



Information Exchange

The newsletter of the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network

No. 45 – September 2008

Program guides future leaders

NORM TOZER and Winston Sim are looking to the future with a new perspective after taking part in the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program.

Both Norm and Winston received support from BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB to take part in the program that was recently run in Geelong.

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

Topics

The course featured a range of speakers who covered topics such as leadership, team processes, submission writing, negotiation, effective meetings, public speaking, managing conflict, communications and dealing with the media.

The dinner speakers included the 2007 Rural Woman of the Year and National Farm Day co-ordinator Deb Bain, and Queensland eco-tourism operator and motivational speaker Bram Collins.

The final day of the course involved participants having to think on their feet and draw on their training and skills as they



Norm Tozer, BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Advisory Committee member Craig Oliver and Winston Sim at the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program dinner.

role played in a re-creation of an actual agribusiness scenario.

Norm Tozer is an agricultural consultant and group co-ordinator of the central Victorian Soil Health BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group.

Winston Sim returned to agriculture after 10 years in the hospitality industry and is now involved in a partnership with three couples running more than 10,000 sheep and cropping in a business called Fiery Creek Farms.

Winston is an associate member of BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB and said the Marcus Oldham

Leadership program was the best course he had ever done.

Lessons learnt

"It was extremely challenging and I am very grateful for the opportunity to have taken part," he said.

"There wasn't a segment that wasn't worthwhile, the speakers were extremely good and the other participants were young and enthusiastic.

"I found the generational issues very interesting and got a lot out of the public speaking, which I initially found a big challenge.

"I also learnt a lot about dealing with the media, negotiation, and running and chairing meetings."

Norm Tozer said the course content was stimulating, and the speakers were outstanding and had extensive industry experience.

"The days started at 7.30am and went through to 10pm at night, so everyone was constantly challenged and on a steep learning curve for the whole week," he said.

"Everything was aimed at increasing people's confidence, skills and ability to think on their feet under pressure."

"The other participants in the course were also amazing. They came from all over Australia were involved in agribusiness, rural finance, poppy production, cropping grazing, horticulture and bees.

"The calibre of the participants in their 20s was fantastic."

Next steps

Norm said he planned to use skills learnt from the course in developing people within the Soil Health Group, while also helping the group develop as a whole. ■

BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB IS SPONSORED BY:



Department of
Primary Industries



Glenelg takes the tour of Frances

OLIVE GROVES, dairy cows, irrigated vegetables and organic crops were some of the highlights of a recent tour of Frances, South Australia, by members of the Glenelg BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group.

The two-day trip only took members to an area just up the road, but it gave them an insight into a diverse range of farm businesses and the people who ran them.

Group co-ordinator Tim Leeming said the tour gave members a chance to 'sticky beak' at innovative properties and encouraged them to think outside 'the square'.

"Our limiting factor is water, whereas the farms in Frances have underground water, which opens up a range of possibilities," Tim said.

Attitude

"The exciting thing about the people farming in the Frances area is that they have a pioneering, outgoing attitude and are prepared to give things a go.

"It was a real eye opener for those who went on the trip because the farming was so different, but the area was only 45 minutes up the road from where our members farm.

"We visited farms that were using water to diversify their enterprises, and at the same time were adopting technology and embracing marketing."

Properties visited on the tour included;

- a broadacre farm using a centre pivot to grow broccoli;



Glenelg BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB member Mark Jarvis.

- a state-of-the-art rotary dairy run by farmers from New Zealand who use benchmarking extensively and maximise returns from pasture;
- an olive grove using new technology for irrigation and harvesting; and
- an organic broadacre cropping and livestock property using niche marketing to maximise returns; optimising economies of scale and adopting strategies to minimise price risk.

Group member Mark Jarvis crops and runs a self-replacing Merino flock with old ewes

joined to terminal sires at Vasey, between Balmoral and Cavendish.

He was impressed with the approach taken by the people they visited on the tour.

Change

"The variety of businesses we visited was amazing, especially given that this area had traditionally been used to grow irrigated seed crops, such as clover and lucerne," Mark said.

"The economics of these traditional enterprises has declined and people have dealt with the change by looking for alternative enterprises and changing the way they run their businesses.

"We met people who had a positive attitude, were looking for opportunities and were prepared to have a go."

On one property the group visited, the owner was looking to increase the value of the crop grown under a centre pivot to offset the rising cost of the diesel needed to operate the pivot.

"After talking to people in the vegetable industry they opted for broadacre irrigated broccoli," Mark said.

"Another property we visited had identified a niche market for organic lentils in health food shops that sold at a substantial premium over conventionally grown lentils.

"They talked through how they catered for the specific needs of the market as a way of adding value to the business." ■

AT A GLANCE

Electronic tag trial

ON-FARM trials at Casterton, Ballarat, Euroa, Swan Hill and Benalla are exploring the potential benefits of using electronic ear tags on sheep. Electronic ear tags are compulsory in the beef industry, but are optional for sheep under the National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS).

The three-year commercial trials are being run by Mike Stephens & Associates (MSA) and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries to look at the practicalities and economics of integrating electronic tag technology into farm management.

The trials are on a number of commercial properties involved in prime lamb production, self-replacing Merinos, Merinos joined to terminal sires and a lamb feedlot.

The tags will be used to record animal performance in shearing sheds and sheep yards, and farmers in the trials are being trained in how to use the equipment and information.

It is hoped the electronic tags will help producers identify superior and valuable animals.

The first results of the trials are expected at the end of the year and a series of field days are planned in coming months.

For more information, phone Jim Shovelton on 0407 953 445.

Equipment grants

SHEEP and goat producers who have bought 500 electronic tags or more can apply for grants up to \$2500 a property.

The grants are for up to 50% of the purchase price for the equipment needed to integrate

the electronic tags into farm management, such as handheld or panel readers, automatic drafting, weighing and computer software.

The grant may also be used for technical support in setting up equipment and systems, but is not available to buy tags.

The funding is limited and will be allocated in order of applications received.

Electronic tags cost \$1.35 each and need to be ordered from the Department of Primary Industries website at www.dpi.vic.gov.au.

For more information, phone the Department's helpline on 1800 678 779.

Newsletter contributions

WE are keen to hear suggestions for this newsletter and are happy to take contributions.

Phone Jane Court on 5735 4351.

Soil carbon and greenhouse gases

WOOLGROWERS AND prime lamb producers – along with all agricultural enterprises – are set to come under increasing scrutiny about their impact on global warming.

While the advantages of storing, or 'sequestering', carbon by planting trees has been widely promoted, researchers are working to establish just what impact other aspects of farm production have on greenhouse gas emissions.

Carbon storage and releasing

Carbon emissions from cattle and sheep in the form of methane are relatively easy to measure, but measuring the soil's ability to release and store carbon is more complex.

Carbon accumulates in the soil through the build up of humus – stable plant matter left over after decomposition.

Only 5-10% of plant material added to the soil becomes humus. The other 90-95% breaks down and the carbon it contains can be released back into the atmosphere.

A recent research project examined the effects of pasture management on the amount of carbon locked in soils under pasture.

Led by John Graham, the project measured soil carbon and the carbon sequestration of the fertiliser and stocking rate treatments at the Long Term (25 years) Phosphate Experiment (LTPE) in Hamilton.

"The total amount of carbon stored in soil is relatively large compared with the carbon pool in the atmosphere," John said. "For the soils on the LTPE every 0.1% change in the organic carbon content in the top 100mm of soil equates to a change of approximately one tonne of carbon per hectare.

"Small changes in the size of the soil carbon pool can have a considerable effect on atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. Soil carbon levels are also important for soil quality."

The project was funded by Meat and Livestock Australia, the Victorian Department of Primary Industries' Wool and Meat Strategy, and the CRC for Greenhouse Accounting.

Affects on soil carbon

The researchers compared a range of superphosphate application rates and sheep stocking rates to see what impact these factors had on soil carbon levels.

"While pasture production, stocking rate and wool production all increased significantly with increased phosphorus (P) application, the soil carbon storage was not significantly affected by either the fertiliser or stocking rate, even after 25 years of treatment," John said.



John Graham

"But we did find that increasing rates of P application produced a trend of slowly increasing carbon sequestration that would only be detectable by soil analysis if the higher application rates were continued for periods in excess of 30 years.

THE FACTS OF THE MATTER

The emission of greenhouse gases and the storage of carbon will become increasing issues for agriculture. Land under pastures has the capacity to store carbon in soil.

Research by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries has shown that increasing soil carbon levels through fertiliser and grazing management is extremely slow.

The best option is to manage pastures to minimise the loss of the carbon stored in the soil by maintaining pasture cover and good environmental management on-farm.

"But this long timeframe makes it difficult for farmers to directly to influence soil carbon levels through fertiliser use."

Pasture management

John said the biggest area where producers could influence soil carbon levels was by managing their pastures to avoid a reduction in soil carbon.

"Low pasture production, poor pasture cover and soil disturbance have been shown to result in an overall loss of soil carbon to the atmosphere," he said.

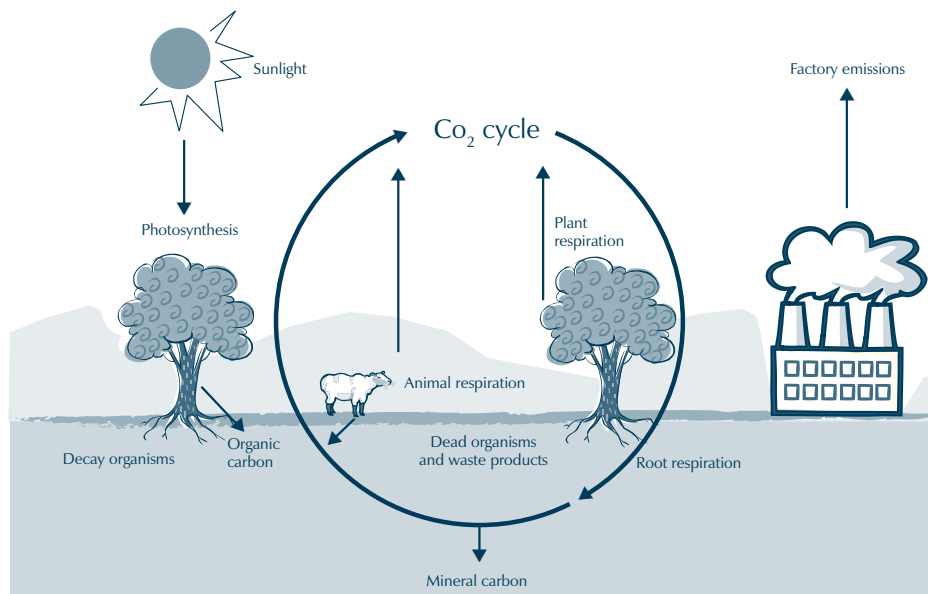
"The key to maintaining soil carbon is to have a good environmental approach to pasture management by not overgrazing and using stock containment areas in dry seasons to maintain soil cover.

"Producers should be confident that well-managed pastures – given appropriate P applications and grazing – are not likely to be detrimental to soil carbon and in the long term will provide direct benefits in terms of soil structure and fertility, water retention, reduced erosion, and improved sustainability of the farming enterprise."

There are two web sites that people can use to estimate their farm's emissions and carbon sequestration potential. These are:

- www.greenhouse.unimelb.edu.au/gia.htm – greenhouse calculators for dairy, beef sheep and grains; and
- www.forest.nsw.gov.au/env_services/ess/default.asp – sequestration potential.

For more information, contact John Graham on phone 5573 0900 or e-mail John.Graham@dpi.vic.gov.au.



The carbon cycle.

The power of persistence

THAT I am writing a Chair's Report is a testament to the culture of persistence of BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB, particularly the group co-ordinators, Department of Primary Industries staff and our Advisory Committee.

Nobody in agriculture needs to be told that persistence is an important trait. However, I recently read Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* and thought I would share an inspirational example of persistence.

Mohammed was a prophet, but he never performed a miracle.

He was not a mystic; he had no formal schooling; he did not begin his mission until he was 40.

When he announced he was the Messenger of God, bringing word of the true religion, he was ridiculed and labelled a lunatic.

Children tripped him and women threw filth at him. He was banished from his home,



Jamie Ramage,
chairman,
BESTWOOL/
BESTLAMB

Mecca, and his followers were stripped of their goods and sent into the desert after him.

After preaching for 10 years he had nothing to show for it but banishment, poverty and ridicule. Yet before another 10 years had passed he was dictator of all Arabia, ruler of Mecca and head of a new world religion that was to sweep to the Danube and the Pyrenees before exhausting the impetus he gave it.

That impetus was three-fold:

- the power of words;
- the efficacy of prayer; and
- man's kinship with God.

EverGraze updates

A SERIES of open days, farm walks and information sessions showcasing exotic and native perennial pastures and their potential to improve profitability and the environment are on in October and November as part of the EverGraze program.

Proof Sites in three states are testing new systems, measuring soil, water, pasture and livestock inputs and outputs, and farm profits. Proof Site open days are planned for:

- Albury Wodonga, November 25 [phone Meredith Mitchell on (02) 6030 4579].
- Hamilton, November 12

[phone Ralph Behrendt on (03) 5573 0979].

The EverGraze Roadshow will feature pasture cropping using lucerne and farm visits to district properties using the EverGraze approach. It will visit:

- Mortlake, October 2 [phone Anita Morant on 0427 329 541 for catering].
- Euroa, October 16 [phone Alison Desmond on 0409 424 274 for catering].
- Yarram, October 22.
- Boolara, October 23

More details are listed on the EverGraze website at www.evergraze.com.au

We face extraordinary challenges and opportunities as we enter the next phase of BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB, but

with persistence and belief later-day sheep herders can be successful in community and business pursuits. ■

SMOKO

Things you won't learn in school

BILL GATES recently gave a speech at a high school where he talked about how feel-good, politically correct teachers had created a generation of kids with no concept of reality and that this had set them up for failure in the real world. He said there were 11 things the students would not learn in school:

1. Life is not fair – get used to it!
2. The world does not care about your self-esteem. It expects you to accomplish something *before* you feel good about yourself.
3. You will NOT make \$60,000 a year out of high school. You will not be a vice-president with a car phone until you earn both.
4. If you think your teacher is tough, wait until you get a boss.
5. Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger flipping, they called it *opportunity*.
6. If you mess up, it is not your parents' fault, so do not whine about your mistakes, learn from them.

7. Before you were born, your parents were not as boring as they are now. They got that way from paying your bills, cleaning your clothes and listening to you talk about how cool you think you are, so before you save the rainforest from the parasites of your parents' generation, try delousing the closet in your room.
8. Your school may have done away with winners and losers, but life *has not*. Some schools have abolished failing grades and will give you as *many times* as you want to get the right answer; this does not bear the slightest resemblance to *anything* in real life.
9. Life is not divided into semesters. You do not get summers off and few employers are interested in helping you *find yourself*. Do that on your own time.
10. Television is *not* real life. In real life people actually have to leave the coffee shop and go to jobs.
11. Be nice to nerds. Chances are you will end up working for one.



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