry body (e.g. Dairy Australia), young producers, old producers, service providers (e.g. agronomist, nutritionist, vet), combined effort <p>Who initially funded the group when it first commenced?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industry body, producers, state or commonwealth government <p>Staffing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • volunteer, paid facilitator • initial time commitment (e.g. 0.5 day/wk 0.5 FTE) <p>Baseline resources that were used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • office, website, land for trials, facilitator <p>Were there any teething problems?</p> <p>What and how were these teething problems addressed in the early stages?</p>
3. What critical factors led to the successful implementation of the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • size • purpose • location • composition • funding • coordination e.g. producer driver v facilitator driven • density of the producers within the regions, distance between producers • involvement of an industry champion(s)
4. Has technology adoption been formally assessed? (If yes, who completed the assessment and what was the main objective of the assessment?)	
5. Once established, what were the critical factors that led to the successful implementation of <i>technology adoption</i> within the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industry champion(s) • method of communication / engagement e.g. electronic such as webinar, email or hard copy newsletter or booklets • method of delivery e.g. face-to-face workshops, e-workshops that are completed at home / business, interactive webinars • method of assessing adoption: written feedback forms, phone interview (post training / awareness), contact by independent

	3 rd party (independent of the trainer / deliverer)
6. Once established, what were the critical factors that led to the ongoing uptake of <i>technology adoption</i> and participation within the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • size • purpose • location • composition • funding • coordination e.g. producer driver v facilitator driven • density of the producers within the regions, distance between producers • involvement of an industry champion(s)
7. How has the group responded to internal and external factors that affect its viability and / or relevance over time?	<p>Internal Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of leadership / skilled people / technical resources • change to the Group objectives • change of roles or shared responsibilities • collaboration or amalgamation with other Group(s) <p>External factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of industry / government funding • impact of commodity prices • regulation and / or insurance costs (e.g. work cover and professional indemnity)