



Information Exchange

The newsletter of the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network

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Farm day helps bridge city-country gap

AN ADVERTISEMENT in *The Herald Sun* newspaper has linked the Chisholm family from Eltham to the Robinson family near Clunes as part of National Farm Day Program.

Their first meeting last year was part of the pilot for the program, which aims to bridge the city-country divide.

The Eltham family repeated their visit to the Robinsons' farm this year on National Farm Day.

The Robinsons run Merinos, crops and farm forestry on their property at Mount Beckworth near Clunes. Stuart Robinson is group contact for the Maryborough Regional BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group.

Program origins

Cathy Robinson has been involved with Farm Day since its early stages, as a representative of the host farms, talking with sponsors and as a host representative in the 2006 Farm Day pilot run by Deb Bain.

"Our kids are at the same school as Deb Bain's kids and Deb ran something in the school newsletter about getting city people out onto farms when she was starting to get the Farm



Day concept organised," Cathy said.

"At the time there was a lot of negative material in the media about rural industries.

"Stuart and I often talked about what city people must be thinking – and that was before water and the drought were in the headlines."

The Robinsons gave their support to the concept and have opened their doors and offered their hospitality for the past two years.

The Chisholm and Robinson



The National Farm Day program allowed the Chisholm family from Eltham to get a better understanding of life by visiting the Robinson family's property near Clunes.

families were matched because their children are similar ages.

"They are a lovely family, who are very easy going and with great kids. Their kids hit it off with our kids like a house on fire," Cathy said.

"Stuart had sheep in the yards and put some in the shed to be shorn, but the kids were more interested in helping our kids build a cubby.

"After we had done a few things we had lunch and asked them about their perceptions of farming.

"It was an interesting exercise, because even though they ran a small business, they initially didn't see a family farm as a small business."

The concept proved a successful way of linking urban and rural people, according to Cathy.

"They realised we had a lot in common as people, families and small business operators," she said.

This year the two families climbed to the top of Mount Beckworth on National Farm Day.

Urban understanding

"The Farm Day experience has certainly made us more aware of rural issues," Kathy Chisholm said.

"In the past we'd see things about rural issues on television or read them in the paper, but it really didn't mean much.

"Once you know people who are involved in farming, you have a greater appreciation of how things affect rural people."

For more information, visit the website www.farmday.com.au or phone Deb Bain on 5340 2215 or mobile 0438 402 215, or e-mail deb@farmday.com.au

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Wooragee group builds on basics

THE WOORAGEE BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group is helping some north-east Victorian lamb producers combine their production and business skills.

The group joined BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB this year. It has 14 members, who plan to meet eight times a year to discuss topics such as pasture persistence, buying rams on Lambplan figures, lamb marketing, alternative forages and trees on farms.

Most of the group were involved in the LambCheque program before joining BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB.

The LambCheque group was discontinued after just two years, when the number of participants dropped and the course became unviable to continue.

The nine remaining members opted to form a BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group and canvassed for new members.

During LambCheque, the group learnt about pasture production, animal requirements, feed budgeting and grazing management.

Under BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB it has developed a year-long plan to build on its grazing knowledge and develop new skills in prime lamb production.

Of the 14 current members, 13 are women and most tend to be on small holdings that they want to run productively, according to group co-ordinator, Cheryl Graham.

“Joining BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB has let people consolidate what they learnt in LambCheque and given them the flexibility to deal with other issues,” she said.

“It’s given them a more in-depth, practical understanding of effective grazing management, pasture production, sheep management and nutrition, and lamb



Members of the Wooragee BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group (left to right): Owen Johnstone, Peter McGowan, Cathy McGowan, Jenny Lucas, Fran Robinson, Carol Togher.

Program develops leadership skills

BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group members Craig Oliver and Stuart Belcher are looking to the future after taking part in the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program.

Both received support from BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB to join 30 other rural industry representatives for the program that was recently run in Geelong.

The week-long, live-in course involved people from rural industries and agribusinesses around Australia.

The course heard from a range of speakers on topics such as leadership, negotiation, effective meetings, public speaking, managing conflict, communications and dealing with the media.

The speakers included ABC Television’s Africa correspondent, Sally Sara, environmentalist Dan Atkins talking on climate change and the National Farmers Federation’s chief executive officer, Ben Fargher.

Stuart Belcher is a woolgrower and an active member of the Soil Health BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group at Euroa.

Craig Oliver farms at Dunkeld and is the group contact for the Triple M BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group.



Craig Oliver and Stuart Belcher at the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Course.

Both men found the course gave them an opportunity to meet a range of people with different views and develop a number of skills.

“It was a well-structured course with great facilitators and guest speakers,” Stuart said.

“Presenters such as Mike Stephens and Neil Inall were outstanding and had extensive industry experience, covering everything from dealing with the media and public speaking to business negotiation skills.

“The course exposed me to a cross section of people representing a range of industries, from NAB finance to Tasmanian poppy production.

“It really put leadership in perspective, as an active approach to making change.

“We learnt a lot of skills and techniques during the course, such as public speaking, organisational skills and getting the most out of teamwork. I can certainly see these skills will be valuable in helping BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB groups work more effectively.”

Craig said the course was a unique opportunity for woolgrowers to access guest speakers and training in leadership and communication.

The course gave him a better understanding of different approaches to learning and leadership.

“As I become more involved in groups, the course provided me with improved skills and a better understanding of communication and negotiation,” he said.

“The course helped build on my skills to clearly articulate and negotiate issues and opportunities affecting the sheep and wool industries.

“It also helped clarify some of the business goals of our farming operation and has improved my ability to communicate with the various contractors we use throughout the year.”

marketing, so that they can maximise returns within their businesses.”

Group support

Carol Togher runs a small Suffolk flock on 49ha between North Wangaratta and Eldorado. She has found the group invaluable in helping her make farm management decisions, as well as providing support.

“We have no farming background and although we have off-farm income and only run a small farm, we still want the farm to be productive and profitable,” she said.

“Being part of the group has been fabulous as a source of information and as a way of developing skills.

“If you’re unsure of a decision, you can take it along to a group meeting and talk through the issues. That gives everyone more confidence.

“During the drought we were buying in feed like everyone else, so as a group we worked through the economics of different drought management options – which feed was the best value and the importance of managing the condition score in the sheep.

“It helped in our decision making at home, meant we had more confidence knowing that we were in control, and in the end our lamb sales covered our feed costs.”

Changes

Cheryl said group members have made significant changes to the way they operated their properties, including:

- using rotational grazing to increase pasture growth and utilisation;
- better ewe management, i.e. joining for a shorter time, weaning earlier and improved feeding before joining and lambing;
- improved parasite control using Wormtest, changing drenches to prevent drench resistance and putting drenched stock on clean paddocks;
- better vaccination programs; and
- timing lamb sales to achieve target weights for target markets.

This year’s program involves seven hands-on sessions, run on-farm and covering topics such as ram selection, trees for shelter and biodiversity, pasture and hay production, lamb marketing and value adding.

The group is open to new members and anyone interested should phone Cheryl Graham, the Wooragee BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB co-ordinator, on 0408 393 105.

Health a priority for farm families

MEMBERS of the Bairnsdale/Stratford BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group have made their health a priority by taking part in the three-year Sustainable Farm Families program.

The project is designed to help the group improve their family health, wellbeing and safety by getting a better understanding of their current health and how they can improve it.

The program, which is offered in Gippsland through the Bairnsdale Regional Health Service, recognises that a family’s health is central to the success of a farm business, said Bairnsdale/Stratford BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group co-ordinator, Don Moore.

“The program involves people taking part in three workshops spread over two years,” Don said.

“Our first workshop was in late-June and went for two days. It involved everyone being individually assessed through a range of health tests, such as body mass index, blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose, and included sessions on how to manage aspects of personal and family health.

“There were a number of specific workshops, including men’s and women’s issues, so that people could hear about aspects relating to their own health and wellbeing.

“At the end of the first day each person was given a personal assessment of their current health and what changes they could make, such as through diet and exercise, to improve their health and their farm business’ future.”

Bairnsdale Regional Health Services community/health promotion nurse, Chris Shoemaker said results from the Bairnsdale workshop found a number of the participants had underlying health issues of which they were unaware.

“Within the group, five people were found to have raised blood pressure, five had raised blood sugars and one had elevated blood cholesterol levels, all of which warranted follow-up with a GP to discuss recommended action,” Chris said.

“The concern with mildly elevated results such as these is that people are not aware of the changes in their body, including the damage caused as a consequence.”

A further two workshops, each a year apart,



Participants in the Sustainable Farm Families program learn to identify the additives in foods by studying their labels.

will get participants back together again to monitor what they have managed to achieve in terms of improving their health.

“Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is also organising additional workshops, six months apart, to cover topics of interest raised by the farmers in the workshop,” Chris said.

“One of the first of these will be on chemical residues, as this was an issue that a number of farmers wanted to know more about.”

Broad program

More than 400 farming families across Australia have taken part in the Sustainable Farm Families program, which was developed by Western District Health Services in Hamilton.

The program was developed to help farming families take a fresh approach to their health in an environment where most farmers associate ‘farm health and safety’ with injury prevention, audits and meeting legislative requirements.

Better health

Results from the 400 farmers and their families who took part in the program between 2004 and 2007 found that they had experienced a significant reduction in body mass index, blood cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose levels, and halved their number of medical referrals.

The success of the program has been recognised by the State Government, which recently announced \$2.9 million over two years to expand it and so help more farm families across Victoria.

For more information, visit the website at www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au or phone Annette Taylor on 5355 0531.

Your network in action

THE YEAR is looking a lot brighter than this time last year, although, apart from some areas in Gippsland, I suspect no one would complain if they had more rain.

The phone seminar, *Ewes and lambs – don't lose them*, with guest speaker David Rendell in July had 60 participants registered.

This type of result shows that this format is being accepted by members as a way of getting timely information at home.

If you have not been involved in a phone seminar, I urge you to try the next one.

The Regional Forum in



Jamie Ramage,
chairman,
BESTWOOL/
BESTLAMB

Hamilton with Lyn Sykes talking about succession was again stimulating.

Lyn is a master at challenging participants to be involved and to question their ideas.

Progress has been made with the BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Business Plan – Mike Stephens

& Associates has been chosen to develop the plan from several applications received.

The first phase presentation will be delivered at the next Advisory Committee meeting on August 21. This will give the committee the basis to proceed with a two-page proposal for the funding bodies.

I spent two days at Sheepvention in Hamilton, which was a great networking, experience talking with producers, co-ordinators, potential collaborators and funding bodies.

The BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB stand was situated in the Australian Wool Innovation/

Meat and Livestock Australia tent and there was a good flow of producers to talk to about events in their lives and issues that were affecting their enterprises.

Don't forget BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB also has a feature article each month in the Stock and Land newspaper that highlights our members. If your group, or an individual in your group, has a story to tell, please pass the details onto Annette Taylor. As the Chairman of BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB, I feel this is a great opportunity to show the productivity gains made by members and to share these with the wider community. ■

SMOKO ...

The 12 days of mustering

ON THE FIRST day of mustering, my true love said to me: With the kids home from school to help, he wouldn't need me.

On the 2nd day of mustering, the kids all laughed with glee: Because all the jobs around the house would now be up to me!

On the 3rd day of mustering my true love said to me: "Could you whip into town to pick up a tonne of lick blocks and some more vaccine? Then, when you get back, could you slip out on the bike and check the water, 'cos we're too busy!"

On the 4th day of mustering my true love said to me: "At about lunch time we're moving to the next paddock. Could you fill up the Toyota, hook up the horse float and bring it out. Oh and don't forget to bring the tool box and spare tyre, please!"

On the 5th day of mustering my true love called to me on the radio: "We've got some calves that need a ride. Would you bring the truck to the top paddock as fast as you can, but make sure the oil and water are okay."

On the 6th day of mustering my true love said to me: "We've got some poddy calves that need feeding. Would you get some milk from town and duck down to the yards to show the kids how to feed the calves, please, darling!"

On the 7th day of mustering my true love said to me: "The tank float has broken, would you dash into town and pick up another as

fast as you can. Oh, and we need some more poly joiners as well, but could you please bring the lunches to the yards before you go and this time, for goodness sake, DON'T FORGET THE THERMOS OF TEA!"

On the 8th day of mustering my true love said to me: "Could you slip into town and pick up the new jackaroo. The Primac bloke phoned and is coming today, and we can't keep 'im waiting, so don't stop to talk to anyone, just hurry, hurry, hurry!"

On the 9th day of mustering my true love radioed to me: "Just got the truck stuck in the creek. Would you get the front end loader out the back of the shed, find the chain and drive out here as fast as you can to pull us out please."

On the 10th day of mustering my true love snapped at me, while I stood by the truck handing tools up to him nervously.

On the 11th day of mustering my true love called to me: "It's stinking hot out here and all the dogs are nearly perishing, would you fill up the containers of water and bring some for us too. Oh and a packet of Panadol for my splitting headache, please."

On the 12th day of mustering my true love grinned at me: "Aren't you glad you didn't help with the mustering this year honey!"

I think it would have been easier to have been mustering ...



BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB is a co-operative program for wool and lamb producers seeking to boost their farm profit and productivity.

For information about the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network, phone (03) 5355 0531, e-mail bestwool@vff.org.au or visit www.bestwool.com