

FEEDBACK

MLA – FOSTERING PROSPERITY

AUTUMN 2025



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MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA

MLA fosters the long-term prosperity of the Australian red meat and livestock industry by delivering world-leading outcomes that fuel global competitiveness, sustainability and producer profitability.



Cover: The McKay family of 'Umbearra Station' on the NT/SA border have a strategic weaner management program which underpins herd productivity. Learn more on page 6. Image: Angus McKay.

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A note from the MD

Welcome to the autumn edition of *Feedback* magazine.

Over the past five months I have had the pleasure of meeting with hundreds of stakeholders to help MLA develop its new five-year *Strategic Plan*.

These sessions took place around the country, from Perth to Tamworth to Brisbane to Melbourne and many other places. We also had an online survey.

We received more than 1,000 pieces of feedback – from livestock producers, processors, researchers, peak industry bodies, government departments and service providers – to include into our *Strategic Plan* development.

This consultation created an opportunity for these stakeholders to provide input into the key opportunities and challenges for the red meat and livestock sector, looking ahead to 2030. For example, some of the biggest opportunities were identified as environmental sustainability, market access, Meat Standards Australia, objective measurement, genetics, on-farm adoption and animal welfare, among others.

They were very clear about their continuing high expectations of MLA, and that the organisation must help the industry to meet the opportunities and challenges over the next five years.

Opportunities

We have immense potential over the next five years for our industry to strengthen partnerships and collaborations, investigate cutting-edge technology, expand our markets, and lift productivity and profitability. This period offers the chance to enhance our sustainability and build community engagement and trust.

MLA's *Strategic Plan* for 2025–2030 will set the framework to achieve these ambitions.

Challenges

Stakeholders told us that MLA and the industry need to respond to a changing operating environment, being aware of major global factors such as shifting political situations, changing terms of trade, volatile currency and commodity markets, biosecurity and fluctuating climate and weather patterns.

As I lead the development of MLA's next *Strategic Plan*, there is a lot to be excited about in how we work together to shape the direction of our industry.

Capturing value

We can move from a traditional supply chain to creating a value chain. By focusing on areas where we can create and capture value, the benefits will flow to producers.

To achieve this value creation and capture, we must connect consumer and customer insights to brand specifications. Brand specification compliance, along with objective measures of quality and yield, can change payment incentives, which then allows the production system to respond.

We can breed, feed and finish livestock with a market destination in mind. Carcase feedback will flow to the breeder of the livestock and not just the last owner. In turn, we can feed forward the genetic potential of animals, raising claims and accreditations so livestock are more appropriately valued on a liveweight basis.

To underpin this, we will need the data systems and data capability which is being developed through a National Livestock Identification System database redevelopment.

We have the objective measurement technology commercially ready to provide the measurement tools needed, and we have ongoing uptake of genomic technology to support the genetic potential of our livestock.

This gives me confidence we can elevate productivity, deliver positive environmental outcomes, be objective in our market focus and continue to meet and exceed the expectations of the ever-changing and evolving consumer.

As we move towards value-based marketing, we will see improvements in price signals to reward higher value animals, we will strike the appropriate balance between quality and yield, and we will deliver efficiencies in extensive production systems.

There is an exciting future ahead of us and I look forward to seeing where we can take this industry with an ambitious and aspirational plan that is delivered with practical and high-impact execution.

Next steps

We will continue to refine the *Strategic Plan* with levy payers, peak bodies and other stakeholders, ensuring alignment to the broader industry strategic plan, *Red Meat 2030* (overseen by the Red Meat Advisory Council).

The plan will then be presented for approval by the MLA Board before it officially commences on

1 July 2025. ■

Michael Crowley – MLA Managing Director

- ✉ I am always keen to hear MLA members' thoughts and feedback – please email me at managing.director@mla.com.au



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This season...



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Host

a BredWell FedWell workshop:

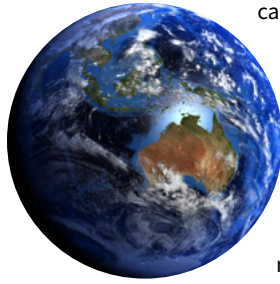
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Change to forecast tools

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has implemented significant changes to its long-range forecasts.

The Bureau is continuing to reduce its emphasis on climate indicators, previously referred to as climate drivers, like *El Niño* and *La Niña*.

The changes will encourage people to focus on its long-range forecasts – which



capture all ocean and atmospheric conditions that affect seasonal weather – rather than just a few climate indicators.

BOM is suggesting key industry stakeholders make decisions for their agricultural enterprise based on these long-range forecasts. These will become the more reliable prediction method in the foreseeable future.

🔗 Visit bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks to access the long-range forecasts.

Important updates for livestock advisors

Free resources to help build your service offering

MLA has compiled a suite of resources for advisors to help build their service offering, upskill themselves and their employees, and connect with people in the industry. Find it all in this free advisor resource guide (scan or click the QR code):



Refer clients to MLA adoption events and win

Encourage your clients to register for an MLA adoption event (e.g. EDGE workshops, MeatUp/BeefUp forums, BredWell FedWell and more), and you could win a \$100 VISA gift card. Entries are open until 31 March. Scan or click the QR code to learn how:



Get involved with MLA projects in 2025

MLA is currently searching for service providers to undertake a range of projects and consultative positions. Scan or click the QR code to see what's on offer this year and how you can get involved:



🔗 For the latest red meat industry advisory news, sign up for *The Advisor* e-newsletter at mla.com.au/mymla

MeatUp and BeefUp forums are back

MLA's popular MeatUp and BeefUp forums have kicked off for the year, giving producers across Australia the opportunity to stay up to date with the latest research and technologies and connect with like-minded people in their region.

meatup
FORUM

- 📅 12 March
📍 Naracoorte, SA
- 📅 18 March
📍 Albany, WA
- 📅 15 July
📍 Wagga Wagga, NSW

🔗 mla.com.au/meatup

beefup
FORUM

- 📅 14 March
📍 Cloncurry, QLD
- 📅 8 July
📍 Rockhampton, QLD
- 📅 18 July
📍 Alice Springs, NT

🔗 mla.com.au/beefup

Five reasons to sign up to a forum near you:

- 1 Be the first to know about new research and technologies
- 2 Get practical information relevant to your region
- 3 Network with producers and advisors from your local area
- 4 See R&D in action with engaging demonstrations
- 5 Go home with the tools and resources you need to make better decisions on-farm.

New ABSF appointment



The Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (ABSF) has welcomed Patrick Hutchinson as the new Chair of its Steering Group.

Patrick brings more than 25 years of experience in the Australian red meat and livestock industry. Most recently he was Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC). His career spans advocacy,

industry leadership, and navigating complex global trade and policy environments. Now leading his own agribusiness advisory, Patrick brings a broad, supply chain-wide perspective to the role, ensuring sustainability remains a priority for the entire industry.

The ABSF is owned, developed and led by industry through the peak industry bodies

Cattle Australia, Australian Lot Feeders' Association, and AMIC, with a vision of a thriving Australian beef industry that strives to continuously improve the wellbeing of people, animals and the environment.

It is overseen by an Advisory Board and led by the independent Steering Group, while MLA provides resources, including the secretariat, in support of the ABSF.

🔗 Visit sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au



Patrick Hutchinson is the new Chair of the ABSF Steering Group.

Export momentum continues

Exports of Australian red meat continued the record momentum seen last year, with goatmeat and mutton both reaching new January highs.

These highlights are from the most recent MLA markets insights analysis. Turn to page 4 to read a new *Feedback* column, 'The stock/take', which takes a closer look at trends and data.

Lamb

Lamb exports fell 4% from January last year to 24,177 tonnes. Despite the decline, January 2025 export numbers still reached the second largest on record for January. This is broadly in line with the high slaughter volumes seen towards the end of 2024.

The US was the largest market for Australian lamb, with volumes rising 6% from last year to 6,020t. China was the second largest market, with exports falling 4% from last year to 3,414t, while exports to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) rose 14% from last year to 2,516t.

Frozen lamb exports eased by 6% from year ago levels to 13,147t, with chilled lamb exports also falling by 1% to 11,030t. Resilient chilled figures can be partially explained by strong volumes exported to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) markets, which is primarily a market for chilled lamb, and chilled carcasses in particular.



Mutton

Australia exported 19,776t of mutton, the largest January export volume on record.

Following on from the strong finish to 2024, exports to China rose 16% from last year to 7,326t, making it the largest market for mutton. Following China, exports to Malaysia lifted 63% to 2,792t and exports to Saudi Arabia lifted 20% to 1,416t.



Goatmeat

Exports of Australian goatmeat lifted 67% from last year to 4,044t. This is the largest January goatmeat export figure on record, and remarkably, 41% higher than the previous January record (set in 2017).

The US was the largest market with exports rising 13% to 1,517t, while exports to China lifted 183% to 764t and exports to South Korea lifted 79% to 620t.



Beef

Australia exported 81,050t of beef in January, 7% more than January 2024 and the highest January beef volume on record. Grainfed exports fell 4% from last year to 22,786t, while grassfed exports lifted 13% to 58,283t.

The US remained the largest market for Australian beef, with exports lifting 22% from last year to 24,685t. Exports to Japan fell 3% from last year to 15,806t and exports to China rose 6% to 14,908t.

After an unusually large increase in exports in December, January volumes to Korea dipped 9% to 10,596t. This dip comes after a record 2024, with Australia shipping 200,545t of beef to Korea, on the back of decreased US beef supply and increased availability of Australian products.



New levy legislative framework in effect

A new agricultural levies legislative framework came into effect on 1 January. This framework is made up of five new pieces of legislation:

- *Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act 2024*
- *Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Act 2024*
- *Primary Industries (Services) Levies Act 2024*
- *Primary Industries Levies and Charges Collection Act 2024*
- *Primary Industries Levies and Charges Disbursement Act 2024.*

The new legislation is more streamlined, flexible and consistent. This will make it easier for levy payers, collection agents and recipients of levy funds to understand their obligations.

The key features of the levy system remain the same. This means there is no change to existing levy rates, the bodies that receive levies, or the purposes for which levies can be established and used.

The new legislation uses consistent terms for the different levy components. These are:

- research and development component
- marketing component
- general component
- biosecurity activity component
- biosecurity response component
- National Residue Survey component. ■

Further information and guidance materials are available from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's website – scan or click the QR code or visit agriculture.gov.au/levies



The stock/take

with Stephen Bignell, Manager –
Market Information

MLA's Market Information team unpacks trends and data, to help inform your business.



Producers answer the big questions



For a long time, producers and industry stakeholders have pondered these questions, but not really known the answers or where to find them.

This information is now available in the results of MLA's Sheep Producer Intentions Survey and Beef Producer Intentions Survey.

These important surveys are run three times a year by MLA's Market Information team.

Informing investment

They are a useful tool for industry and assist in ascertaining the size of the national flock and herd, and when supply of livestock is likely to hit the market.

MLA also uses the survey responses to help target our adoption programs –

helping producers get more tailored MLA services.

Not only does the survey provide value to industry, but there is also great value to producers by completing the survey.

Every respondent receives a personalised benchmark to compare their answers against others in their state.

Have your say

The next producer intentions surveys will be released in April.

We encourage every producer to complete the surveys when they arrive in their inboxes, as more data – and better data – about producers' decisions over the next 12 months will drive the industry forward. ■

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- MLA market reports: mla.com.au/prices-markets
- MLA trends analysis: mla.com.au/trends-analysis
- Stephen Bignell sbignell@mla.com.au

Intention insights

Here are some of the key results from the most recent producer intentions surveys.

NOVEMBER
2024

Beef

National sentiment among grassfed beef producers is 47 basis points (bp), up 327% from last year due to improved seasonal conditions and a better outlook for prices.

47bp
sentiment

Producer sentiment in both WA and Tasmania moved from negative to positive over the past 12 months, shifting from -28bp to 16bp and -12bp to 34bp, respectively.

34bp
TAS

45% of beef producers are looking to increase their herds in 2025, with 16% of producers holding their herd size the same.

45%
increase

39% of producers, mainly in SA and Tasmania, are looking at reducing their herd size in 2025.

39%
reduce

Angus remains the dominant cattle breed in southern Australia, with 67% of all cattle in southern Australia produced by Angus cows.

67%
Angus

In northern Australia, 46% of the herd is born to Brahman cows – the next two most popular breeds are Santa Gertrudis and Droughtmaster.

46%
Brahman

Sheep

The results show a decline in the number of Merino lambs being born. In the current lamb cohort, only 35% of lambs were Merino, down from 40% two years ago. Over the same time the proportion of shedding lambs has doubled from 4% of the lamb crop to 8% in 2024. (Turn to page 32 to learn more about breeding shedding sheep.)

35%
Merino

Over the past two years, more producers are selling their lambs over-the-hooks (OTH), increasing by 21%, as producers try to secure space at abattoirs.

+21%
OTH

At the same time, saleyard usage has increased by 5% over the past year due to the large size of the lamb cohort and the poor conditions in Victoria and SA, which resulted in increased store lamb trading.

+5%
saleyard



DIG DEEPER



Scan or click the QR code to read the results of previous surveys:

Sheep
Producer

Intentions Survey:



Beef
Producer

Intentions Survey:



ON FARM

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Seasonal action plan

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with grazing
and land
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Tap into a new
P tool for more
productive soils

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transition to a non-
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Get ahead of
the climate
curve for future
productivity

Weaner wellbeing sets up future productivity

A strategic approach to weaner management underpins high standards of cattle health and productivity in the McKay family's enterprise on the NT/SA border.

Angus (Gus) and Kimberley McKay and their three children manage 820,000ha across two properties – 'Umbearra' and 'Idracowra'. Gus is the third generation of the McKay family on these lands.

They are custodians of diverse terrain – including open granite range country, gum-lined creeks, mulga country, sand hill regions, river plains and flood-out areas.

A rich mix of native and enhanced vegetation supports approximately 11,500 Red Angus-cross cattle, a breed selected for its fertility and Meat Standards Australia (MSA) scoring potential. Umbearra's average MSA index over the past 12 months was 59.79.

Stocking strategies

The McKays oversee a comprehensive range of cattle operations, from self-replacing breeding programs to turning off heavy steers.

At full capacity, the property supports 2,000 maiden heifers, 4,500 breeders, 120 bulls and 5,000 steers.

Herd numbers are strategically adjusted based on the stock class and land system, all coordinated around essential watering points.

This is identified by the carrying capacity of the various land types across the property

and the estimated pasture yield. Due to the variability of rainfall in Central Australia, a conservative approach is taken to provide sufficient ongoing feed should there be limited rainfall the following year.

"We run conservative numbers so our stocking rate doesn't change much due to seasonal conditions," Gus said.

Trusted advisors

The McKays draw on their 60 years of family experience and expertise in managing Umbearra as well as the advice of rangeland specialists.

Dr Dionne Walsh – an expert in the field who runs her own consultancy and has worked for the NT Government in research and consultancy roles around rangeland management – contributes valuable insights into their management decisions and practices.

Chris Materne, Pastoral Production Officer for the NT Government, also brings his extensive experience researching pastures and carrying capacity in rangeland environments to the table when discussing the McKays' management decisions.

This collaborative strategy has been crucial in optimising the efficiency of the couple's livestock management.

Markets

The McKays' cattle are predominantly marketed through abattoirs in Victoria and SA.

The natural advantages of Central Australia, with its expansive natural landscapes, good pasture quality and minimal pollution and parasites, supports organic farming practices.

All mature cattle are processed under an organic label, accredited by both the United States Department of Agriculture National Organic Program (USDA/NOP) and Australian Standards.

They aim to sell this portion of cattle at approximately 24–28 months of age, weighing between 600–700kg.

"Organic certification is pretty easy for us in our environment," Gus said.



The McKay family. Image: Angus McKay.

SNAPSHOT



GUS AND KIMBERLEY MCKAY – 'Umbearra' and 'Idracowra', NT/SA border



AREA
8,200km²

ENTERPRISE
11,500 Red Angus-cross cattle

PASTURES
Range of native and enhanced vegetation

SOILS
Diverse

RAINFALL
200–250mm



Gus McKay in the yards with the weaners. Image: Angus McKay.

Their primary challenge lies in securing high-quality organic hay and ensuring lick blocks don't contain any urea. To address this, they have partnered with an organic lick supplier who custom makes their phosphorus lick blocks, ensuring compliance with organic standards while maintaining the health and productivity of their livestock.

The McKays source their phosphorus lick blocks and biochar blocks from Olsson's Blocks as these don't contain urea so are able to pass organic certification.

Breeder management

The McKays use a two-month controlled mating period at Umbearra for their maiden heifers once they reach approximately 300kg at 12–15 months of age.

They use continuous mating after this initial phase.

The heifer conception rate is an average of 86%. Any heifers that are identified as pregnancy tested empty (PTE) after this maiden mating are turned out with the steers, where they are grown to a target weight of 500kg and transported to markets.

The McKays' weaning strategies enable them to consistently maintain a minimum body condition score of three for both their heifers and cows. This careful management ensures the health and productivity of their livestock and the land, reflecting their commitment to quality and sustainability in their cattle operations.

Weaning

The McKays' approach to cattle management involves meticulous care of heifers and steers from the weaning stage onward.

At Umbearra, they wean from 200kg (or approximately nine months of age) to allow heifers and cows to regain their body condition before cycling again.

Once in the yards, the weaners are fed organic oaten hay. Due to their organic certification, the McKays are limited to compliant supplements and therefore wean at the higher end of the weight range. This ensures weaners have enough reserves to continue growing well without additional supplementation.

The McKays dedicate a significant amount of time to educating weaners in the yards and tailing them out.

They adopt a low-stress stock handling practice both inside and outside the yards at Umbearra, to ensure the wellbeing of their livestock.

Tailing out activities are conducted using motorbikes to allow weaners to be efficiently moved and fed on pasture before being returned to the yards – this also maintains uniformity in mustering practices later on. Additionally, weaners undergo internal yard work and education, which produces animals with good temperaments.

Rings are used to castrate weaner steers. Heifers and steers are branded using a gas fire brand to maintain identification and health records. Umbearra boasts a weaning rate of approximately 90% – a testament to the McKays' high standards of cattle management and strategic planning.

"We are very happy with our weaning rate – it has taken 22 years of controlled mating to achieve these results," Gus said.

Mustering

The McKays use water trapping, airplanes, helicopters and motorbikes for mustering. The prevalence of *Indigofera*, a poisonous plant that can complicate the safe use of horses in the area, has led them to favour motorbikes.

The McKays conduct two full musters annually at Umbearra, in addition to a mid-year pregnancy testing muster for the maiden heifers. The meticulous mustering and weaning practices, along with conservative stocking rates, are key contributors to the property's high weaning rate, as the females remain in good body condition, enabling a short post-partum anoestrus period and high pregnancy rate.

In addition to their usual mustering practices, the McKays have successfully integrated stress-free stockmanship learnings from

Bruce Maynard. This approach prioritises understanding and working with the natural behaviours of cattle to minimise stress during handling.

By incorporating these principles, particularly during the critical periods of mustering and tailing out, the McKays ensure a consistent and gentle handling process.

This adaptation approach not only maintains the wellbeing of cattle but also enhances the overall efficiency and safety of operations, which keeps animals calm and responsive. In turn, animals experience less stress when in the yards, allowing for more consistent and efficient daily weight gains.

Data management

The McKays follow the principle of 'what isn't measured can't be managed'.

Their main data-driven areas of focus are fertility and turn-off weights. They use Gallagher crush-side technology and Black Box systems to monitor cattle and carcase performance.

All cattle are equipped with a National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) tag to ensure full traceability and electronic data recording. Breeders are also assigned management tags that identify their age, to enhance management and tracking within the herd.

This systematic approach to data collection and analysis is integral to optimising the productivity and sustainability of their livestock operations. ■

"We are very happy with our weaning rate – it has taken 22 years of controlled mating to achieve these results."

TOOLBOX



🔍 Read *Weaner management in northern beef herds*: mla.com.au/weaner-management

🔍 Tools and resources for northern cattle producers: mla.com.au/northern-cattle

🔍 Meat Standards Australia: mla.com.au/msa

✔ Anna Toland uses eID data to improve health and welfare traits in her family's stud and commercial Poll Merino flocks.

eID game changer: learnings from two decades of data

Recording and improving traits of genetic merit have played a key role in ensuring Victorian sheep producers, the Toland family, can make informed decisions to achieve their breeding and production goals.

They were early adopters of electronic identification (eID) in their Poll Merino stud at Violet Town, implementing eID tags in 2007 – 12 years before it was mandated for sheep in that state.

The Tolands initially used the tags as a tool to collect data to improve the genetic merit of their stud lambs.

Since taking over management of the family business in 2020, third-generation producer Anna Toland and her husband Simon Riddle have continued to utilise eID to boost on-farm productivity. They now record to improve more than 50 genetic traits.

With eID tags now mandatory for all Australian sheep producers, Anna shares her insights and advice on how eID can help commercial Merino producers harness the power of data.

Improving key traits

In their goal to breed advanced, all-purpose polled Merino rams, the family's business has been heavily focused on improving growth, carcass quality and wool traits of their flock for the past 60 years.

While Anna said they've made many changes to their production system over the decades, using eID for data collection to aid reproduction decision making has been a game changer.

"Over the years, we've been steadily increasing the traits of genetic merit we record data on," she said.

"So, it's really done a great job at putting us in a position where we can make reproduction calls with confidence."

In addition to recording her animals' genetic merit for target traits, Anna also inputs her own notes into the database.

"While genetics do play a huge role in indicating how an animal's progeny will perform, I also like to note additional factors relating to each ewe's productivity and ability to mother," she said.

"I'll record their weights, but I'll also note if they're missing any teats, what their toes are like, if they've had and reared multiples, and if their teeth are showing any sign of wear.

"I'm ultimately putting myself in the best position to make reproductive and flock management decisions."

Health and welfare

Like many Australian red meat producers, improving animal health and welfare traits has become a growing priority for the Tolands over the years.

"We've also been utilising eID data collection to concentrate on improving dag scoring, worm egg counts and reducing breech wrinkle," Anna said.

"These are traits I feel are really important for commercial breeders as they combine to produce an animal that is easy to care for – something which will benefit not only the animal, but you and your business."

Productivity gains

Since introducing eID, Anna said there has been a clear return on investment.

"On-farm management and decision making have been seamless thanks to eID allowing us to collect lifetime flock data, use that data to boost our business production, and then integrate that data through the supply chain to better showcase rams we sell," she said.

"In 2024, we weaned 120% of lambs to ewes joined and 59% of our stud ewes scanned



✔ Anna Toland scans eID tags to collect data to guide flock management decisions.

SNAPSHOT



**ANNA TOLAND AND
SIMON RIDDLE –**
'Toland Poll Merino',
Violet Town, Victoria



AREA
1,200ha

ENTERPRISE
1,500 Poll Merino commercial ewes,
900 Poll Merino stud ewes, 200 ram lambs

PASTURES
Annual sub-clovers and grasses,
perennials, phalaris, fescues and lucerne

SOILS
Mix of loams, clays and gravels

RAINFALL
650mm

with twins were able to successfully carry them to term and raise them," she said.

"Selecting for resilience through fat and muscle scoring has played a key role in improving ewe body condition which, in turn,

“I’m ultimately putting myself in the best position to make reproductive and flock management decisions.”

has allowed our ewes to regain condition quicker after lambing and weaning.”

Anna said they even have a few eight-year-old ewes, which continue to earn their place year after year.

“They’ve remained productive and possess sound mouths and weights, and serve as a great indication of how beneficial using eIDs to collect and use data that focuses on improving genetics has been to our flock’s long-term productivity and profitability.”

First step with eID

According to Anna, the first step to making the most of eID is to determine your breeding objectives.

“This enables you to then identify which genetic traits will align with achieving your objectives,” she said.

Anna suggests producers keep it very simple to begin with and start by focusing on just a few traits. When they’ve perfected the recording and analysing process of these traits, they can expand to improving other genetic traits.

“Patience and consistency are key when it comes to investing in data collection and improving genetic traits, so make sure you’re putting your energy and time towards data you know you will use.

“While we did see small improvements occur every year during our induction of eIDs, it wasn’t until that three to five-year mark when we saw significant gain on the quality of our flock’s productivity and profitability.

“The ability to retrieve accurate data in a timely manner paired with those gains does deliver a moment of, ‘oh, this is really worth it!’” ■



Setting breeding objectives lets producers get more from eID data.

TOOLBOX

Learn more about eID:
integritysystems.com.au/eID

Learn how to set a breeding objective:
genetics.mla.com.au/merino

i tolandmerino.com.au Anna Toland anna@tolandmerino.com.au Elizabeth Bradley eb Bradley@integritysystems.com.au

Six steps for NLIS success

Electronic identification (eID) tags are now mandatory for all sheep and goats born from 1 January 2025, so it’s crucial producers understand how to use the individual tags within the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS). Here are six steps to follow for NLIS-compliance:

1 Ensure you have a PIC

Contact your state or territory department to organise a property identification code (PIC) or check that your property’s PIC is in your name. You can find a list of these contacts on the ISC website:

integritysystems.com.au/about/contacts

Scan or click the QR code to learn more about updating/removing your PIC details.

2 Order NLIS-accredited eID devices

Scan or click the QR code for ISC’s monthly NLIS tips and tricks column with more information on how to select and apply tags.

Scan or click the QR code for a useful Q&A on what to do if you’re having problems with your NLIS-approved tags.

3 Set up your accounts

Learn how to set up and link your myMLA account to your ISC accounts: mla.com.au/mymla

Read more about setting up your NLIS account at integritysystems.com.au/nlis-how-to or log in to your existing NLIS account at nlis.com.au

4 Move stock off your PIC

LPA-accredited producers can access the free electronic National Vendor Declarations (eNVD), while non-accredited producers can use a waybill. Scan or click the QR code to learn more about using the eNVD mobile app or web-based system.

Always check that the receiver has recorded the movement in the NLIS by conducting a search of the PIC Register. Scan or click the QR code for more information.

5 Receive stock onto your PIC

Receivers are responsible for recording stock transfers on the NLIS within 48 hours of stock moving onto your PIC, even if the stock is coming from another PIC you own. Scan or click the QR code for detailed instructions on how to complete a transfer on the NLIS.

6 PIC reconciliations

Check the NLIS database to ensure it is an accurate record of NLIS devices and livestock on your property. Refer to the NLIS how-to guides for conducting a PIC reconciliation by either uploading a file or typing in the details: integritysystems.com.au/nlis-how-to ■

i nlis.com.au Daniel Forwood dforwood@mla.com.au

Scan or click the QR code to access NLIS how-to resources and guides.



PGS takes the guesswork out of grazing

When it came to grazing management, WA beef producer Paula Carroll found herself relying on guesswork, but now she has a plan regardless of conditions, with the right tools to inform and validate her decisions.

Paula runs 'Tirano Farms' at Nannup, in partnership with her husband and parents-in-law.

In 2023, Paula attended the MLA Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) training program Grazing Matcher™. The group-based course is designed to improve outcomes for producers by teaching them to better match grazing pressure, fertiliser application, animal requirements and market demands.

The program was developed specifically for southern WA where, due to the Mediterranean climate, about 60% of pasture growth occurs in spring. Producers there rely heavily on preserved fodder to fill the feed gap from late summer through to early winter.

"I manage one of our farms by myself most of the time, and during the season I found I was guessing more than I should have been when it came to grazing management decisions," Paula said.

The Carroll family have been farming in the district for more than 100 years, so for Paula, learning to make informed decisions to continue to build the shared business was an important goal.

Since completing the PGS, the tools Paula gained have helped her navigate through poor feed quality, dry seasons and paddock improvements.

New and improved

Armed with a variety of tools, Paula continues to implement new processes within her operation, with the goal of maximising beef production in an efficient way.

The PGS suggested trialling deferred grazing, which allows pastures to establish before commencing rotational grazing.

"Last year was the first opportunity we've had to try it," Paula said.

"I've seen a huge difference in the paddocks which were given time to properly establish, even the paddock we held the cattle in has recovered beautifully too.

"There were a few moments where I wondered if holding the cows in the

sacrificial paddock would be detrimental, but trusting the process and the knowledge of the industry professionals who run the Grazing Matcher™ workshop was a success."

The decisions of how, where and when to defer grazing were guided by calculation tools provided in Grazing Matcher™.

"The tools have helped me ensure our grazing rotations are down pat, and the cattle are in each paddock for the correct amount of time. I do a lot more pasture monitoring and measurement now."

After seeing success, Paula decided to make another change learnt from the PGS to prepare for a change in season.

"We applied urea in July to select paddocks, which we haven't done in the past. After a long, dry summer, it really bridged the winter feed gap and ensured we had plenty of grass without having to slow down our grazing rotation or supplementary feed," she said.

"I've developed a better understanding of where the feed gaps are, and what we have to do to look after the grass ahead of time without compromising the pasture they're on."

Using the brains trust

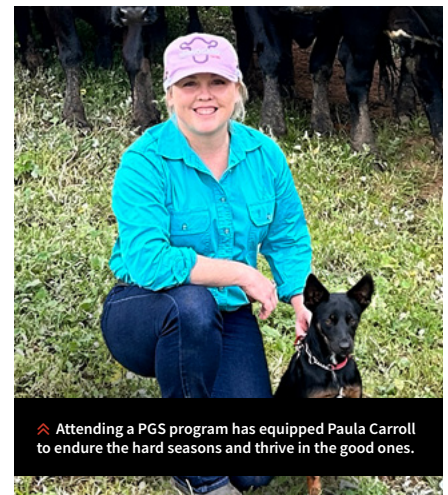
Testing samples is key to maintaining consistency within their feed.

"We always collect samples of hay for a feed analysis once it is baled, so we know what we're working with. Over the past few years, high neutral detergent fibre (NDF) has been a consistent limiting factor," Paula said.

NDF is a measurement of feed quality, which estimates the percentage of total cell wall content of forage or other feeds.

The foundation of the PGS supported learning packages is peer-to-peer learning, allowing producers to lean on each other to find solutions.

"We couldn't pinpoint why NDF was high, but I brought the results along to a Grazing Matcher™ workshop, and as a group we brainstormed a few ideas to implement," Paula said.



Attending a PGS program has equipped Paula Carroll to endure the hard seasons and thrive in the good ones.

SNAPSHOT



PAULA CARROLL –
Cundinup, WA



AREA
400ha

ENTERPRISE
250 Angus–Friesians joined to Black Simmental bulls, plus replacement stock

PASTURES
Annual ryegrass and clover

SOILS
Loam over clay with granite

RAINFALL
900mm

"Since then, we've gotten the NDF percentage back to the range it should be – it's some of the best hay we've ever made."

High moisture percentage and uneven drying of hay was another challenge Paula wanted to overcome.

"We purchased a tedder implement (used to aerate and spread hay) to help dry the hay evenly and used the microwave to test moisture content. Using the microwave was a game changer in getting an accurate measurement to decide when to start baling."

“There were a few moments where I wondered if holding the cows in the sacrificial paddock would be detrimental, but trusting the process and the knowledge of the industry professionals who run the Grazing Matcher™ workshop was a success.”

Tools in action

While the tools gained in PGS programs can be used to help a business thrive, making the right decision can make or break a business in a tough period.

Paula has seen promising results using her new knowledge to make improvements and build profit, but also to help the business through dry periods.

Maximising pasture production, quality of preserved fodder and better matching feed supply to stock are key to success, but in WA, where each year is different, calculations are difficult to get right.

“We always weigh several hay rolls after baling so that we understand how many kilograms of hay we have available to feed out over the season,” Paula said.

“We had a longer than anticipated dry spell and had budgeted our hay for a typical year, where we normally have plenty of carryover.”

At a certain point, Paula realised the hay would soon fall short.

From her PGS training, Paula learned to observe stock and field cues and adjust management depending on the season, rather than locked dates, giving her better control over seasonal challenges.

“There were a lot of discussions around the table about what we should do: destock, feed less or bring feed in.

“I was able to use a digital feed calculator and apply our scenario to include factors such as the cost of feed at the time, our stocking rates and the energy requirements of our cows and calves. We found the benefits would outweigh the cost and could justify buying pellets and hay,” Paula said.

The decision sustained the business through the season – and their calves even weighed more than previous years.

Last year, the business was awarded first runner up in Meat Standards Australia’s large beef producer category for 2022–23, an award which recognises beef producers in each state who consistently deliver beef of superior eating quality.

Paula believes their improved grazing management will help the Carrolls continue their positive trajectory producing high quality beef to their local customers.

“As a producer, cost and affordability can be such a barrier, but when you make use of the knowledge gained from the Grazing Matcher™ program, you have the confidence to make informed decisions each season.” ■

Grazing Matcher™ has been running for seven years with the support of MLA and Western Beef Association. Groups are also supported by the Healthy Estuaries WA program and GeoCatch.

LESSONS LEARNT

- ✓ Deferred grazing made a huge difference, as it gave time for paddocks to properly establish.
- ✓ Monitoring and measuring pastures helped us better understand where the feed gaps are.
- ✓ Learning to observe stock and field cues and adjust management depending on the season, rather than locked dates, gave us more control over seasonal challenges.

TOOLBOX

- 🔍 Try MLA’s feed demand calculator: mla.com.au/feed-demand-calculator
- 🔍 Browse the grazing land management hub: mla.com.au/grazing



Three reasons to join a PGS workshop

Different PGS supported learning packages are delivered across the country, to suit different production systems and locations. WA-based PGS deliverer Jeisane Accioli said there are three main reasons why they’re valuable:

- 1 Personalised information**
PGS lessons can be individual to all businesses, regardless of circumstances, and are flexible with changing conditions.
- 2 Be part of a brains trust**
PGS brings producers together from different backgrounds, enterprises and experience levels.
- 3 Keep learning well beyond the PGS**
The package includes an online discussion which continues after the package ends, to connect participants.



PDS maps out non-mulesed move

An MLA-funded producer demonstration site (PDS) which supported sheep producers to transition to a non-mulesed flock has delivered improvements to their on-farm productivity.

As part of the 'Transitioning towards non-mulesed sheep' PDS, 53 participants in NSW and Victoria used genetic tools and resources – which were readily available – to develop and initiate their own property-specific transition plans.

Steps to success

PDS facilitator Lisa Warn said regular meetings between the producers involved were important to guide them through changes to their management and breeding programs, to enable the transition to non-mulesed flocks.

"Heading into the experience, we were aware that while there was a large number of producers who wanted to cease mulesing, they often reported lacking the confidence to do it without increasing the risk of flystrike within their flock," she said.

"We felt a group environment where participants could gain support and different insights from their peers who were in the exact same position would really help kickstart a widespread adoption of non-mulesed sheep."

The producers involved were divided into four working groups – three in Victoria and one in NSW. Where possible, these subgroups were linked to producers operating in a similar environment who had already completed the transition to non-mulesed flocks.

"This gave participating producers the opportunity to chat with producers who had already completed the transition about what their journey was like, what their key challenges were and how they overcame them."

Readily available tools

Following an initial workshop with each of the groups, the first step on-farm was for producers to familiarise themselves with already-available genetic tools and resources.

"We started the project by getting each producer to provide a summary of their enterprise, markets and constraints," Lisa said.

"Then, it was straight into using DNA analysis tools to understand where their flock's genetic baseline was currently sitting, and what traits would need to be focused on improving in order to reach that goal of a non-mulesed flock."

The tools used included the flock profile tool and Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs).

"Once producers completed the initial benchmarking of their flock, we worked with them to determine what traits of genetic merit need to be improved to meet their breeding objectives and achieve non-mulesing," Lisa said.

"This is especially important in the lead-up to buying rams as we wanted our participating producers to be confident with all their reproduction decision making."

Taking charge

Each producer had the opportunity to run their demonstration in a way that suited their production goals to reflect the various pathways to achieving a non-mulesed flock.

For example, one producer ran a sire evaluation demonstration. They separated rams into two groups: high early breech wrinkle ASBV (EBWR) and low EBWR. Lambs born from sires in the high EBWR group had a breech wrinkle score of 1–5, while the lambs born from the low EBWR sire group had breech scores of 1–3 (See **Figure 1**).

"We felt a group environment where producer participants could gain support and different insights from their peers...would really help kickstart a widespread adoption of non-mulesed sheep."

Other producers from different regions in NSW worked together to run smaller non-mulesed mobs, while still keeping a larger mulesed mob to observe different management requirements.

These producers found shearing every six months was most effective, and the seasonal risk of flystrike determined how much they would have to invest in purchasing drenches and monitoring their flock.

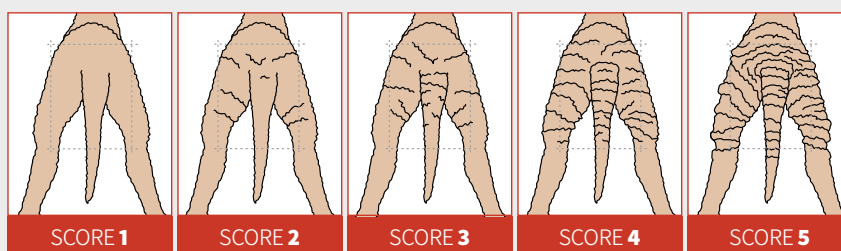
Changes to production

At the conclusion of the PDS, half the producers involved had made changes to their husbandry procedures calendar and 70% had made changes to their reproduction decision making to improve genetic traits.

"Transitioning to non-mulesed does not have to be scary," Lisa said.

"All changes made to production for these producers have been for the benefit of both the animal and their business. When you're reaching out to the experts and other producers along the way, your short-, medium- and long-term goals will all be met with confidence and certainty." ■

Figure 1: Breech wrinkle scoring chart



TOOLBOX

🔗 Flock profile tool:
sheepgenetics.org.au/resources/genomics/flock-profile

🔗 BredWell FedWell workshops:
mla.com.au/bwfw

🔗 PDS information and updates:
mla.com.au/pds

🔗 Set breeding objectives and shop for a high-performing sire:
genetics.mla.com.au



📧 Lisa Warn l.warn@iinet.net.au 📧 Alana McEwan amcewan@mla.com.au

✓ Mark Tiedemann's flock has been non-mulesed since his 2021 drop.

Smooth transition to non-mulesed flock

For NSW Merino producer Mark Tiedemann, breeding to improve the productivity and profitability of his dual-purpose flock has been a key focus for the past two decades.

Although he was initially driven by the objective to produce plainer-bodied sheep with good growth, fat and muscle while still improving wool quality via increased fleece weights and reduced micron, it wasn't long before Mark's new breeding program also highlighted the important health and welfare benefits which flowed from reduction in wrinkle.

In January 2021, Mark began the transition towards a non-mulesed enterprise, a journey kickstarted when he joined an MLA-funded producer demonstration site (PDS) project.

When he joined the 'Transitioning to non-mulesed sheep' PDS (see story opposite), Mark felt confident with how plain-bodied his stock were.

"I felt I had already developed the genetic foundations, and I could also see opportunity for financial gains from both wool premiums and an increased demand from people seeking to purchase non-mulesed wethers," he said.

"However, the PDS really pushed me to commit as it provided an opportunity to connect with other producers who were also making the transition to non-mulesed."

Improved flock management

According to Mark, the most noticeable benefits of becoming non-mulesed has been the improvement to animal welfare and on-farm management.

During the project, his property received a significant amount of annual rainfall – usually, this would result in a spike in worm burden during late lambing in September.

However, Mark said moving to non-mulesed meant he could deal with worms much more effectively.

"When we experienced high rainfall in previous years, I was not able to move my ewe and lamb mobs to reduce transmission because the mulesing wounds on the lambs needed time to heal after marking," he said.

"However, I now have the option to move ewes with marked lambs off potentially contaminated pastures with ease – reducing the stress this kind of event has on both myself and my animals."

As well as improving his response to disease or infection outbreaks, a non-mulesed flock has also given Mark flexibility to change the timing of herd management practices – further reducing the risk of disease or infection.

Previously, Mark shored his flock every six months, and would crutch two weeks prior to shearing.

However, since moving to non-mulesed, Mark has made the decision to crutch one month prior to shearing to further reduce the risk of breech strike.

"It's a minor change to production, but it has a big impact on keeping my ewes healthy," he said.

"Ultimately, having a non-mulesed flock has meant that I'm now monitoring my flock more routinely and therefore am able to intercept the occurrence of disease, flystrike and parasites earlier – particularly in my younger and more vulnerable stock such as wethers and weaners."

Tools and information

Mark credits the smooth transition to non-mulesed to the genetic foundations he had established.

SNAPSHOT



MARK TIEDEMANN –
'Summerhill Pastoral',
Young, NSW



AREA
1,315ha

ENTERPRISE
4,200 Merino breeding ewes

PASTURES
Native grasses, improved perennial pastures and legumes

SOILS
Red-brown clay, sandy loams

RAINFALL
700mm

"Entering the project with plain bodied sheep made all the difference," Mark said.

His confidence increased with the support and information gleaned during the project.

"I would recommend to anyone thinking of heading down the non-mulesed pathway to ensure they have a plan that sets targets and goals to meet prior to ceasing mulesing – keeping a close eye on the shape and structure of your sheep as you progress.

"It takes time, but the return on investment is there, and it's worth it." ■

Learn more about the PDS program, sign up for PDS e-news and access resources including the PDS search tool to find sites by relevant topic or region: m1a.com.au/pds



Mark Tiedemann summerhillpast@hotmail.com Alana McEwan amcewan@m1a.com.au

Breathing life back into northern pastures

Down the track

Revisit red meat businesses to see what's been happening since they last appeared in *Feedback*.



In just six years since they bought their Charters Towers cattle station, Kylie and Shane Stretton have transformed the productivity of their dry tropics land through rotational grazing and increased land contouring.

The journey

Kylie appeared in *Feedback* in autumn 2013, where she shared how she was connecting with red meat consumers.

At the time, Kylie and Shane were running a small trade steer and bullock enterprise on 40ha, and Kylie was a year into managing the 'Ask an Aussie Farmer' Facebook group which she launched to connect consumers with food producers.

Today, the couple manage a livestock agency and own the 4,970ha 'Red Hill Station', and the 'Ask an Aussie Farmer' page has grown from 1,360 followers in 2013 to more than 19,000 followers.

Kylie has started a second personal Facebook page called 'Life on Red Hill' where she shares updates on their land and herd management strategies, seasonal changes and her on-farm highlights.

Building from the ground up

When they purchased Red Hill, approximately 25% of the land was significantly impacted by scalding, erosion and overgrazing.

"We knew the land was in pretty poor condition and would require a significant amount of time, skill and money invested into its rehabilitation," she said.

"However, since Shane and I were both coming into this with producer backgrounds and experience working with soil and pasture constraints across Queensland and NT, we felt the biggest constraint we were up against was finding the time amongst our other business commitments."

When it came to dealing with land constraints, Kylie said Red Hill – the station's namesake landform located in the middle of the property – meant water and soil run-off quickly occurred whenever it rained.

"Any rain we received would simply run down from the top of the hill, gouging out soils and washing them off the property," she said.

"So, our first point of focus was to increase ground cover to slow the flow of water – starting with the top of the hill and working our way down.

"Once we were satisfied with the level of ground cover we had stretching from the top of the hill to our lower catchments, we started looking at land contouring to further slow that water flow."

Trial and error

While Kylie and Shane knew increasing land contouring would be the answer to making the most of their annual rainfall and ensuring the recovery of their grazing land, it was easier said than done.

"Creating the contours takes Shane about four hours on the dozer, but there's a lot of trial and error behind where we put them," Kylie said.

"We've had contour dams that haven't filled up at all and we've had others burst, we've even had 'whoa boys' (low earth banks built to intercept run-off) that have been washed out within the first year.

"However, after investing in a bit of education and guidance from soil



Kylie Stretton at 'Red Hill Station'.

SNAPSHOT



KYLIE AND SHANE STRETTON – 'Red Hill Station', Charters Towers, QLD



AREA
4,970ha

ENTERPRISE
430 Brahman breeders and 300 backgrounding cattle for live export

PASTURES
Mixture of native and sown tropical pastures

SOILS
Sandy, clay and gradational loams with some rocky terrain

RAINFALL
650mm (2025: 684mm already received by mid-February)

RED HILL STN

erosion control specialists such as Darryl Hill* and Bob Shepherd*, we really started reaping the benefits.

“Two years into increasing land contouring, we finally saw those really scalded areas start to establish some good ground cover. More recently, we’ve spotted wetlands plants popping up around some of the contour dams we have created.

“By default, we’re also finding ourselves to be in a position where we are less prone to drought and flood, simply because we have control over the speed and direction in which water moves across the property.”

Resting for recovery

Another critical step behind improving Red Hill’s pastures was implementing a rotational grazing program to ensure pastures can rest and replenish.

Currently, Kylie likes to have about 75% of paddocks resting at any given time.

“We usually only have two mobs to our 10 paddocks – a ratio that means our recently grazed paddocks can be provided with enough time for both pastures and soils to replenish,” she said.

During their wet season, they rest paddocks for 7–14 days, which increases to four to six weeks in the dry season.

“Using rotational grazing as one of our key land management strategies means we do have to invest in fencing, water infrastructure, working dogs and educating weaners to get them used to being around people, vehicles and dogs,” Kylie said.

“However, we’ve got a good system in place and the benefits that come from the management strategy means it really pays for itself.

“We use buggies for our day-to-day movement across the property, only using

bikes when we’re doing a paddock shift, so our herd associates the sound of the bikes with that move.

“We’re at a point where our herd will pick up their calves and come trotting over to us happily, calling down the line to others to send that message of ‘we’re moving to better pastures’”

Getting connected

As part of their on-farm goal of improving land condition and long-term productivity, Kylie and Shane have partnered with the NQ Dry Tropics group and Three Big Rivers Indigenous-led employment group to help further repair erosion.

“Three Big Rivers is heavily focused on healing and caring for Country, with the members of the group working to obtain certificates in land conservation,” she said.

“As part of that, they will come on-farm and help us with weed eradication, building infrastructure such as leaky weirs, and even

help spread hay when needed.

“However, the true value of this partnership goes beyond the physical help they provide. It lies within the relationships we’ve built with the group members and the ability to swap knowledge and insights about caring for the land and its environment.”

Beyond the station, Kylie’s use of Facebook to document their on-farm processes has also opened doors.

“While I’m simply sharing what we’re doing on our property, it does spark a lot of conversation from other producers and sometimes they’ll mention something that makes us go ‘maybe we should give that a go,’” Kylie said.

“We are all people who share a common goal of wanting to leave the land better than how we found it and wanting to ensure the longevity of that land so it continues to provide for the generations to come, so there’s a lot of positivity that comes from the ability to connect.” ■



▲ Shane Stretton built contour banks to control water flow across the property.



▲ The Strettons run a Brahman breeding herd at ‘Red Hill Station’.



▲ As a result of increasing land contouring to keep water on the property after rainfall, wetlands grasses have begun growing.

*Darryl Hill is an erosion control and soil conservation specialist. Bob Shepherd is a Principal Extension Officer with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

Your Carbon EDGE questions answered

Whether you've signed up or are still considering whether Carbon EDGE is right for you, here we answer all your frequently asked questions about the workshop.

? What makes Carbon EDGE different?

Developed over two years, Carbon EDGE was built by red meat producers, for red meat producers.

"We wanted to turn what can be a complex space into an accessible workshop so that producers weren't left feeling overwhelmed," MLA Sustainability Adoption Project Manager, Hilary Connors, said.

Carbon EDGE is an independently-operated workshop and the presenters provide research and fact-based information to support you in making decisions with your operation in mind.

? What can I expect from the two days?

Take to the classroom to learn the foundations of carbon, including greenhouse gases, carbon credits, and on-farm emissions and sequestration.

Using details from your own operation, the presenters will assist you in developing a carbon action plan tailored to your property through practical, achievable strategies. This will help identify the most suitable opportunities to reduce emissions while improving productivity and learning how to future-proof your market access.

Every participant in the room will have different levels of experience when it comes to carbon. Take advantage of this – your classmates will likely have some valuable insights which you may be able to learn from.

? How can you prepare for a Carbon EDGE workshop?

If you haven't already, it's recommended you complete some pre-work to get the most value from the workshop and optimise your carbon action plan.

Use MLA's Carbon Calculator (carbon-calculator.mla.com.au) to gain insights into your property's greenhouse gas emissions and emissions intensity per product produced.

It's also beneficial to complete the MLA Carbon 101 eLearning modules to learn the basic language of carbon – you can access them at: elearning.mla.com.au/courses/carbon-101

? What will I take home?

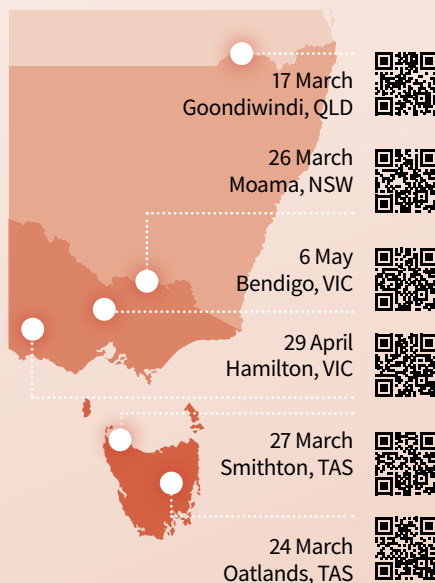
Once armed with the foundational knowledge, you won't be left to remember it all on your own.

Instead, you'll take home the tailored action plan you developed and resources to implement it, including a:

- technical manual
- workshop workbook
- USB filled with additional supporting resources including videos and readings.

"We give you plenty of supporting information and resources, meaning you can dive into them once you're home, or look to if you ever need a refresh of the concepts," Hilary said. ■

Scan or click the QR codes to access the details of upcoming Carbon EDGE workshops:



New resources for ewe preg scanning

MLA and Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) have released a range of new resources to help producers scan and manage pregnant ewes.

The new resources are the result of a multi-year co-investment between MLA and AWI aimed to improve lamb survival and reproductive rates in the Australian sheep flock through better adoption of pregnancy scanning. This project is an initiative under the Sheep Reproduction Strategic Partnership (SRSP).

The background research was completed by The University of Adelaide and included many industry consultants in the project team.

In 2018, an MLA-funded survey of Australian sheep producers determined that 69% of respondents did not pregnancy scan their ewe flocks for litter size, which can limit capacity to maximise lamb and ewe survival.

Pregnancy scanning enables identification of litter size early in pregnancy, so that multiple-bearing ewes can be differentially managed to meet recommended condition score targets and increase survival. Research shows pregnancy scanning in sheep provides an average increase in profit of \$5.55/ewe scanned.

As part of the project, AWI and MLA conducted an extensive benefit-cost analysis on the value of scanning across a range of sheep producing regions and enterprise types. They also identified the barriers to adoption in scanning through producer interviews and surveys, to develop solutions.

Visit makingmorefromsheep.com.au/resources or scan or click the QR code to access guides and checklists:



Putting the (soil) P in productivity

Productivity of cattle is closely tied to the amount of available phosphorus (P) in the soil. Without sufficient soil P, cattle show suppressed feed intake, decreased reproductive performance and significant health challenges.

To help conquer the challenge of low soil P levels which are common across Australia, MLA has launched an updated digital soil map, giving Queensland producers an indication of their on-farm P levels.

Producers often use supplementation to overcome P deficiency. However, with varying P levels across land types on property, it can be difficult to determine if there's a deficiency before the severe clinical signs are present.

Many rely on soil maps to inform them of the likely P status of their lands – while these are a significant decision-making tool, up to now the information for North Queensland has been missing, leaving a significant portion of the state's grazing land P status unmapped.

Mapping for success

Dr Evan Thomas from the Queensland Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation said producers often develop a P management plan. This involves supplementing P in the form of loose licks, liquid supplements, blocks or via water medication.

"Without an understanding of what's likely in your soil, you risk taking the wrong management approach and may not get the expected benefits," Evan said.

"The new digital soil map takes all the best available information about soil P levels, and in collaboration with producers collecting additional soil samples, provides indicative estimates of P levels down to a 30-metre grid space.

"The new digital soil map takes all the best available information about soil P levels...and provides indicative estimates of P levels down to a 30-metre grid space."

The map provides general information to producers regarding soil P status across their properties. While it's a useful indicator of phosphorus levels, producers should still use a combination of soil samples, blood and faecal testing.

"We still recommend soil testing as an essential part of developing a P management plan, with the map helping producers target their actions where supplementation or additional testing might be best undertaken," Evan said.

Starting to supplement

Creating the right supplementation program is crucial once a P deficiency has been identified.

MLA Beef Productivity Project Manager, Ainsley Smith, said production goals, cost per unit and quality should all be considered when choosing the best method.

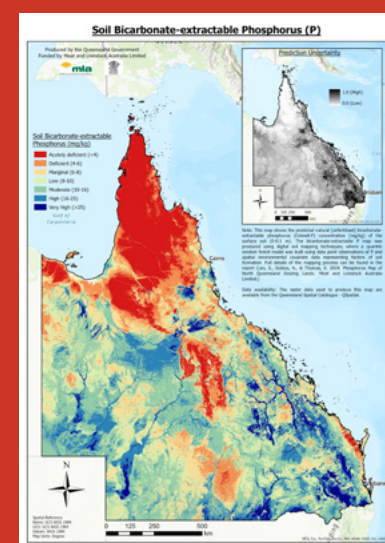
"Supplement feeding can be costly, so careful and strategic decision making will help you get the full benefits the first time," Ainsley said. ■



▲ Kacie Baker from the Queensland Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation gathering soil data for the latest map.

TOOLBOX

Updated QLD phosphorus map:
mla.com.au/phosphorus



MLA's soil phosphorus tool:
mla.com.au/p-tool



Three tips for successful supplementation

- 1 Monitor intakes and adjust the recipe to avoid wastage.
- 2 Wet season supplement mixes should provide at least 6g P/head/day to young growing cattle and 10g P/head/day to breeders.
- 3 Dry season supplement mixes should contain a source of protein (e.g. urea) with sufficient P content to provide 2–5g P/head/day.

Nutrition drives embryo success

A focus on nutrition underpins the success of WA beef producer Craig Forsyth's extensive embryo recipient program in his Angus breeding herd at 'Avoca Farms', Irwin.

Craig works alongside his wife Donelle and their son Nathan – the enterprise has been in his family for 48 years.

"We've always run cattle, but over the years we've extended our business to take on animals from other producers thanks to our focus on nutrition and increasing our feedbase," Craig said.

"We initially started by taking on cattle for backgrounding on our pastures before they were transported to another feedlot or an abattoir for live export, with the owner/producer paying us for the weight gain that occurs."

Four years ago, a new business venture came about, when their vet – who was producing Wagyu-fertilised embryos – approached the Forsyths to see if their Angus cows could be the embryo recipients.

"We'd been doing fixed AI for 21 years at this point, so we felt pretty confident about the prospect of trialling this venture," Craig said.

Addressing constraints

While Craig's focus on nutrition has made his services sought after, he said ensuring a high-quality nutrition and feedbase supply has not come without its challenges.

"We've got a lot of inequalities within our soils with areas of low fertility appearing across the property," he said.

"Our summers are very hot and dry and while we do experience the rare summer thunderstorm every now and then, the majority of our 450mm annual rainfall is contained within our May–October growing season."

They combat these constraints with fertiliser, mineral supplementation and planting premium-growth subtropical pastures.

"Our biggest challenge has been maintaining pasture and cattle condition during autumn," Craig said.

"Originally, soil testing and fertiliser was our go-to solution, but for the past 30 years we've been planting Gatton panic and Rhodes grasses, as they offer a more extended growing system than typical ryegrass pastures in WA.

"Good symbiosis also occurs between these subtropical pastures and our perennial pastures which means that if we do get a summer thunderstorm, then we have pastures that will really come forward and provide a good range of nutrition for our cattle."

SNAPSHOT



CRAIG, DONELLE AND NATHAN FORSYTH – 'Avoca Farms' – Irwin, WA



AREA
3,600ha

ENTERPRISE
400 Angus breeders
2,500 head for backgrounding

PASTURES
Annual and perennial pastures, Gatton panic and Rhodes grass

SOILS
Sandy soils and gravel

RAINFALL
450mm

Key role of good nutrition

In addition to providing good nutrition through pastures, Craig has found benefits from going the extra mile and providing his cattle with year-round supplementation, delivered through the herd's water.

"We use different minerals for our different livestock classes, with cobalt sulphate for our backgrounding cattle, electrolytes for our cattle that are about to be transported, and a mixed mineral rich in magnesium for our calving cows.

"Good symbiosis also occurs between these subtropical pastures and our perennial pastures which means that if we do get a summer thunderstorm, then we have pastures that will really come forward and provide a good range of nutrition for our cattle."

▲ Craig Forsyth with his son Nathan in front of their Angus breeders, which they use as part of their embryo recipient program. Image: Shannah Kanny

“As a result of this, our cattle are able to maintain good levels of hydration and nutrition during both short-term impacts, like transportation, and long-term impacts, like dry seasonal conditions.”

When there’s a particularly hot and dry summer, Craig also puts out a cattle lick with phosphorus to ensure the herd’s nutritional needs are met during periods when pastures are impacted.

Creating a routine

According to Craig, a key element to ensuring cattle receive the most nutritional benefits possible from his feedbase is having a well-planned reproduction system, which lines up with the pasture growth cycle.

“We start in late July with our embryo recipient program, giving a Gonadiol® injection and inserting an intravaginal progesterone delivery device known as Cue-Mate® into our selected cows on what we call day zero,” Craig said.

“Eight days later, we remove the Cue-Mate®, apply heat detection patches, and administer a Novormon® injection before delivering another Gonadiol® injection on day nine.

“The fertilised Wagyu embryos are inserted on day 17 with the use of Lignocaine to keep the process pain and stress free.

“We then bring our Wagyu bulls in with our heifers and our Angus bulls in with our cows to impregnate those who aren’t carrying the Wagyu embryos – supplying us with replacement heifers and feedlot steers.”

This puts their herd on a late autumn/early winter calving system, with heifers calving in the last few weeks of May and cows calving in June.

“We like to keep our calving timeline reasonably tight as the better pasture quality and availability during our winter period means our lactating mothers are having their nutritional needs well met – benefiting both the mother and her calf,” Craig said.

“We wean in December–January, and we yard wean for 30 days before the Wagyu calves from the embryo recipient program are put on a backgrounding rotation – lining up nicely with that boost in pasture condition we get following summer rainfall.”

Return on investment

While Craig said it’s important to note that taking part in an embryo recipient program requires a lot more yard work with less flexibility of timing, the return on investment is worth it for them.

“Having an embryo recipient program does call for a bit more of our time than just putting our bulls in with our cows,” Craig said.

“Things have to be done on time, especially the insertion and removal of the Cue-Mate® devices which are both done at around 6.30am on their respective days.

“We also need to keep good records of injections given, embryos inserted and pregnancy test results.

“However, as part of our agreement with our vet as the embryo owner, he pays to have genomic testing done on our cows, Craig said.

“This is great in helping us with recording data that highlights the status of our cows – allowing us to determine which ones are better suited to the embryo recipient program, which ones have the preferred genetic traits we want passed on to our replacement heifers, and which ones should be culled.”

He said genomic testing is also beneficial in ensuring calf survivability rates.

“We get paid for every Wagyu calf from the recipient program that’s weaned,” he said.

“This year, approximately 190 of the 360 embryos we implanted became viable pregnancies and our calf survival rate was 100%.

“Overall, I’m getting a great return on investment from the program using my Angus heifers and cows to carry Wagyu embryos – it has really allowed for a nice boost in profitability. We’ve been able to increase the number of embryos we implant every year.”

Opportunities

When asked for his key takeaways from adopting an embryo recipient program into his reproductive system, Craig said its results highlighted the importance of having a good nutritional focus and taking opportunities to expand your business when viable.

“No matter what your reproduction system entails, ensuring your heifers and cows are supplied with good nutrition will allow for improved productivity,” he said.

“For us, a focus on nutrition supply has not only benefited natural pregnancies and artificial pregnancies, it’s also opened the door to opportunities to increase the profitability of our business.” ■

SEASONAL ACTION PLAN

- ! Attend pasture establishment and nutrition workshops, such as through the EDGENetwork: mla.com.au/edge
- ! Align breeders’ reproduction cycle with seasonal pasture growth periods: mbfp.mla.com.au
- ! Invest in data collection to ensure informed decision making: mla.com.au/tools-calculators

TOOLBOX

- 🕒 BredWell FedWell workshops: mla.com.au/bwfw
- 📍 MLA persistent pastures hub: mla.com.au/persistentpastures



Craig Forsyth cdforsyth@activ8.net.au Sarah Hassall shassall@mla.com.au

People power drives progress in the north

Trust, cooperation and a shared approach to problem solving created fertile ground for producers involved in MLA's Northern Breeding Business', (NB2) pilot project, 'Pathways to Practice', as they rethought the way they manage their beef enterprises.

Over two years, participants built skills around collecting and analysing data from their pastures, herds and businesses, with guidance from industry experts.

Led by the Department of Primary Industries, Queensland (DPI), the project aimed to address key issues limiting long-term viability and sustainability in the northern beef industry.

On-property strategies to achieve this included:

- changing breeding and herd practices
- adopting annual forage budgeting and land condition monitoring
- improving herd recording technologies and practices
- adopting digital technologies
- calculating business emissions baselines.

Here, NB2 group facilitators Dr Trevor Smith and Roxanne Morgan share some of their groups' challenges, successes and key learnings. ■



▲ The Burdekin NB2 group, facilitated by Roxanne Morgan (front row, far left) and Bec Clapperton (not pictured). Image: DPI Queensland.

TOOLBOX

🔗 Australian Feedbase Monitor: mla.com.au/afm

🔗 MLA's Genetics hub: genetics.mla.com.au



- 🔗 mla.com.au/nb2
- ✉ Dr Trevor Smith tsmith@navg.com.au
- ✉ Jo Gangemi jo.gangemi@daf.qld.gov.au
- ✉ Tony Parker tparker@mla.com.au

Thinking big in the Burdekin



NB2 group: The Burdekin, Queensland

Facilitators: Roxanne Morgan and Bec Clapperton

Facilitator Roxanne Morgan, former Beef Extension Officer at DPI, believes the camaraderie developed among the seven businesses in the Burdekin NB2 group was one of the biggest drivers of change.

"It gave them the confidence to share information and discuss solutions with each other – it was just as important as the technical info they had access to.

"Some of the group members didn't have an existing network of fellow beef producers, so they really valued the connections they developed," Roxanne said.

Ice-breaker activities, shared meals and social get-togethers helped develop these bonds.

Professional development

The facilitator training and the opportunity to work with more experienced facilitators gave Roxanne the confidence

"It's rare to have access to these types of opportunities in northern Queensland. Producer coordinators are paid for their time so there's an additional incentive for interested producers to get on board and build up their skills," Roxanne said.

Data capabilities central to success

Each business was required to complete an annual herd inventory using NB2's 'Herdflow' template, to calculate key herd metrics such as kilograms of beef produced per adult equivalent, mortality rate, reproduction rate and turn-off weight.

Once participants completed their first year of herd data entry, it became apparent there was a need to focus on improving their recording systems. Several members had purchased new data collection software and hardware at the start of the NB2 project.

"There was group consensus that improving herd records was a priority, and project funds meant we could arrange on-site training at a group catch-up, where they could also help each other get more from their equipment," Roxanne said.

A lack of adequate data on herd numbers by class meant participants were missing opportunities to compare herd numbers year-on-year and work out why they might not be reconciling. Having access to better data will now help identify issues and lead to more accurate diagnoses and remedies.

"The funding meant producers could 'think big'. By the end of the project, they were equipped with the tools and confidence to go ahead and do the data collection that will now drive their businesses forward." ■

to step up and take the reins when required, sharing the role with fellow extension officer Bec Clapperton. Producer coordinator Natalie Marks was instrumental in liaising between the group and the facilitators and organising get-togethers. Her leadership skills developed through her role in the project.

New strategies pave way to profit



NB2 group: Cloncurry, Queensland | **Facilitator:** Dr Trevor Smith



For veterinarian Dr Trevor Smith, the people-focused approach to change championed by the NB2 model made all the difference. “Getting groups of people trusting each other to share information was really useful. Creating change within a business to move them in the right direction is more about people rather than simply supplying them with solutions,” he said. “In my work as a vet, I take the time to build relationships with my clients before having those more in-depth conversations around improving their productivity.”

Working together

The NB2 program partners producers with facilitators who are skilled at building strong relationships, to create an environment of trust, where people are confident to openly share business data. “The next step is then looking at each individual themselves, and ensuring people work together to enact change,” Trevor said. He said it’s also wise to identify the ‘low hanging fruit’ to boost productivity. “Before you can fix any issues, you generally need the dollars to make that happen. Can you address fencing, water or genetics?”

“What will give you the most bang for your buck to help you achieve your goals?”

Strategies for success

One standout practice change made during the project was when one participant reduced their bull:breeder percentage from 4% to 1% – which also slashed their bull-purchasing spend by \$1 million. This decision was backed up by more strategic use of bull breeding soundness examinations and estimated breeding values to optimise the performance of the 1%. Another producer has continued to refine their strategies to improve breeder efficiency during the program, building on eight years of sustained effort. As a result, they have maintained the number of weaners produced while reducing their breeder numbers by 3,500. “They still produce the same kilos of beef but they’re far more efficient and have thousands less cows now burping and using the land,” Trevor said.

These positive business results were achieved by:

- reducing distance to water
- improving fencing
- improving use of genetics
- matching time of calving to when the best nutrition is available i.e. just before wet season

One standout practice change made during the project was when one participant reduced their bull:breeder percentage from 4% to 1% – which also slashed their bull-purchasing spend by \$1 million.

- improving bull control – culling older bulls that are more challenging to muster and focusing on getting younger, compliant bulls into the yards. “Having group members who can share the good and the bad from their experiences gives other group members confidence to make changes,” Trevor said.

Improved feedbase monitoring and assessment

After looking at the Australian Feedbase Monitor (AFM), freely available to all Livestock Production Assurance account holders, some members chose to sign up to a PastureKey subscription with AFM developer, Cibo Labs, to access individual paddock data. This enabled them to reduce the time taken to conduct grass assessments.

“Grass is the fuel that runs their businesses and this tool has dramatically reduced the time required to monitor the various land types and feed available on their properties,” Trevor said.

With some producers taking up to four days to assess larger properties prior to getting on board with the AFM and/or PastureKey, this practice change alone has delivered significant time savings. Having access to more accurate data in a matter of minutes has only benefited their on-farm and business decision making.

PastureKey sends monthly reports to subscribers which enables decisions to be made based on the rate of grass consumption. This allows producers to be responsive to issues such as frosts, which may impact grass quality.

One producer used the AFM to identify areas of erosion and took action to restore the productivity of this land.

“They undertook deep ripping, used left-over hay as mulch and used some gypsum to break down the clay. Subsequent to that they had a lot of rain, and the pastures really took off,” Trevor said. ■

Tackling herd data together

Left to right: Troy and Kellie Pollard and their daughter Oakleigh, with Kayleen and John Healing at their property, 'Warrawee Station'. Image: Bec Clapperton

John and Kayleen Healing's quest to identify opportunities to improve their Charters Towers beef enterprise was one of the catalysts for joining a Northern Breeding Business (NB2) group.

A second goal was to develop their daughter Kellie and son-in-law Troy's involvement in the business.

The family, along with six other beef businesses, formed an NB2 group in the Burdekin, led by the Department of Primary Industries, Queensland (DPI) (read more page 20).

They soon realised they had a shared goal to improve their on-farm herd recording and data accuracy, so bringing the group's recording systems into line was an important first step.

A steep learning curve

The group was a mixed bag in terms of how they recorded and analysed their herd data. Some, like the Healings, were using mob-based paddock numbers on paper and experiencing issues with reconciling herd records year-to-year.

The group consensus was clear: the effort required to wrangle numbers into the project's 'Herdflow' template was greater than what was needed to muster cattle out in the paddock.

However, the group's persistence – under guidance from industry experts and the group's facilitators – saw them build the skills and confidence to adopt new technology and unearth some new insights into how to improve their businesses.

Getting it right

The nature of the Healings' country made it easy to miss animals in a muster, posing an additional obstacle to accurate herd data.

They moved to an electronic individual identification system – with data collected and recorded for all animals – which Kellie said has made all the difference.

"We were then able to better identify poor performers and confidently cull 'dead wood' out of the herd," she said.

Kellie has now been able to reconcile the annual Herdflow template and address gaps in their records.

"A more accurate recording system means we can now more confidently analyse our herd performance," Kellie said.

The first year they completed the Herdflow spreadsheet, they only had a 50% calving rate.

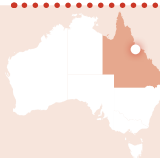
Kayleen said this was due to a combination of poor herd data preventing accurate numbers of breeders being recorded and the lack of information on these breeders such as pregnancy and calving rates.

"Since then, using the information we have and culling out poor performers and so on, when Kellie did the Herdflow reconciliation, we had a calving rate of 73%," Kayleen said.

SNAPSHOT



JOHN AND KAYLEEN HEALING, TROY AND KELLIE POLLARD – 'Warrawee Station', Charters Towers, QLD



AREA
37,200ha

ENTERPRISE
3,500 Brahman-cross cattle (approximately 1,500 breeders)

PASTURES
Couch, speargrass, bluegrass

SOILS
30% goldfields, 70% variable soils

RAINFALL
600mm

"We directly attribute this to having better herd data and being able to make those better management decisions over the past three years."

New ways of working

Kayleen credits the experts involved in the group as another catalyst for change.

"Having access to the technical expertise through NB2 has really accelerated our progress."

“Having access to the technical expertise through NB2 has really accelerated our progress,” she said.

Kellie’s involvement in the course, as the next generation of management, was also integral to the family’s succession planning process.

“Kellie has now taken on the responsibility of researching, learning and choosing the herd-recording equipment and software and she now looks after all aspects of the herd recording – numbers in paddocks, movements, data reports and so on,” Kayleen said.

“Her organisational and practical skills make her a key part of the business. She’s been more involved in discussions with our bank manager and doing the yearly reporting, which has been really good.”

Reaping the rewards

Improving their data management is already paying off.

“We’re starting to improve our decision making using the data collected. Kellie is now getting some really useful data around pregnancy and mortality rates,” Kayleen said.

“It’s informing decisions on which animals to cull and feed as they’re coming through the yards – something we couldn’t do as well previously.

“We actually didn’t know exactly what our calving percentage was before, it was just based on estimates, so now we can get a much better handle on key performance information.”

Learning together

While the Healings had been considering implementing a new herd-recording system for some time, Kayleen credits the support of the group as a key driver of change.

“It galvanised us to take the next step. We learned from each other and became quite tight-knit,” Kayleen said.

Peer support proved to be a significant motivator for group members to persist with and improve their herd recording, while the regular producer catch-ups kept them on-track and more likely to commit to making changes.

“I think the best part of being involved in NB2 is the group of people we now have as part of our network. The level of collective knowledge and trust within the group is so valuable,” Kayleen said.

“The closeness and trust developed within the group has also supported the mental health and wellness of group members – knowing you can talk to each other about things.”

Forward focused

By the end of the Burdekin NB2 program, all businesses had improved the accuracy of their stock numbers and are now ready to analyse their herd performance with confidence.

This includes utilising key performance metrics and benchmarking themselves against regional and industry results.

The Healings plan to continue learning with and supporting their fellow group members beyond the official conclusion of the program. ■

NB2 methodology

Collect and analyse

standardised
business and
production data

Determine
their current
situation

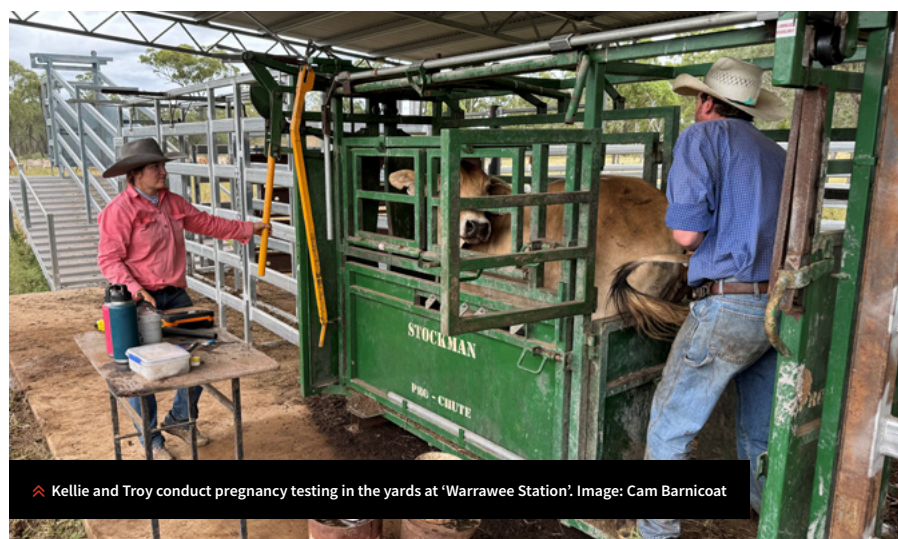
Identify an
opportunity
for increasing
production



Source specialist
advice, learning
opportunities or
technologies

Paddock test
identified
interventions

Reflect on the
outcome through
ongoing collection
and analysis of data



👉 Kellie and Troy conduct pregnancy testing in the yards at 'Warrawee Station'. Image: Cam Barnicoat

TOOLBOX



- 🔗 Northern Breeding Business (NB2) program: mla.com.au/NB2
- 🔗 The Toolbox: elearning.mla.com.au
- 🔗 Australian Feedbase Monitor mla.com.au/afm



📧 John and Kayleen Healing and Troy and Kellie Pollard warraweestation@bigpond.com

📧 Tony Parker tparker@mla.com.au

The Wright approach to transport

For beef and wool producer Greg Wright, maintaining good relationships with carriers and preparing according to livestock type are important considerations for transport.

The fourth-generation grazier and his wife Joanne are the principals of Benoak Devon Stud, based across two properties in the Northern Tablelands, NSW.

Strong, well-handled weaners travel best

Greg said his weaner cattle were trucked between places once they were well-handled and settled – this could be anywhere from 10 days to three weeks after weaning.

“We make sure they’ve recovered well from the weaning process and are broken in and sensible,” Greg said.

“You want to know you can let them out onto new country and they’re going to go and eat, not just wander around looking for Mum.”

Weaners are handled to a point they accept the processes that take place in cattle yards, Greg explained.

“When we break the weaners in, we don’t overhandle them, but set them up so they handle easily.

“They understand that if we’re standing next to a gate, we’re just counting them or assessing them, as a feedlot buyer would do when appraising stock.”

Any drafting is done at least the day before transport and animals are held in separate paddocks to avoid last-minute stress or delays from unforeseen issues.

Stock are drafted based on sizes, to ensure smaller cattle aren’t impacted by bigger animals during transport, and so larger cattle can be loaded on the bottom pens.

“The day before trucking, we’ll bring them into holding yards or smaller paddocks,” Greg said.

“On the day of transport, we’ll have them

settled in the yards and have everything done at least an hour before the truck is supposed to get there.

“Having them all done before the truck arrives, they just seem nice and settled. If something goes wrong, you’ve got time to sort it out.”

Mutual respect with professional transporters

The Wrights use Glen Innes-based StockTrans for their cattle transport and said they have a good relationship with the operators.

“If they give us a time, they try their hardest to stick to it.”

Having any associated paperwork filled out ready for drivers to add their details saves a lot of time, Greg added.

“We know they’ve got other jobs to do, so we’re conscious of not holding them up. You want them happy to come back. You get to know each other and how each other works.

“Having truck drivers that are stock-orientated is excellent too. They always send good operators out. It seems to be a good relationship.”

Careful management of cows and calves

The Wrights try to avoid transporting cows and calves where possible due to the potential issues involved. However, if it must be done, Greg said careful management is key.

“If you’re trucking cows and calves, it means the season hasn’t gone your way. The only time we’ve ever done it is if the feed has cut out.

“You need to be careful. It can lead to mismothering, depending on the age of the calves.

SNAPSHOT



GREG AND JOANNE WRIGHT –
Glencoe, NSW



AREA
970ha

ENTERPRISE

Devon stud and commercial beef herd, with 300 breeders, plus a self-replacing Merino flock (1,000 ewes) and first-cross Border Leicester lambs

PASTURES

Mix of improved and native pasture

SOILS

Range from high quality basalt through to heavy clay

RAINFALL
900mm

Greg and Joanne Wright, Benoak Devon Stud, Glencoe NSW.



“Think about how you’ll tackle the feed transition. Maybe feed them hay, introduce them to paddocks slowly and possibly offer green feed licks.”

“We would keep the cows and calves separate for the journey. When they arrive at the new destination you need a holding paddock to keep them in to make sure they’re all mothered up.”

Greg said it’s also important to think about things like rich feed and mastitis with cows. With the calves, he highlighted the importance of watching for stress and scours.

When transporting sheep and cattle, Greg said stock that have been on a truck when they’re younger can make life easier when they’re older – although he recognises this isn’t always possible.

“When stock are big, the problems compound. Stock that have been on trucks before load much better when they’re big, strong animals.”

Preparation prevents problems

The Wrights use different transporters to cart their sheep. They discuss numbers and type, length of journey and consider the transporter’s advice on preparation.

“With store lambs, we talk to the trucking company. If they say they’ve got a big trip and need to take them off water at least the night before, then that’s what I do. It seems to work okay.”

When transporting agistment cattle, it’s important to think about feed transition from where they’re coming from and going to, Greg advised, as planning can save a lot of headaches and financial losses.

“Make sure all their 5-in-1s are up to date and then have a plan when you get to the other place,” he said.

“Think about how you’ll tackle the feed transition. Maybe feed them hay, introduce them to paddocks slowly and possibly offer green feed licks.” ■

📄 mla.com.au/transport-hub

✉ Greg Wright

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Managing for more kids

Researchers leading the largest goat industry research project ever undertaken in Australia are a step closer to answering the question: what reproductive performance should I expect from my does?

Interim findings from the five-year, \$3.7 million Kids+ project show that, as expected, there are numerous management factors that influence the number of kids weaned.

The project has collected more than 15,430 individual goat records to date, from across extensive, intensive and semi-intensive systems.

Louw Hoffman, Professor of Meat Science at the Centre for Nutrition and Food Sciences within the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation (QAAFI) at the University of Queensland, is leading the project.

He said one of the main management strategies which seems to be delivering results is to shorten the joining season to six weeks.

“This gives each doe the opportunity to cycle twice; any does that are then not pregnant are culled, thereby removing any sub-fertile does from the herd,” he said.

“Other reasons for culling include weak teats/udders, and age. A shorter joining period also allows for a better management of the herd, as it enables easier and more accurate pregnancy scanning, a tighter age and more uniform kids at weaning and marketing.”

Infrastructure tips

The Kids+ research team also identified some key infrastructure design features for large-scale commercial goat producers to help reduce stress when working with goats in yards.

“We have found a few commonalities that can be addressed to accommodate

goat behaviour and improve the welfare of both livestock and handlers, and one of them is the need to have a shorter raceway,” Louw said.

“For sheep, you can have long, wide raceways, but for goats, the raceways need to be shorter and narrower to prevent goats from packing together and smothering each other at either end of the raceways.

“Depending on the size of the herds you’re handling, yard pens must be big enough, and it’s best to minimise corners, to again prevent the goats piling together.”

He said shade and good water sources are essential.

“Not only is the water obviously necessary for the goats, but it will also dampen the dust. If there is too much dust swirling around in the yards, you risk missing important signs such as pregnant status of young does, because you can’t see their udders, bad udders or feet – all indicators to cull.”

Other tips include establishing holding paddocks (40–80ha) around the yards for quicker mustering and considering raceways to muster and move goats more easily than through an open paddock.

“I know it has its financial implications, but it does make a difference on stress and ease of handling,” Louw said. ■

TOOLBOX

Click or scan the QR code to read MLA’s Infrastructure for goats factsheet:



✉ Louw Hoffman louwrens.hoffman@uq.edu.au

✉ Daniel Forwood dforwood@mla.com.au

Getting goat transport right from the get-go

✓ Queensland cattle, Boer goat and lamb producer Glenda Henry. Image: Dentsu Creative

SNAPSHOT



GLENDA HENRY AND COLIN VALLER –
Emerald, QLD



AREA
2,630ha

ENTERPRISE
Brahman cattle, Boer goats, prime lambs

PASTURES
Buffel, paspalum, native grasses, black and silver wattle, sedges and forbs

SOILS
Black soil, sandy loam, sandstone and basalt ridges

RAINFALL
600mm

Taking the time to familiarise weaners with handling processes can pay dividends for producers and their livestock according to Queensland cattle, Boer goat and lamb producer Glenda Henry.

Glenda and her partner Collin Valler run Bellarine Boer Goats alongside their Brahman cattle and fat lambs on 2,630ha in Emerald's highlands.

According to Glenda, making livestock familiar with transport, yard handling and loading makes for faster and stress-free processes in the long run.

"With all animals, it comes back to them trusting you and not feeling threatened. Then, they will cooperate," Glenda said.

"We do things here to make life safe and happy for the animals and handlers. When we wean them, we move them around paddocks in a trailer.

"It helps them become familiar with loading so it's not such a frightening thing. It's a big advantage to have done some trips."

The couple were originally cattle producers, but expanded into goats 10 years ago as a land-management tool. They said the goats have boosted pasture diversity and helped to control weeds.

"The goats have been a total benefit to the property," Glenda said.

"They've helped more with balancing out the vegetation. They love parthenium, which is throughout our area.

"Parkinsonia and mimosa bushes are like chocolate cake to them. They've helped to balance our windmill and reed-type grasses."

Making the best move

The couple regularly supply wether goats to a domestic market requiring three-and-a-half hours transport to Mackay.

They prefer to use trusted transporters or transport their livestock themselves. Glenda has a few transport fundamentals when preparing for a trip.

"The main goal is to have them calm when loaded," Glenda said.

"We usually transport them in pairs or more. You don't want them under or overloaded in the pens."

Ensuring livestock have been appropriately prepared with sufficient time off feed and water for the journey is important as well, Glenda said.

"We yard them the day before they're due to be loaded.

"We add electrolytes to their water to help alleviate the stress. Even though our animals are calm around people and we practise low-stress handling, it can be a stressful experience being loaded and transported."

The length of the intended journey and season both inform how far in advance the livestock are taken off feed and water.

"It gives them a chance to empty out in the yards instead of the truck, so they're not slipping over."

A layer of straw will often be added into the truck or trailer to make it more comfortable for animals and help soak up anything dropped.

Goats need the extra consideration of coverings on transport, Glenda advised.

"They're incredible jumpers and climbers. Be aware – you need a lid on things. They will jump out." ■

10 tips for goats on the go

Here are Glenda's top tips for transporting goats:

- 1 Familiarise goats with being handled, loaded and transported as weaners.
- 2 Use trusted operators who practise low-stress handling.
- 3 Yard goats the day before the trip and discuss time off feed and water with your transport operator.
- 4 Consider a layer of straw in the bottom of a truck for comfort and to reduce slipping.
- 5 Consider adding electrolytes to animals' water in advance of transport to assist their response to travel.
- 6 Ensure trucks and trailers are covered to stop goats jumping out.
- 7 Avoid transporting pregnant goats in the third trimester.
- 8 Ensure animals are fit for the intended journey.
- 9 Consider the weather conditions as goats are susceptible to the cold.
- 10 Follow the Australian Land Transport of Livestock guidelines available from the Transport Hub: mla.com.au/transport-hub



mla.com.au/transport-hub

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✉ Sharon Dundon sdundon@mla.com.au

Practical steps to weather the climate

Planning is key to managing increasing climate variability over the coming decades, but for many producers adaptability is already second nature.

New research out of WA is exploring practical steps sheep producers can take to stay resilient.

The three-year FutureSheep project, which is part of the MLA-supported SheepLinks program, set out to understand what conditions sheep producers in WA can expect heading towards 2050, and how these conditions might impact their farming systems.

To build projections, the researchers used biophysical and economic modelling, combined with case studies, in three key sheep-producing regions (Kojonup, Wagin and Merredin) to identify potential adaptations for projected hotter and drier climates in 2030 and 2050.

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) WA senior research scientist Dr Kevin Foster emphasised the importance of focusing on the challenges of WA's Mediterranean climate with its wet winters and dry summers.

"Our producers are already skilled at managing seasonal variability and have been doing it for a long time, especially in the lower rainfall zones (LRZ), but that variability will increase in years to come," he said.

The impact of climate change

The FutureSheep team modelled future climate scenarios based on both moderate and high greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and how they would affect different sheep-producing regions of WA.

"WA is a big state with different agricultural zones, so we can't assume climate change projections will impact uniformly across our farming systems," Kevin said.

The modelling suggests lower stocking rates and less water security will be likely outcomes for low and medium rainfall zones (MRZ) without adaptation from producers.

While current pasture technology is likely to be sufficient for producers in MRZ and higher rainfall zones (HRZ) to adapt, it will only

provide a short-to-medium term solution in LRZ, which will require new innovations by 2050 to remain viable.

"The LRZ will be more challenging and require new systems and technologies, including earlier-maturing annual pasture species with specific traits for drought and heat tolerance, especially as a seedling," Kevin said.

While the research offered sobering results, being prepared can help offset the challenges ahead.

"Now we know the gaps, we know where to focus our resources on closing them," Kevin said.

"Producers are already exhibiting a diverse range of responses. Some have been planning for the last decade, while others are beginning to make changes now.

"Some are utilising early and late feeding systems such as high-yielding, short-season forage crops, perennial pastures, shrubs and confinement feeding, or even buying or leasing land in other regions."

On-farm strategies

Growing barley or oats, mixed with a legume such as vetch, was identified by producers as an opportunity to increase feed availability at the beginning of the end of the season.

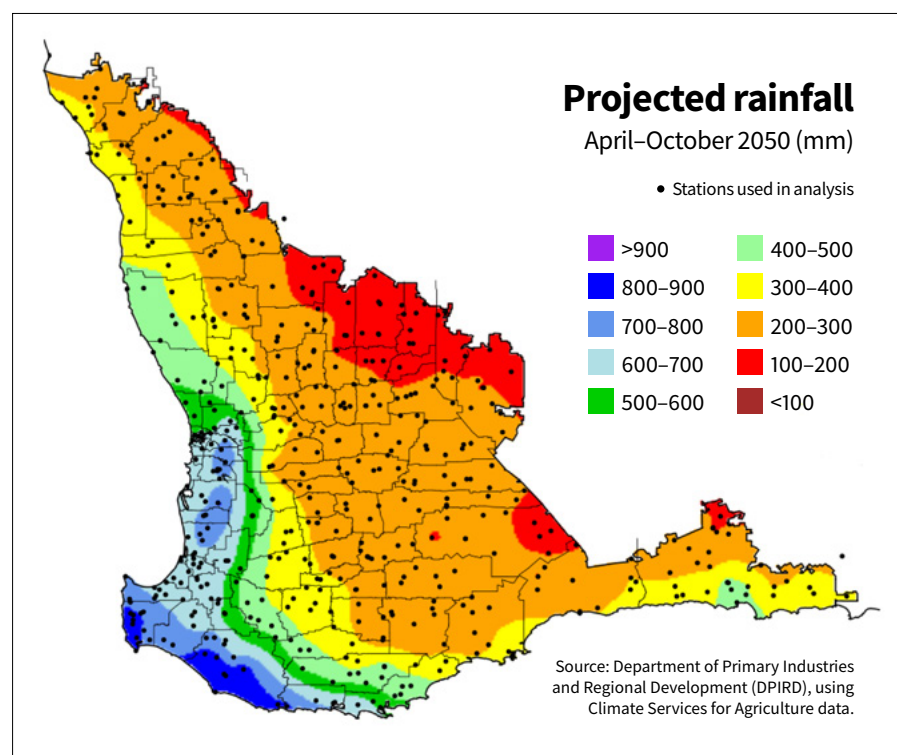
Water security emerged as a top priority with producers engaged in the study. Some are working to conserve their supply, and others looking at methods to acquire more in dry periods.

Improving inflow, installing more dams or cleaning existing dams, and stopping dams from leaking were all identified as methods to gain or conserve water.

For others, desalination and on-farm bores is a potential longer-term solution, although producers highlighted that costs remain a barrier to adoption.

"If we could get cheaper desalination units in the paddock, combined with cheap solar power, many producers and lot feeders would be more independent of rainfall," Kevin said.

Figure 1: Projected rainfall (mm) under the moderate emission scenario (RCP4.5) in 2050 from 1991–2020 baseline.



continued from previous page

“Our producers are already skilled at managing seasonal variability and have been doing it for a long time, especially in the lower rainfall zones, but that variability will increase in years to come.”

Intensification of farming

The case studies also revealed that containment feeding and lot feeding are growing in popularity to manage late breaks of season to let their annual pastures establish before grazing.

“Often, producers have little choice but to graze pastures as soon as the season breaks, as dry pasture, grain or hay is running out. However, this early grazing slows the pasture’s recovery,” Kevin said.

While there’s growing interest in containment feeding, uncertainty around the correct feed rations, design and the upfront costs could deter adoption.

“Development of extension packages or decision support tools that cover feeding strategies, economics and practical system designs will be critical for increasing industry uptake.”

Following modelled projections and an awareness of current system limitations, Kevin said it’s important to encourage producers to develop and test new strategies ahead of further climate variability.

“Despite increased variability, the challenges of the future can be managed if we begin adapting and implementing new systems and technologies now.” ■

TOOLBOX

Click or scan the QR code - FutureSheep project:

Making More From Sheep
makingmorefromsheep.com.au



Mitchell Plumbe

mplumbe@mla.com.au

Kevin Foster

kevin.foster@dpird.wa.gov.au

Getting ahead of the climate curve



WA producer Ben Webb has seen more cropping success as his sustainable resource management has evolved.

Working the land in WA is no simple feat and, without adaptation, it's only likely to get more difficult.

Climate modelling suggests preparation over the coming years will be the secret to success. So, like many producers, Ben and Emily Webb have been consistently amping up their sustainable resource management.

Water security, pastures and stocking rates have been the focal points of the recent FutureSheep research project, part of the MLA-supported SheepLinks project, which modelled how climate change would impact sheep producers in WA (see story page 27).

The Webbs put their drought-proofing to the test on their Kojonup property for a second consecutive poor season, and their preparation is paying off. Despite a rainfall deficit of around 200mm and reduced feed, their crops and sheep maintained condition through summer.

Results from FutureSheep suggested livestock and crop systems in areas like Kojonup – a high rainfall zone (HRZ) – will remain profitable with adaptation of current systems.

Conserving moisture

Where water is limited, capturing every drop is crucial. To ensure rainfall was stored either in soil or dams, the Webbs introduced several different measures.

“With continuous cropping of the hilltops, we use a wetting agent at seeding time to suck any moisture into the crops, which does mean less water is getting to the bottom of the hill to fill our dams,” Ben said.

Subsurface drainage was installed to counteract the impact on waterlogged areas, and polypipe is used to drain excess water from a wet winter into dams.

Water from freshwater soaks and wet areas have also been used to pump water up into dams.

“It’s two birds with one stone. You get water in the dam for the summer, and it dries out another waterlogged area so you can grow a crop there in the winter,” Ben said.

The change has allowed the Webbs to grow crops in places they previously haven’t been able to.

“We’ve started growing winter wheat in the wettest areas, which goes in early to make use of any summer and spring rains. Wheat copes better with being waterlogged than traditional spring crops and helps mitigate the frost risk from those wet areas.”

Alongside subsurface drainage, the family is investigating desalination as an option for their property.

“We’ve had limited success finding good volumes of fresh water, but found salty water near the house which is feasible for desalination.”

Containment feeding

System changes happen gradually, but in WA containment feeding is expected to eventually become the new norm as delayed autumn/winter rain keeps producers feeding sheep. It’s a practice the Webbs have used since 1996.

“We found there was a gap when we wanted to get the sheep off the crops to let them germinate and conserve any moisture,” Ben said.

When winter rain arrives, the Webbs implement containment feeding, allowing the pastures to establish and reach target feed-on-offer levels before the sheep are allowed on it.

“It started as just the wethers, but now they all go in there. We might use some frosted wheat we turned into hay, or if we have a weedy crop, we turn it into silage for feeding, as well as using grain,” Ben said.

“We’re also looking at legume fodder crops, trying different species and whether something will fit for us. If we can make it work, it should be a great break crop and somewhere to finish our lambs without grain.”

Getting sheep in shape

Genetics has been a focus for the Webbs to ensure they are breeding sheep which can tolerate climate variability.

The family breed ‘easy-care’ rams as part of the Merinotech (WA) group, looking for high growth rates and easy finishing.

“A big part of our breeding objective is to raise dual-purpose Merino sheep that we can run at high stocking rates, focusing on fat, muscle and staple strength, as well as easy-care traits including resistance to worms and lower dag, breech wrinkle and breech cover.

“Having sheep with more fat and better condition scores means they have a better ability to maintain condition in poorer seasons and when there is less grass around in our dry summers.”

Reduced stocking rates because of poorer pastures was a projection of the FutureSheep project. The FutureSheep project identified

SNAPSHOT



BEN AND EMILY WEBB –
Kojonup, WA



AREA
2,300ha

ENTERPRISE
Merino sheep and cropping

PASTURES
Improved pasture with sub-clover base, small area of perennials

SOILS
Predominantly duplex gravel and loam over clay

RAINFALL
535mm

that without adaptation, producers would need to reduce their stocking rates in years to come.

“Ideally there will be more money in sheep in the next few years so we can afford to run a lower stocking rate, but every summer is dry here, so it’s good to have sheep which have good fat stores and therefore don’t rely so much on the paddock feed or supplementary feeding.”

A little does a lot

Despite starting early, the Webbs are nowhere near finished making improvements to see them through the hard seasons.

Although their new systems are helping to get them through the current dry year, the Webbs are still investigating what more can be done, as legume crops, desalination and breeding are still being perfected.

“There is no silver bullet to preparation, but lots of little things help.” ■

TOOLBOX



Click or scan the QR code to view the FutureSheep project:



Containment feeding
mla.com.au/containment-feeding

Sheep Genetics
sheepgenetics.org.au



Ben and Emily Webb webby027@bigpond.com Mitchell Plumbe mplumbe@mla.com.au

✓ Murdeduke's stud cattle advisor Simon Falkiner with farm manager and co-principal Lachie Wilson.

Soil fertility jewel in crown at Murdeduke

The Victorian mixed farming enterprise Murdeduke Agriculture has experienced the transformative effects of focusing on soil fertility and health.

Murdeduke Agriculture at Winchelsea is a seedstock Angus cattle, prime lamb and cropping operation, owned by the Wilson family. A free-range outdoor piggery on the property is a critical component of Murdeduke's circular model, which makes the most of each enterprise's resources and byproducts.

As stud cattle advisor Simon Falkiner and farm manager and co-principal Lachie Wilson explain, building a circular business that utilises byproducts and is in harmony with the environment has not been without its challenges, but it's paying off.

"The circular and adaptive nature of the business is important because there are a lot of external drivers that influence our decision making and frequently lead us to modify our business model to ensure we satisfy the demands of a modern and sustainable production system," Simon said.

"We, as producers, can't farm and run our business in isolation anymore. There's demand from our consumer to do things really well, to meet current ethical and environmental standards.

"Luckily, it's not that difficult – productive farming and meeting community expectations aren't mutually exclusive. The objective for both parties is to have healthy, content and productive animals, living in a thriving environment that supports agriculture, the environment, community and the prosperity of our red meat production systems."

Overcoming challenges

Simon joined the Murdeduke Agriculture team about 25 years ago, working alongside Lachie's father and co-principal Bruce Wilson to improve the productivity of both the land and the livestock.

"When I first came here 25 years ago there were some real challenges," he said.

"We're in volcanic country so there are lots of rocks, which meant fertility and good pasture composition were somewhat lacking as much of the country was unimproved.

"Through the cropping program we cleared rocks and built fertility. Pasture renovation became easier and opened the door to being more productive with the livestock system."

The business focused on building soil fertility and health before investing in improved pasture species to increase the feedbase.

SNAPSHOT



**LACHIE WILSON
(PRINCIPAL),
MURDEDUKE
AGRICULTURE –**
Winchelsea, Victoria



AREA
4,000ha

ENTERPRISE
Angus seedstock business,
prime lambs and cropping

PASTURES
Perennial phalaris and annual ryegrass

SOILS
Clay loams

RAINFALL
550mm

Turning pig manure into fertiliser

A key tactic has been using the free-range piggery as a nitrogen and carbon source. The grower shed bedding – originally straw cut and baled as part of the cropping enterprise – is recycled to create compost, which is then spread on cropping and pasture paddocks.

"We now grow more fodder, allowing us to turn animals off faster, reducing their methane emissions – that's key to reducing our carbon footprint."



“From our cropping enterprise we generate a lot of straw from our stubbles, so we put it back through the piggery. The resulting ‘waste product’ of straw and pig manure is a really good natural building block for soil fertility,” Simon said.

“We now grow more fodder, allowing us to turn animals off faster, reducing their methane emissions – that’s key to reducing our carbon footprint.”

Murdeduke also instituted a system of raised-bed farming, which allowed them to expand their cropping system to paddocks that would otherwise be waterlogged. The reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from cropping well-drained paddocks has helped reduce Murdeduke’s carbon footprint, and at the same time increase productivity.

Feedbase focus

As soil fertility improved, rocks were cleared and the raised beds allowed more land to be cropped, attention turned to selecting appropriate pasture and crop species.

“We’ve geared our pasture and crop selection to utilise the improved soil health whether it be a cereal species that we can get in early and get it up out of the ground so we can graze it over the winter, or something like soybeans – which we grew for the first time last year,” Simon said.

The soybeans were trialled as a high-quality feed source during the late autumn feed gap, plus to provide nitrogen for the following crop.

They are also having great success with deep-rooted perennials, including Holdfast GT phalaris.

Stocking rate doubled

The improved pastures, together with adopting ‘grain and graze’ cropping and containment feeding principles, have driven a doubling of the winter stocking rate over a 10 to 15-year period.

“We didn’t used to be able to handle the spring flush – we would have to shut paddocks up and cut them for fodder,” Lachie said.

These days, however, they can carry enough animals to utilise the spring flush.

“The containment areas mean we can now feed and lock up animals in the autumn when our feed source is low in the paddocks,” Simon said.

“The grain and graze principles of grazing crops has made a huge difference to the productivity of this farm.

“We’re no longer wasting a resource in the middle of the winter when pasture supply is low. We can graze our crop and have limited impact on our grain yield.”

Lachie said containment feeding has also boosted animal performance.

“The ability of the animals to put on weight in late winter–early spring is just phenomenal, particularly the cattle,” he said.

“It’s pretty cool to get cow condition back up so the cow is on a rising plane coming into joining to achieve that ‘calf a cow per year’, which is a critical profit driver in a beef production system.”

Livestock enterprise changes

Over the decades, the sheep side of the business has seen ongoing adjustments, morphing from a pure Merino business to first-cross, then composite sheep.

“The opportunity to produce prime lambs arose from having more fodder of higher quality, so we moved to a first-cross operation,” Simon said.

“That didn’t quite meet our requirements, so Lachie moved to a composite breed – multiple births, high productivity.”

The downside was the lack of wool, so in recent years plain bodied, mulesing-free Merinos have been added back into the system to complement and value-add an already successful part of the business.

Set stocking and small flock sizes during lambing have been critical to lamb survival and health.

“There is solid research that suggests you’ll get better lambing percentages with smaller mobs and less mismothering,” Lachie said.

Finding appropriate paddocks is an ongoing challenge in a mixed-enterprise – where bigger cropping paddocks support machinery efficiency – so they use temporary wires to reduce paddock sizing.

Feed efficiency

On the cattle side, weighing calves at 200, 400 and 600 days gives a good handle on growth rates.

They recently conducted their first feed efficiency trials to further tease out which animals are ‘producing more from less’, and the next step is to see if these high-performance animals emit less methane.

“Measuring performance traits has taught us the value of really good genetics,” Simon said.

Other livestock productivity improvements have come from synchronising calving, lambing and peak animal demand with peak feed production in spring.

Building resilience

Murdeduke is focusing on better utilising climatic and rainfall events to build business sustainability and resilience.

“With climate change we’re seeing a lot of different rainfall events,” Simon said.

“In the past, in our traditional system, we used to waste many out-of-season rainfall events, so we now look in a three-monthly cycle and ask: What’s the opportunity? What’s the stress that’s in front of us? How do we combat the challenge or take advantage of the opportunity?

“The old system of just setting a plan in concrete for a calendar year and sticking to it is out the window.” ■



Set stocking and small flock sizes during lambing have been critical to lamb survival and health at Murdeduke.



Take a virtual farm tour of Murdeduke and other businesses featured in MLA's sustainability videos: mla.com.au/sustainability



Lachie Wilson lachie@murdeduke.com.au Simon Falkiner falkiner.ag@bigpond.com

Shedding light on new breeding values

When producers transition to shedding sheep enterprises – in a quest for easy-care prime lambs – maintaining quality and genetic gains in their existing breeding objective traits can be a challenge.

To overcome this, MLA has partnered with the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU) at the University of New England, to develop a breeding value. This value will allow producers to not only accurately select for animals which are going to shed their fleece, but will also provide an understanding of when, how quickly and where on the body it will shed.

Lead researcher Dr Sam Walkom said the demand for this information reflects the changing landscape of the sheep industry.

“We’re seeing a shift within the industry towards shedding animals,” Sam said.

“I don’t think it will ever grow to the point where they are the whole industry, but it’s a response to the high cost of shearing and the relatively lower value for higher micron wool at the moment.

“A lot of the producers moving towards the shedding breeds are looking for lower input and easier management. For those specialising in lamb meat production, wool can in some ways be seen as a nuisance.

“You can either accept that it’s a cost you have to deal with or look to move away from those requirements.”

This growing demand for shedding sheep presents a challenge for breeding in new characteristics without losing the genetic gain achieved over many years.

Getting under the skin

The project will include understanding how shedding interacts with other important production and health traits, by identifying genetic correlations between new shedding traits and currently available Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) such as growth, carcase traits and eating quality.

“I think the breeding value we’re trying to build will be highly valuable to sheepmeat producers looking to transition down the shedding pathway,” Sam said.

“It will give them the capacity to have a balanced breeding objective that maximises



Researcher Sam Walkom (AGBU) and contributing producers Matt Kelly (Low Footprint Lamb) and John Keiller (Cashmore Nudies) at MLA Updates.

“A lot of the producers moving towards the shedding breeds are looking for lower input and easier management. For those specialising in lamb meat production, wool can in some ways be seen as a nuisance.”

genetic gain for productivity, but also maintains a consistency of shedding performance within their flock.”

Currently, producers trialling this transition on their own flocks are relying on phenotypic selection – this involves visually observing their sheep to identify suitable shedding patterns, which is not only a reflection of generic merit, but the environment they live within.

As shedding is linked with day length, relying on phenotypically selecting sheep during a period where sheep are not expressing shedding may lead to the selection of animals with poor genetic merit for shedding.

Also, without understanding the genetic correlations between shedding and other important production traits like growth and

eating quality, visual selection for shedding may inadvertently result in selecting animals with poor genetic merit for such important production traits.

“You can breed through phenotypic selection, but progress will be slower and selection will potentially not be as accurate as you want,” Sam said.

“Breeding values allow us to improve the accuracy of that selection. The selection will be on genetic merit alone, rather than clouded by any environmental triggers.”

The ASBV is still being developed and is expected to be available to industry in early 2027, however updated scoring protocols and research breeding values will be delivered prior to this. ■



Efficiency rides on sheep's back

Western Victorian producer Matt Kelly's shift to shedding sheep in the early 2000s was born out of necessity, when getting his flock from heavily timbered country to the shearing shed each year was no easy feat.

"It was hard to get a clean muster in the trees, so whatever treatment we gave them may have only covered 85–95% of the flock – it just wasn't an efficient system.

"Shedding sheep were the only way I could successfully run that operation."

Having already built up a significant Coopworth flock, starting from scratch wasn't an option. Instead, Matt bought some shedding sheep to add to his existing flock, and bred the wool off as quickly as he could.

The primary focus of the early years of Matt's breeding program was to develop an easy-care shedding sheep, so he selected heavily for shedding.

After building up a shedding flock, Matt turned his focus to placing selection pressures on traits such as weaning and growth rates, muscle and fat.

"Our maternal composite flock has more productive genes and has made significant progress, with 50 years of performance recording," Matt said.

"Our focus is on understanding how we can fast-track the genetic transfer of those productive genes into our shedding sheep."

Decades of data

Matt is one of the producers who has spent years collecting data from his flock for an MLA-supported project, and now has three generations worth of data for the researchers to work with.

This information is being used as part of ongoing research to develop a phenotyping protocol and breeding values that describe an animal's ability to shed their fleece (see story opposite).

"We're trying to introduce the maternal composite with the least amount of wool that has the highest genetic merit, so we can then bring across those highly productive genes into our shedding sheep and increase the genetic traits we want them in without bringing too much wool," Matt said.

If successful in developing a breeding value for this trait, Matt believes a clearer path to high-performing shedding sheep will be popular for those wanting an easy-care flock.

"There are a lot of producers looking to reduce costs by going to shedding sheep, so they're going to need the same breeding value to transfer those genes across into their woolly sheep."

While the ongoing research is promising for the ability to select on an animal's genetic merit for its ability to shed wool, there is still a value gap behind maternal composite breeds.

SNAPSHOT



MATTHEW KELLY –
Cropton East, Victoria



AREA

166ha

ENTERPRISE

1,000 ewes, 490 ewe lambs and 200 rams

PASTURES

Improved phalaris, ryegrass and sub-clover

SOILS

Heavy clay to clay loam

RAINFALL

700mm

"At the moment, our sheep are about \$15–\$25 behind leading maternal composites from a production perspective, but in our operation we're making those savings in labour, chemicals and risk," Matt said.

"Our main goal is to produce sheep that need humans less, and function well without constant monitoring and chemical intervention."

The ongoing research holds significant potential in closing that gap and improving the productivity of shedding sheep, with number of lambs, weaning and growth rates, muscle and fat all being priority traits for Matt.

"We're using all the information we can get our hands on to push production as hard as we can. Low input, high output is the ultimate goal." ■



▲ Matt Kelly has been refining his shedding flock for more than a decade.



📄 sheepgenetics.org.au 📧 Matt Kelly mpbkelly@gmail.com 📧 Sarah Day sday@mla.com.au

Tried and tested methods bring breeding success

For Ross and Dimity Thompson, the success of their NSW stud, Millah Murrah Angus, relies on a balance between ‘looking under the hood’ at their livestock’s genetics and careful visual inspection of each animal they introduce to the herd.

The stud, based at their Bathurst property ‘Goonamurrah’, was founded in 1969 by Ross’s parents Wyatt and Winsome Thompson. Ross and Dimity took over the stud in 2003.

A loyal customer base and standout sales results – with Millah Murrah achieving the highest averaging beef bull sale in Australia in all but three years since 2011 – is testament to their breeding success.

Visual inspection

On top of objectively evaluating the sires he invests in, Ross stands firmly behind the merits of physical inspection.

“No matter how much technological advancement we make as an industry, the time-tested basics of cattle breeding mean that I must see firsthand everything we use in the herd. This lowers the margin of error in the phenotypic outcome of our cattle,” he said.

Ross’s three fundamental traits for cow/calf profitability are:

- a fertile cow that rebreeds each year
- a cow that holds her condition easily in drought
- a cow that weans a heavy calf which will grow out to a point, but not with an excessive frame.

Stewards of their land

Ross and Dimity have moved increasingly towards a regenerative approach to farming.

“The cattle provide the income so we can improve the land. We fence off the fragile parts of the property and we ramp up production on the more resilient areas,” Ross said.

Productivity improvements include an extensive, targeted fertiliser program based on chook manure, lime and gypsum.

A comprehensive realignment of the fencing infrastructure on Goonamurrah (increasing paddock numbers from 40 to 60 across 951ha), coupled with development of an extensive reticulated water network, has seen pasture quality and sward density increase dramatically.

“We are now able to implement many of the principles of time-controlled grazing, with denser stocking rates for shorter periods and increased rest periods,” Ross said.

“The impact on weed reduction has been tremendous, with a much higher percentage of desirable species in the pasture.”

Carbon sequestration makes sense

In 2022, the Thompsons contracted the entirety of Goonamurrah with the

SNAPSHOT



ROSS AND DIMITY THOMPSON, MILLAH MURRAH ANGUS –

‘Goonamurrah’, Bathurst, NSW



AREA

951ha

ENTERPRISE

Seedstock Angus business, producing approximately 500 registered calves and 300 commercial females a year

PASTURES

Improved pastures based on cocksfoot, phalaris, sub-clovers, chicory and lucerne

SOILS

Ranges from shale to granite base

RAINFALL

700mm

Clean Energy Regulator under a carbon sequestration contract.

“Many people are reticent to commit to carbon programs, usually due to the uncertainty surrounding the whole sector, but from my point of view there’s nothing to fear from being contracted to the regulator,” Ross said.



Multi-breed genetic evaluations

Multi-breed evaluations allow comparison of animals’ genetic merit regardless of breed, allowing identification of the right animal for the right purpose.

“Notwithstanding the various breed societies’ intellectual property rights associated with EBVs, I don’t think multi-breed EBVs are something that hold any fear,” Ross said.

“My guess is multi-breed EBVs will highlight the relative strengths (and weaknesses) of the individual beef breeds.

“From an Angus perspective, I suspect it will lead to more focus on, and appreciation of, the all-round qualities of the breed. I don’t think it will precipitate a mass rush into cross-breeding. It will just give beef producers additional tools to enhance genetic understanding.” ■



Four ways the Thompsons are caring for their environment



- 1** Seven fragile landscapes have been fenced away from the main production areas at Goonamurrah.
- 2** They have planted 3,000 trees in the property's environmental reserves. Higher School Certificate students from Barker College plant out the reserves with trees which, once established, act as drought reserves and can be used for raising weaners.
- 3** They have dramatically reduced synthetic fertiliser use, with zero single superphosphate application since 2016. Ross conducts heavy applications of chook manure.
- 4** Substantial investment in water and fencing infrastructure has enabled better grazing management – many time-controlled grazing principles can now be utilised.

"Nothing we're doing is contrary to what I'd want to be doing anyway. We're improving the water, nutrient and carbon cycles of our land – everyone is winning."

With several environmental awards under their belt, the couple plan to continue rejuvenating their land for the benefit of future generations and the ongoing productivity of their business. ■

Benchmarking sires keeps breed on track

As former chairman of the Angus Sire Benchmarking Program (ASBP), Ross applauds this collaborative initiative by Angus Australia, which was co-funded by MLA until early 2024.

Breeders nominate sires annually for an artificial insemination (AI) program in cooperator commercial herds, with raw data from progeny collected for an array of traits.

Increased genomic testing by Angus Australia members has contributed to an accelerated rate of additional genetic gain in the Australian Angus population, which is estimated at \$74.7 million after 10 years to 2033, or \$707 million after 30 years to 2053.

The University of New England's research facility, Tullimba Feedlot, collects data on the program's progeny for hard-to-measure traits such as Feed Conversion Efficiency.

Initially established with a view to helping producers identify and rank some of the best young sires in the Angus breed, a further benefit has been the establishment and now ongoing maintenance of a core reference population for BREEDPLAN estimated breeding values (EBVs).

"The ASBP is a tremendous initiative. Being able to check the calibration of EBVs is one of the project's greatest strengths," Ross said.

"Several of our bulls have been through the program – the data collected through this project is extremely

meaningful and valuable. I doubt there'd be a more comprehensive, well-structured program in the world.

"If industry was to go off track with genomics, then this is a very good yardstick to make sure we don't go too far outside the lines."

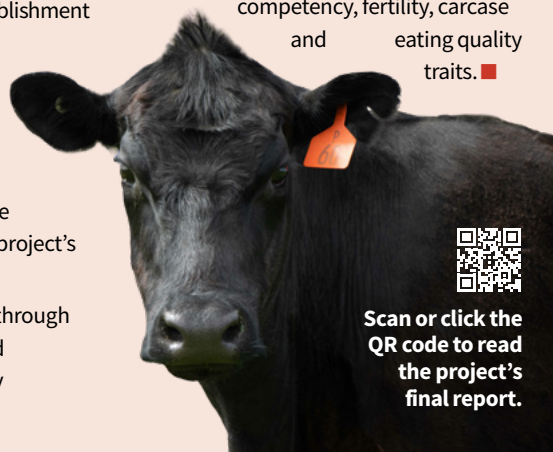
What does it involve?

Across 15 cohorts, more than 489 Angus bulls have been joined, primarily through fixed-time AI, to 1,000 to 2,000 Angus females per year.

The resulting progeny are measured for numerous commercially relevant traits, from birth to slaughter in the steers, and birth to first parity in the heifers.

All relevant ASBP data is added to the Angus Australia database and included in the TransTasman Angus Cattle Evaluation to contribute to the calculation of EBVs of the sires and their relatives.

There is particular emphasis on hard-to-measure traits such as feed intake, methane emissions, immune competency, fertility, carcass and eating quality traits. ■



Scan or click the QR code to read the project's final report.

TOOLBOX



MLA Genetics hub:
genetics.mla.com.au

BREEDPLAN: breedplan.une.edu.au

Scan or click the QR code –
'Using and understanding
BREEDPLAN information'
eLearning training:



▲ Millie, Ross, Dimity, Olivia and Twiggy Thompson after their record-breaking cow sale on 20 April 2023 at 'Goonamurrah'. Image: Ben Simpson, OGA Creative.



millahmurrah.com

✉ Ross Thompson info@millahmurrah.com

✉ Sarah Strachan sstrachan@mla.com.au

✓ WA producer Spencer Knight has implemented changes on-farm as a result of attending a BredWell FedWell workshop.

“Since the workshop, we’ve been working to improve how our pasture matches our production goals for our cattle. We’ve installed centre pivots and are on an ongoing journey to match our production system to our property.”

Lessons continue to deliver profits

BWFW covers how to develop a customised breeding plan, identify and select sires to meet objectives, and maximise genetic investment through nutrition.

Fellow WA Angus stud owners Spencer and Penny Knight, ‘Gumnut Downs’ Kirup, have already seen benefits to their bottom line from actioning lessons learned at the BWFW workshop hosted by the Gandys.

“We’re paying a lot more attention when matching feed demand to feed supply. This has significantly improved our bottom line. It was that little bit of gold we took away from the event,” Spencer said.

“We’re monitoring our pasture quantity and quality very closely now so we’re able to maximise the most out of a plant’s nutritional value. By doing this, we can maximise growth rates in our cattle across all ages, even in less-desirable seasons.”

On the back of the success they’ve seen in their own enterprise, Spencer recommends BWFW to anyone looking to improve their business.

“There were bits of gold in this workshop for everyone, from the beginners to the professionals farming full-time.”

BredWell FedWell workshops are available for all sheep types, southern cattle and northern cattle production systems. ■

Finding the gold in your beef business

Producers across the country are reaping the rewards of hosting – and attending – MLA’s BredWell FedWell (BWFW) workshops.

In south-west WA, Lex and Kim Gandy opened the gates to their ‘Diamond Tree Farm’ and welcomed local beef producers to attend a BWFW workshop.

Workshop insights

The one-day workshop includes a mix of presentations, classroom and in-yard activities. While all attendees benefit from the nutrition and management information, hosts have an advantage, as their own bulls are used and their management plan is analysed throughout the workshop, so they can directly apply learnings from the day to their business.

“Alongside the opportunity to improve our business, hosting presented a really good opportunity to have highly-skilled people come to our area,” Lex said.

Presenters at the Gandys’ BWFW workshop

included Scott Wright, CEO of Angus Australia, and his colleague Jake Phillips.

“As an Angus breeder – which many people in the area are – it was great to have them here and for everyone to have the opportunity to meet and learn from them,” Lex said.

He also found value in networking with the attendees.

“Because we’re breeding for other producers as a stud, I always really like to understand what they’re looking for and the challenges they’re having, which we can help solve with our seedstock.

“Since the workshop, we’ve been working to improve how our pasture matches our production goals for our cattle. We’ve installed centre pivots and are on an ongoing journey to match our production system to our property.”

TOOLBOX

Host a BredWell FedWell workshop:
mla.com.au/bredwellfedwell

Find a BredWell FedWell near you:
mla.com.au/events-bwfw



Mitchell Plumbe mplumbe@mla.com.au

Throwing shade on lamb survival

MLA-funded research is digging into how edible shelter – such as shrubs and crops – can lift lamb survival rates.

Most lamb deaths occur within three days of birth, and up to half are due to 'starvation-mismothering-exposure', with hypothermia playing a significant role in these outcomes. Providing edible shelter in lambing paddocks is thought to have a significant positive impact – potentially halving these mortality rates, particularly in the case of high-chill environments and with twin lambs.

The MLA-funded 'Shelter and lamb survival' project aims to quantify the impact of edible shelter on lamb survival, comparing outcomes of traditional pasture lambing paddocks with crop and/or shrub shelter.

The Murdoch University project is led by Associate Professor Serina Hancock and managed by PhD candidate Georgia Welsh.

Quantifying outcomes

Georgia said while previous studies have looked at the impact of shelter on lamb survival, a limited number of shelter options were considered and any additional benefits to on-farm productivity and profitability were not identified.

"This project is looking at how shelter options can impact twin lamb survival and help ewes maintain their condition during both lambing and lactation," she said.

"By using shrubs or crops in the paddocks, we hope to see ewes lambing into the shelters and remaining at the birth site,

rather than leaving their lambs in search of feed after lambing.

"That's going to help address the levels of starvation-mismothering-exposure and bring down lamb mortality rates."

Reducing mortality in cold conditions

"We have a lot of anecdotal evidence that lambing in shelter improves survival, but we want to quantify it on a commercial scale, with a particular focus on the impact of climatic conditions," Georgia said.

The study uses a 'chill index' which takes into account rainfall, wind speed and temperature at lambing time.

A high chill index ($>1,100 \text{ kJ/m}^2/\text{h}$) can see twin-born lamb mortality reach up to 70%, but edible shelter can provide a windbreak to help reduce that chill index.

"We want to quantify any benefits and establish whether edible shelter has a significant impact on lamb survival due to improved shelter and nutrition," Georgia said.

Producer involvement

The 'Shelter and lamb survival' project started in 2023 and will continue through to 2026. To date, 10 edible shelter producer sites have been completed, but the project team is looking for an additional 18 producers to get involved.

The process involves two site visits from the researchers, at the start of lambing and again at marking.

So far, the study has looked at sites in WA and NSW, and the team is keen to expand this to include SA and Victorian producers.

SEASONAL ACTION PLAN

- ❗ Pregnancy scan for twins and singles so resources are more effectively utilised.
- ❗ Identify pasture paddocks with existing shrubs or other shelter and consider resting these in preparation for lambing.
- ❗ In rough seasons where pastures don't get away, consider lambing into shrub paddocks to give your pasture paddocks a rest during the winter feed gap.
- ❗ Consider planting fodder crops in late-March/early-April to create dual-purpose lambing paddocks with shelter and high nutritional value.
- ❗ If lambing on to crops, offer a mineral supplement containing calcium, magnesium and salt.

Get involved

The 'Shelter and lamb survival' project is looking for producers to host comparisons in 2025 or 2026.

The project will compare twin lamb survival by testing adult twin-bearing ewes on pasture lambing paddocks versus crop and/or shrub lambing paddocks.

Interested producers will need to have at least 150 twin-bearing adult ewes of the same breed, with 50 ewes to be allocated into one of two or three paddock treatments for 130–140 days from the start of joining.

Data collection

Collected data will include:

- ewe condition scores, feed-on-offer and nutritive value at the start and end of lambing
- lamb survival rates
- microclimates throughout lambing using remote weather stations.

Results will be shared with the producer and benchmarked against other (anonymised) project participants. ■

➡ To get involved, visit mla.com.au/es-flyer

➡ Shelter can have a positive impact on lamb survival.

Drying innovation opens door to more flavour, less waste

To enjoy optimal success as an industry, Australian red meat producers need access to as many markets as possible. However, some potential export markets have yet to develop adequate chilled supply chains, making it challenging to service these regions with Australian red meat.

This may be set to change thanks to a promising new partnership between MLA and US-based company True Essence Foods (TEF).

TEF has developed technology to maintain the original flavour and structure of fresh foods in a dehydrated, shelf-stable product. Known as Flavor Symmetry™, the advanced dehydration technology is a fully integrated proprietary solution that protects the fingerprint of the fresh flavour of products while eliminating the need for refrigeration and cold chain.

Retaining flavour

In traditional freeze-dried or retorted (canned and superheated) meat products, the preservation technique denatures the proteins in the meat and alters the cell structure, meaning the structure and flavour profile is negatively impacted.

In contrast, Flavor Symmetry™ preserves the integrity and cell structure associated with the meat, offering a superior taste experience. Sensory evaluations conducted by TEF revealed dehydrated meat products using Flavor Symmetry™ outperform freeze-dried alternatives.

Shaun Hughes, TEF's Director of Marketing, said the collaboration was a groundbreaking project that highlights the sensory excellence achievable with Flavor Symmetry™ technology.

"Using a low-temperature method that separates and removes water at an atomic scale retains Australian red meat's flavour, aroma and nutritional components, maintaining the raw product's texture and integrity," he said.

"This partnership has the potential to elevate the sensory experience for consumers worldwide, showcasing

Australian red meat's quality in every bite while minimising waste and environmental impact. Together, we're redefining what's possible for shelf-stable meat products."

New market access

John Marten, MLA's Program Manager – Food Innovation, said the benefits of this technology are far-reaching.

"Initially, our primary motivation was to enable more people to access Australian quality red meat," he said.

"We wanted to understand whether we had a new market access opportunity to supply countries with notoriously poor refrigerated supply chains.

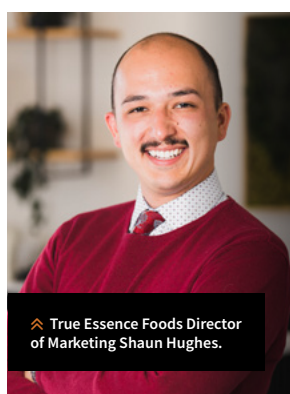
"The more we looked at it however, we realised there was also a huge opportunity to reduce carbon emissions by transitioning from refrigerated air or sea freight to ambient supply chains. Our high-level modelling shows this could lower carbon emissions by about 60%."

Targeting wastage

Minimising food waste is another major benefit of the new technology.

"We know food waste in general is a problem," John said.

"This product has a proven shelf life of 65 days, and TEF believe it could ultimately achieve a two-year shelf life. Most meat today is sold fresh or frozen, and there's a tight timeline to transport, purchase, prepare and eat fresh meat. This is a game changer in that regard."



True Essence Foods Director of Marketing Shaun Hughes.

"This partnership has the potential to elevate the sensory experience for consumers worldwide, showcasing Australian red meat's quality in every bite."



Flavor Symmetry™ technology protects the fresh flavour ‘fingerprint’ of Australian red meat while eliminating the need for refrigeration and cold chain.



Flavor Symmetry™ technology maintains the original flavour and structure of Australian red meat in a dehydrated, shelf-stable product.

“Historically, for food relief, there have been very limited options in what can be maintained and supplied. This changes that.”

The longevity and shelf stability also expands possibilities for meat to be part of the mix for a wide range of consumers – ranging from campers, to remote communities, to people requiring food relief during disasters.

“Historically, for food relief, there have been very limited options in what can be maintained and supplied. This changes that,” John said.

Shaun said the technology creates new markets for the Australian red meat industry, enabling access to fresh-tasting meat where refrigeration is unavailable or limited.

“This is significant because it allows access to fresh-tasting meat products in areas that traditionally could not utilise raw meat due to storage constraints. It also creates

opportunities for innovative product development, such as gourmet soups and sauces, where dehydrated meat with enhanced flavour can add significant value.”

Next steps

While research is still in its early stages, initial results have been promising. In early 2025, MLA took delivery of 6kg of ground beef (mince) and stir fry (beef strip) samples for recipe development and taste testing.

“If the taste testing goes well here, it could open exciting opportunities to bring that technology into our market and start playing around with what’s possible,” John said.

“We could connect TEF with Australian red meat processors to understand whether they

would like to access the True Essence pilot system, so we can start experimenting with different cuts of meat.”

He acknowledged the need for a comprehensive consumer education piece around the introduction of this novel technology. Because Flavor Symmetry™ is a dehydration technology and requires reconstituting the meat by soaking it before cooking, consumers prioritising convenience may perceive it as less expedient. However, it’s undoubtedly quicker and more convenient than defrosting frozen meat.

Despite this, John said the ability of the technology to maintain taste, access new markets, reduce food waste and deliver environmental benefits makes this development a significant milestone for the Australian red meat industry.

“From an environmental perspective, there’s a need to think about things very differently,” he said. “We’ve got all these pressures on us and if we’re not prepared to consider new possibilities, we’re short-changing ourselves.” ■



trueessencefoods.com/flavor-symmetry



John Marten jmarten@mla.com.au



Alicia Waddington awaddington@mla.com.au

Training provides lifelong career lessons

For livestock agent Sam Laffy, upskilling through a training program delivered by RMA Network, Wodonga TAFE and MLA has positively impacted his career performance.

The comprehensive Next Generation Agency and Supply Chain training is designed to help new agents and supply chain service providers gain an operational understanding of required livestock and wool industry interactions between producers, agencies, processors, feedlots, exporters and other providers.

Industry relationships

"Initially, I worked closely with my boss learning the ins and outs of day-to-day tasks in a stock agency. My role has now changed to handle most clients by myself," Sam said.

"One of the most important lessons I learnt in the program was managing relationships within the industry."

The program covers DISC personality profiling. Learning this profiling technique leads to a better understanding about how each individual operates, meaning handling different personalities becomes much clearer.

"Everyone has a different way of handling their business and there are so many different personalities within the industry – knowing how to handle those factors proves vital to achieving success," Sam said.

He also found the lessons around mental resilience beneficial.

"Due to the ever-changing nature of the livestock market, a lot of strain can be put on the agent because of negative prices and

loss of money to a vendor," he said.

"Another lesson we learnt was to focus on the things that we could change in relation to marketing livestock to the best of our ability and try not to stress about the upward and downward trends of the market."

Discussions around mental resilience raised the importance of time management and planning.

"Even though I enjoy helping work and draft cattle, that does not help them get sold. Making the right phone call at the right time can prove to be the most important action to take when marketing livestock."

What's next?

After taking part in the training program, Sam wants to continue to grow his client base while maintaining and supporting his current clients. He also hopes to add further growth to his family's livestock enterprise.

"I hope to continue to learn new things. I believe livestock agents are vital for all producers, regardless of whether they think they need our services or not."

Sam believes the condensed wisdom that is learnt over the few weeks of the program could prove to be career-changing for him. ■

✉ To discuss training opportunities, contact the course coordinator Simone Dand on

sdand@wodongatafe.edu.au

📱 Scan or click the QR code to access resources for livestock advisors:



▲ Livestock agent Sam Laffy.

📍 Sam Laffy sam@kellco.com.au
 📍 Keely Kovacevic kkovacevic@mla.com.au

Lamb's tick of approval for DEXA devices

Six lamb abattoirs across Australia are now using dual energy x-ray absorptiometer (DEXA) devices as a predictor of carcase fat, lean and bone percentage, with the technology recently securing full AUS-MEAT accreditation.

The DEXA devices were developed and released by the MLA-supported Advanced Livestock Measurement Technologies (ALMTech) program, as predictors of lean meat yield (LMY) in hot lamb carcasses.

For full accreditation, AUS-MEAT requires the process be repeated within 12 months of the initial provisional accreditation. MLA partnered with Murdoch University to ensure the initial accreditation trial results could be repeated within the year.

This involved collecting 269 carcasses from five site trials at the WAMMCO processing plant in Katanning, WA. DEXA devices were initially used to scan these carcasses before they were transported to the Murdoch University campus for a CT scan, which is the gold standard measurement device for LMY.

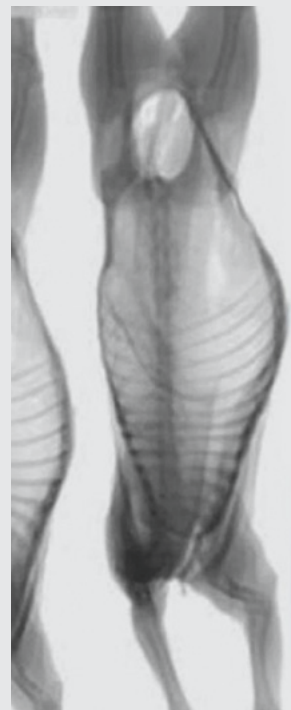
In October 2024, the DEXA reaccreditation report was submitted to the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee (AMILSC) and was subsequently accepted, marking DEXA's full accreditation in December 2024.

Benefits to the sheep industry

Trial outcomes have proven DEXA to be a more accurate means to predict carcase composition when compared to hot standard carcase weight (HSCW) and GR tissue depth measurements.

This capability, alongside the acceptance of the re-accreditation report by AMILSC, allows for the sheepmeat industry to use the DEXA system as a means of trading upon sheep carcase composition.

It also allows processors to provide producers with feedback, which they can use to enhance on-farm decision making.



▲ DEXA device scan of a lamb carcass.

The next steps

Moving forward, MLA plans to unlock further value from DEXA by working to extend the accreditation achieved for hot DEXA to include cold DEXA – doubling the number of devices accredited to measure LMY.

Early work has also indicated that the bone values measured using cold DEXA may be a method of predicting consumer eating quality scores, meaning the device could strengthen the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) sheep cuts model which is currently being rolled out. Both initiatives are currently being investigated in funded projects. ■

📱 Scan or click the QR code to read the full DEXA reaccreditation report:



📍 mla.com.au/objective-measurement
 📍 Jack Cook jcook@mla.com.au

THE COMMENTS SECTION

Get out of the comments and into the cutlets

Summer Lamb has proven once again that it has a finger firmly on the pulse of the Australian psyche, with this year's hotly anticipated campaign 'skewering the comments section' to deliver an incredible 20 million views for the long-form ad.

Launched on 7 January, the now viral 'The comments section' ad was developed by Australian Lamb and MLA. Taking a swing at our enthusiasm for online debate, the campaign drew on actual Australian comments from Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Tik Tok and Reddit.

With a tongue-in-cheek approach to this new battlefield, 'The comments section' saw Aussies fighting over everything from the ethics of dog grooming to how the perfect cup of tea is made.

Just when Australians seem perpetually stuck in online conflict, the humble lamb cutlet appears to remind us we have more in common than we think – if only we'd get our head out of our phones and spend some time talking face-to-face over the grill.

Ample supply meets demand

The Summer Lamb ad came off the back of another incredible year for Australian lamb, with 488,566 tonnes of lamb meat produced in the year to September 2024 – not far behind the record set in 2023.

To keep lamb top of mind and drive purchase in store, the campaign connected consumers with a presence in major retail environments including

Coles, Woolworths, IGA, Costco, Drakes and butcher stores nationally.

Product-focused online promotion, digital screens, catalogue, digital assets and point of sale activity delivered meal inspiration ideas and drove in-store purchasing.

According to Nielsen results for the four weeks to 26 January, the overall value of lamb sales increased 2% compared to the same period in 2024. There was an 11.9% increase in sales volume by weight and a 14.8% increase in the spend per occasion over the same period.

Viral reach

Each year, the summer campaign aims to create a buzz around lamb, so shoppers are encouraged to make it their protein of choice whether they're dining out or entertaining at home across the season.

The full-length ad premiered on Sunday, 7 January during the national evening news on Seven and Nine. This was followed by a national rollout across free-to-air, catch-up and subscription TV, cinema, paid social, and retail out-of-home channels. There were 738 media stories over the duration of the campaign.

This year's ad went viral in a matter of days with more than 20 million views of the long-form ad (at time of printing) and around 800 comments on YouTube with 97.3% positive sentiment. This compares favourably with last year's record-breaking 'Generation gap' campaign, which attracted around 24 million views, and makes 'The comments section' our second most popular Summer Lamb campaign ever. ■

'Scotty from marketing' gives his stamp of approval



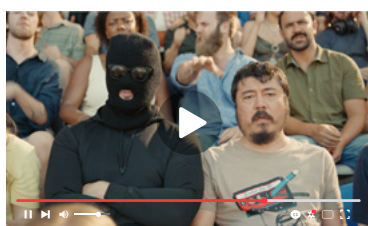
Even Australia's former Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, gave the campaign a thumbs up, going online to share 'The comments section' ad on his X account.

Spring Lamb

The Summer Lamb campaign followed the success of last year's Spring Lamb campaign – 'The ultimate social device'. The campaign aimed to boost lamb's popularity with younger Australians by showcasing the social tool that actually works: the humble lamb cutlet.

The campaign resulted in significant improvements amongst young transitionals (households under 35 with no children) with average buying occasions across this group lifting 8% and volume purchased rising 30% (in the twelve weeks to November 2024).

Scan or click the QR code to read more about the campaign:



Scan or click the QR code to watch the Summer Lamb ad:



Records and opportunities: red meat's global outlook revealed

MLA has released the global market snapshots for 2025, providing an updated overview of Australia's competitive advantages and growth opportunities in key markets.

Up-to-date insights

Global markets are always shifting, particularly in the current context of multiple regional conflicts, cost of living concerns and impacts of extreme weather.

Miho Kondo, MLA's Manager of Global Market Insights, highlighted the importance of the snapshots in delivering the latest market data and insights to Australia's red meat industry.

"It's vital for our industry to have easy access to up-to-date market and consumer insights on our key global markets, so we can remain agile and leverage growth opportunities as they arise," Miho said.

Market insights generated by MLA's Insights and International Markets teams play a key role in supporting efforts to grow demand and preference for Aussie red meat via in-depth understanding of our target consumers and market dynamics.

Record-breaking year

In 2024, Australian red meat volume totalling an all-time record of just over 2.2 million shipped weight tonnes, valued at a historic high total of just over A\$20.1 billion for the 12 months ending November, was exported to more than 100 destinations. This constituted an estimated 74% of Australia's total beef production and 78% of sheepmeat*.

Looking ahead to 2025, MLA's September 2024 industry projections anticipate Australia will export about 1% more beef compared to 2024 and about 13% more mutton, though some 6% less lamb, coming off a record-high year. ■

*According to MLA's September 2024 Sheep industry projections and September 2024 Cattle industry projections.

TOOLBOX

Global market snapshots:
mla.com.au/global-snapshots

Aussie Meat Trade Hub:
aussiemeattradehub.com.au

Global insight highlights

Large, established markets

Australia

Australians continue to be among the world's biggest per capita consumers of red meat, with the domestic market being our single largest market for Australian beef and sheepmeat.

Cost-of-living pressures have seen Australians shift their dining out habits by trading down to more affordable options, but still splurging at premium establishments on occasion. Retail shopping has seen a similar increase in demand for cheaper products such as mince, but also some growth in sales of a variety of 'affordable premium' options, particularly as an alternative to dining out.

There are opportunities to increase red meat consumption among Australia's 'culturally and linguistically diverse' communities, which make up a growing proportion of the population.

United States (US)

In 2024, the US imported an all-time record volume of red meat, including significantly greater volumes from Australia, due in large part to a domestic production shortage.

The past year consistently saw double digit growth for grassfed beef in retail from increased availability and presence of grassfed beef in store. US consumers see grassfed beef as a 'better for me' and more natural option compared to conventional beef.

The US was also the largest market for lamb, with more restaurants across different foodservice segments adopting lamb to cater for and target changing patron demographics.





Mainland China

In 2024, there was improved market access for Australia with temporary export suspensions lifted on six plants and two new plants approved for export.

In response to slower economic growth, consumers have become more cautious in their discretionary spending. Demand for Australian red meat softened, with 2024 volumes down on 2023 across all species except for offal.

However, long-term import demand drivers are strong. China's affluent consumer base is forecast to continue to expand, along with growing appreciation for premium red meat products – not just for special occasions but, increasingly, for every day at home.

Japan

Japan was the second largest beef export market for Australia in 2024. However, the proportion of lower value products increased, impacted by sticky inflation, a weakened Yen and slow real wage growth continuing to weigh on Japanese consumer spending.

Despite the challenges, Australia has benefited from softened competition from the US, increasing our market share in the imported beef market. A surge in inbound tourism to record levels supported foodservice operators, particularly casual and mid-range restaurants where Australian beef is commonly used.

Korea

Australian beef exports to the market were strong in 2024, triggering the beef safeguard volume earlier than usual. Despite the challenges, Korea was the third-largest beef export market for Australia in 2024, up 6% from the previous year.

Long known for their love of beef, more Koreans are also enjoying sheepmeat, particularly through foodservice. While Korea has been among Australia's fastest growing lamb markets in recent years, 2024 saw softer demand due to cost-of-living pressures.

Emerging markets

A significantly larger proportion of Australian red meat was shipped to destinations outside of the top three markets in 2024 (47% compared with 41% in 2019), driven by the young, expanding and increasingly affluent consumer base in regions such as Middle East/North Africa (MENA) and South-East Asia.

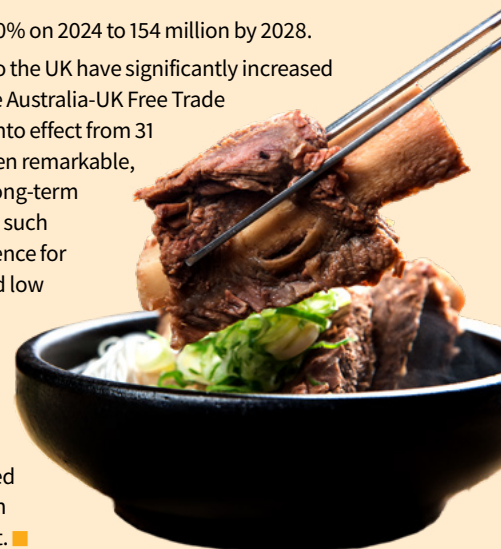
In MENA, more consumers are coming to appreciate the eating quality benefits of premium red meat, increasing demand for packaged meat products at modern retail for home consumption. On 6 November 2024, the Australian Government and the United Arab Emirates signed the bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), delivering another significant enhancement to Australia's market access in the region.

South-East Asia enjoyed all-time high volumes of Australian red meat in 2024. Increasing red meat consumption is being driven by growing interest in dining out at not only Western-style cuisine restaurants but also Chinese, Japanese and Korean cuisine establishments. Tourists are a significant contributor to red meat consumption, and arrivals are

forecast to increase around 30% on 2024 to 154 million by 2028.

Australia's red meat exports to the UK have significantly increased in just the short time since the Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement (A-UKFTA) came into effect from 31 May 2023. The growth has been remarkable, particularly considering the long-term dominance of other suppliers such as Ireland, a long-held preference for domestic product at retail and low familiarity with grainfed beef.

Trade agreement discussions between Australia and the EU will continue, with Australia determined to ensure any agreement reached will be a significant advance in access for Australian red meat. ■



MSA satisfaction, straight from the butchers' mouths

The latest Meat Standards Australia (MSA) survey of 352 independent Australian butchers and wholesalers has revealed how the program continues to deliver value.

MLA has run the survey for more than a decade to better understand how independent butchers and wholesalers perceive, utilise and sell MSA-graded meat, and to gauge their satisfaction levels with the product.

David Packer, MSA Program Manager, said the survey plays an important role in helping MLA understand the buying behaviour of butchers and wholesalers, and the role of the MSA program in underpinning brand quality and consistency.

This year, 302 independent butchers and 50 wholesalers were surveyed to assess MSA's impact and influence on perceptions of the Australian beef and lamb brands it underpins.

Surveyed butchers were then grouped into four discrete profiles based on the role MSA played in their business:

- **Advocates:** butchers who claim they sell MSA meat – more than 50% of their offer is MSA
- **Ambivalent:** butchers who claim they sell MSA meat – less than 50% of their offer is MSA
- **Disengaged:** butchers who think they don't sell MSA
- **Disconnected:** butchers who think they don't sell MSA meat and don't mention MSA brandsmeat – but do sell MSA brands.

Satisfaction

David said this year's survey showed nine out of 10 butchers surveyed are selling MSA brands.

"It's gratifying to see that 50% of the butchers surveyed now identify as 'Advocates', compared to 41% last year," he said.

The quality rating for MSA meat is significantly higher than non-MSA meat and, among those who claim to sell MSA meat, quality perception and understanding of MSA meat has consistently improved – something that's reflected in this year's satisfaction figures.

"In FY24, we saw 80% of independent butchers and 83% of wholesalers rate MSA's

quality as 'Excellent' or 'Very good', which was a significant increase on FY21 when that figure was 66% across both groups," David said.

"Those high MSA satisfaction rates have seen our Advocate butchers increase their offering. This year, MSA-graded meat accounted for 62% of grilling cuts stocked by Advocate butchers, compared to 48% in FY21."

Recognition of MSA quality also bodes well for wholesale markets, where product quality (as well as customer demand) is an increasingly important consideration in deciding which brands to stock.

What's working

The survey showed that 70% of butcher Advocates and 80% of wholesalers continued to draw value from the MLA program, particularly across four key areas:

- **Quality assurance:** "The quality is always going to be high."
- **Consistency:** "We know what we are going to get. It's guaranteed to be tender."
- **Marketing and promotion:** "Clear and concise selling points. We are doing the MLA masterclasses."
- **Traceability:** "The traceability manages the quality."

Price premium

MSA beef continues to command a premium, particularly at the wholesale level where the gap between MSA and non-MSA beef has slightly increased in the past 12 months.

For lamb at wholesale, there were mixed price differentials for MSA lamb in 2023–24 compared to non-MSA lamb. In the near future, it's anticipated that commercialisation of the MSA cuts-based grading model for sheepmeat will enable brand owners to realise increased premiums based on eating quality.

Underpinning brand selection

David said butchers are increasingly stocking MSA brands, with two-thirds of the top 15 brands stocked underpinned by MSA grading.

"When we ask them why they're buying brands underpinned by MSA, butchers and wholesalers tell us it's because they know they can rely on the quality and consistency," he said.

"However, even when they don't realise they're buying products underpinned by MSA, we know it accounts for the lion's share of the brands they stock and those decisions are largely based on the quality and consistency of those products – so we can see that MSA is continuing to do its job in the background."

Brand licensing

As at 30 June 2024, there were 1,146 end users (representing 3,450 outlets) licensed to promote MSA products at point of sale.

MSA initiatives with major foodservice supply companies have focused on alternative cut utilisation and education to assist with centre-of-plate costs, and successful growth of their MSA brands. There are now 211 MSA-licensed beef and sheepmeat brands in the market. ■



Lamb sosaties

Share
the
Lamb
100% AUSTRALIAN

These South African lamb skewers will get tastebuds tingling with their spicy marinade. Visit australianlamb.com.au for more delicious lamb recipes.

Serves 6 Prep time 25 minutes Cooking time 25 minutes

INGREDIENTS

650g lean thick lamb steaks,
fat trimmed, cut into 4cm pieces
½ cup apricot jam
⅓ cup white wine vinegar
2 tbsp curry powder

2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp finely chopped rosemary,
plus extra, to serve
1 tbsp vegetable oil

18 dried apricots, soaked in
boiling water for 15 minutes,
patted dry with paper towel
1 onion, cut into thin wedges,
halved

1 green capsicum,
cut into 4cm pieces

Rice of choice, baby spinach
leaves, lemon wedges, to serve

METHOD

1. Place jam, vinegar, curry powder, garlic, rosemary and ¼ cup water in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and simmer for about five minutes. Set aside to cool slightly.
2. Place lamb in a large glass dish, add the oil and the marinade. Season and toss to coat evenly. Set aside for 15 minutes to marinate.
3. Drain lamb from marinade, reserving for basting lamb during cooking. Thread lamb, apricots, onion and capsicum alternatively onto the skewers.
4. Heat a large char-grill pan or BBQ over medium-high heat. Cook skewers for 12–15 minutes, turning regularly and basting with marinade or until meat is cooked to your liking. Set aside on a plate loosely covered with foil for five minutes to rest.
5. Serve sosaties with rice, lemon wedges and extra rosemary.

TIPS

- You can dice the lamb steaks yourself or ask your butcher to dice the lamb for you to save time – just ask for a 4cm dice.
- You will need eight medium bamboo or metal skewers for this recipe – if using bamboo soak the skewers in cold water for 10 minutes to prevent burning.



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