



Information Exchange

The newsletter of the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network

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Get on the Front Foot with forward planning

BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB MEMBERS in northern Victoria have been some of the first to take part in a new workshop designed to help people plan their farm business decisions through to the next five years.

The one-day Front Foot Farming workshop was developed by South Australian Ken Solly and is designed to help deal with strategic planning.

Ken is a Glenormiston graduate and has been involved in farm management and lecturing at TAFE, and is currently a farm consultant who specialises in business planning.

"We can't do anything about the climate or the world market, but we can always make decisions about how we manage the farm business," he said.

Workshop design

The workshop is designed to cater for people from six to eight farms and family members are encouraged to attend.

The workshop's morning session focuses on looking at the farm business' current situation and reviewing the decision making that took place in 2006.

"Last season people went through a range of decisions



Jamie Ramage, Ken Solly, Bill Hooke, Greg Smith, Jake Napier, Ross Twigg, Gordon Addlem from the Loddon Valley group who took part in the Front Foot Farming pilot.

such as to feed stock, sell stock and buy stock back in, or to change enterprises with a swing away from livestock and more emphasis on cropping," Ken said.

"Part of the workshop involves working through the strategic thinking behind those decisions and identifying where there were any gaps of knowledge.

"For example, people might have decided to set up a stock containment area but had problems with sheep nutrition.

"It's important to understand the complexity associated with some decisions and learn from what we've gone through in the past three years."

The afternoon session deals with planning ahead and the impacts of decisions on the business, the family, individuals and the community over the next three to five years.

"The workshop uses the 'Plan to Profit' spreadsheet that lets participants look at a farm business performance over a five-year period, and how it can be changed by a range of different management, climatic and market price scenarios," Ken said.

"The spreadsheet is interactive and lets people look at how their profit and cash position can change by altering enterprise mix, grain yields and prices, and livestock prices.

"The workshop is flexible so we can respond to the needs of the people in the room."

User impressions

Loddon Valley BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group member Jake Napier went through a pilot program that was used to develop the current course.

"It's important to look back on the past 12 months and the impact of the decisions we've made, especially when so many people are going through the same challenges again this season," he said.

"We all tend to get in a routine with our farm management decisions and do the same thing every year, so it's important to consider alternative scenarios and look beyond 12 months."

Participants in the workshop receive a manual and are made aware of further avenues to improve their knowledge in a particular area, such as accessing the \$5000 Victorian Government Professional Advice and Planning grant.

For more information about the workshops being run in 2008, phone Annette Taylor on 5355 0531.

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Pastures from Space™ – fine tuning technology for SA and western Victoria

TECHNOLOGY USING a satellite orbiting the earth to estimate pasture growth rates is being trialed in western Victoria and South Australia.

Pastures from Space™ is a commercially available service that uses a satellite-derived pasture 'greenness index', combined with climate and soil information, to estimate pasture growth rate (PGR) on regional, farm and paddock scales.

The technology was developed in Western Australia for annual pastures grown in winter rainfall areas, and it is now being used there commercially.

However, there are questions about how the technology will work in the eastern States, which have different soil types and pasture species, especially perennial pasture species, such as phalaris, fescue, perennial ryegrass and even lucerne. Some anecdotal information indicates these species will influence the accuracy of the predictions and adjustments will need to be made to the computer models that are behind the PGR predictions.

Australian Wool Innovation, Meat and Livestock Australia and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry are funding projects testing the accuracy of the satellite-derived data in SA and western Victoria.

Part of the research also involves training a handful of farmers in the use of the software (Pasture Watch™) and PGR data that comes with the commercial service for farm management purposes.

Dr Nick Edwards from the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) said the technology had the potential to help in:

- grazing management and feed budgeting decisions;
- strategic fertiliser applications;
- whole-farm planning (including strategic livestock purchase and sale decisions);
- benchmarking current against previous performance; and
- identifying unproductive and/or unresponsive paddocks or areas of paddocks (i.e. pasture yield mapping).

Liz Abraham from SARDI's Struan Research

Centre is monitoring 18 perennial and 15 annual pasture paddocks on 13 properties between Casterton in Western Victoria and Karoonda in the SA Murray Mallee.

The pastures are assessed and monitored every 28 days to evaluate the accuracy of the predictions from Pastures from Space™ with the help of researchers in CSIRO Livestock Industries, the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia and Landgate Western Australia.

At the same time, a SheepPlus and an MLA-funded PIRD group of up to 12 farm businesses is meeting regularly to assess the benefits of obtaining regular pasture growth information for each of their paddocks and how best to use the data for their own farm management and profitability.

A free region-by-region snapshot of PGR is available at the Pastures from Space website at www.pasturesfromspace.csiro.au.

For more information or to become involved in the project, phone Dr Nick Edwards or Liz Abraham at Struan Research Centre on (08) 8762 9100.

Code of practice for lamb finishing

SHEEP PRODUCERS have the chance to get involved in the development of a Code of Practice for the intensive lamb finishing industry.

Producers can attend information and feedback meetings, as well as nominate to trial the implementation of the code and trial the associated audit process.

The development of the code is being managed by Productive Nutrition Pty Ltd, and involves the Sheep Meat Council of Australia, Meat & Livestock Australia, Australian Lamb Finishers, lamb producers and other key stakeholders.

The Productive Nutrition project team includes South Australian ruminant nutritionist San Jolly, Victorian agricultural consultant Bruce Knee, Queensland extension officer Tony Hamilton, NSW extension officer Geoff Duddy and West Australian supply chain manager Rob Davidson.

A series of produce meetings are planned for February 2008 at Hamilton, Nhill, Bendigo, Wangaratta and Sale and in



BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB members can help develop a Code of Practice for lamb finishing.

other national centres to provide and gather information and feedback to develop the Code of Practices

Key topics to be covered in the code include:

- environment and design;

- approval and planning processes;
- feedlot management;
- animal welfare;
- animal health;
- nutrition; and
- supply chain management.

The information and feedback meetings will discuss areas of concern, current best practice and how a code of practice can give the best results for everyone involved in lamb production.

A series of follow-up meetings is planned to report back on the key points to come out of the public meetings.

These meetings will also give producers the chance to have a final comment on the draft code of practice and discuss the audit process against the code's key areas.

Producers will then be invited to trial the audit process and give the project team a practical insight to ensure the code is practical and manageable.

For more information on the workshops and to register interest in the project, call 1800 177 735.

Free lunch and strip show

EVERYTHING YOU ever wanted to know about grazing cereals will be laid bare in a series of travelling road shows set for February and March next year.

The Grain & Graze project – funded by Australian Wool Innovation, Meat & Livestock Australia, Grains Research & Development Corporation, and Land and Water Australia – has been looking at the pros and cons of grazing cereals.

Cereals have the capacity to grow large quantities of high-quality feed over winter, which is often a time when livestock producers have the biggest feed shortage on their pastures.

Farm-scale trials across Australia have given woolgrowers and prime lamb producers the opportunity to tap into a ‘free lunch’ by grazing cereals.

The trials have looked at a range of cereals and have involved rotational grazing, strip grazing and ‘just putting the stock in’.

Crops on flat paddock and beds have been grazed with cattle, young sheep, pregnant ewes and lambing ewes.

The issues covered will include the time



Grazing cereals over winter can be a source of free feed for livestock.

of grazing, grazing management, impact on subsequent hay, silage and grain yields, and sheep management.

The road shows feature presentations by farmers who will talk about their experiences and what it has meant in terms of farm productivity. There will also be presentations by researchers and agronomists.

The session topics will cover:

- the benefits and costs of grazing cereals on a farm scale;
- the effect of grazing on the cereals and

the rest of the farm in terms of pasture production;

- the what and how of grazing cereals – understanding the agronomy; and
- who can help and where to get more information.

While some of the workshops are still being planned, a number of dates are already locked in they are listed in the table below.

For more information contact Gillian Stewart on phone (02) 6263 6042, mobile 0428 119 815 or e-mail gillian.stewart@lwa.gov.au.

Date	Place	Time	Contact
February 21-22	Mallee Sustainable Farming Information Forum, Mildura		Zubair Shahzad, (03) 5021 9103
March 6	Loxton – on a farm to be announced	9am	Zubair Shahzad, (03) 5021 9103
March 6	Lameroo – on a farm to be announced	2pm	Zubair Shahzad, (03) 5021 9103
March 12	Inverleigh Hall, Inverleigh	9.30am	Karen Haigh, (03) 5229 0566
March 13	Royal Mail Hotel, Dunkeld		Una Allender, (03) 5350 4244
March 14	Naracoorte Town Hall		Ken Solly, 0427 620 895

AT A GLANCE

Bye bye diazinon

As of May this year, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority discontinued the use of chemicals containing diazinon to control lice in sheep using plunge and shower dipping, or jetting.

Industry surveys show that around 80% of the flocks in Australia are treated for lice, yet only 20% are infested. That means large numbers of woolgrowers are overusing chemicals that in many cases are totally unnecessary and add to their cost of production.

The wool industry has produced a fact sheet outlining alternative treatment options for growers who find lice in their flocks.

The fact sheet outlines the best approach for

dealing with a lice infestation, treatment options before and after shearing and after six weeks off shears. It also includes a quick reference guide of lousicides in the Australian market.

A copy of the fact sheet is available by calling 1800 070 099.

The Australian Merino

Merino breeder, woolgrower and author Charles Massey, of Severn Park, in the Monaro has just released an updated version of his classic book, *The Australian Merino*.

The book covers the evolution, history and present state of the Merino sheep, as well as a discussion on the current state of the industry and its future.

Mr Massey currently runs 7000 Merinos and has published numerous articles on the wool industry. He has also served on the Boards of the International Wool Secretariat, and the Australian Wool Research and Promotion Organisation.

The 1217-page hardback book is available from Australian Wool Innovation for \$140 (including postage), 37% off the recommended retail price.

To order, phone 1800 070 099

Newsletter contributions

We are keen to hear suggestions for this newsletter and are happy to take contributions. Phone Annette Taylor on 5355 0531.

Our best foot forward on drought relief

THE PAST month has seen some great rain falling across the State, although not enough for the northern plains. However, southern producers look to be set for a super season.

Let's hope we have seen an end to the huge numbers of stock being forced onto the market at depressed prices and some flock rebuilding occurring.

A drought response is necessary to help BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB members through yet another failed season and low stock prices.

A working party has finalised the Front Foot Farming workshop that is being rolled out to all BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB members.



Jamie Ramage,
chairman,
BESTWOOL/
BESTLAMB

The need to plan three to five years ahead is essential to evaluate the long-term impact of individual and combined decisions.

The workshop will give you the tools to look at a range of scenarios by changing different enterprises, to ascertain a farm's future viability and provide confidence to producers.

Several workshops have

already been run in the north east of the state.

As soon as your group has finished the summer harvest contact your co-ordinator or group contact so that you don't miss this opportunity to be involved.

DPI initiative

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is also working on a 'Restructure Package' for BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB.

This package involves DPI playing a similar role as it does now.

As an observer at development meetings on three separate occasions, I was impressed that:

1. There is genuine support inside DPI for BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB continuing past June next year.
2. The discussions fitted neatly with the feedback received from the co-ordinator and group contact conference at Trawool.
3. There seems to be quite a range of potential funding opportunities.
4. The project logic used allowed me to see clearly how it could all work.

"The magic formula that successful businesses have discovered is to treat customers like guests and employees like people"

– Thomas J Peters.

Spot the hazard, assess the risk and always wear your jocks!

The sun was hot already – it was only 8 o'clock
The cocky took off in his ute, to go and check his stock.
He drove around the paddocks checking wethers, ewes and lambs,
The float valves in the water troughs, the windmills on the dams.

He stopped and turned a windmill on to fill a water tank
And saw a ewe down in the dam, a few yards from the bank.
"Typical bloody sheep," he thought, "they've got no commonsense,
"They won't go through a gateway but they'll jump a bloody fence."

The ewe was stuck down in the mud, he knew without a doubt
She'd stay there 'til she carked it if he didn't get her out.
But when he reached the water's edge, the startled ewe broke free
And in her haste to get away, began a swimming spree.

He reckoned once her fleece was wet, the weight would drag her down
If he didn't rescue her, the stupid sod would drown.
Her style was unimpressive, her survival chances slim
He saw no other option, he would have to take a swim.

He peeled his shirt and singlet off, his trousers, boots and socks
And as he couldn't stand wet clothes, he also shed his jocks.
He jumped into the water and away that cocky swam
He caught up with her, somewhere near the middle of the dam

The ewe was quite evasive, she kept giving him the slip
He tried to grab her sodden fleece but couldn't get a grip.
At last he got her to the bank and stopped to catch his breath
She showed him little gratitude for saving her from death.

She took off like a Bondi tram around the other side
He swore next time he caught that ewe he'd hang her bloody hide.
Then round and round the dam they ran, although he felt quite puffed
He still thought he could run her down, she must be nearly stuffed.

The local stock rep came along, to pay a call that day.
He knew this bloke was on his own, his wife had gone away
He didn't really think he'd get fresh scones for morning tea
But nor was he prepared for what he was about to see.

He rubbed his eyes in disbelief at what came into view
For running down the catchment came this frantic-looking ewe.
And on her heels in hot pursuit and wearing not a stitch
The farmer yelling wildly "Come back here, you lousy bitch!"

The stock rep didn't hang around, he took off in his car
The cocky's reputation has been damaged near and far
So bear in mind the Work Safe rule when next you check your flocks
Spot the hazard, assess the risk, and always wear your jocks!



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