



Information Exchange

The newsletter of the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network

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Animal welfare monitoring here to stay

DON'T EXPECT animal welfare campaigners to stop monitoring the sheep industry even if a magic solution to mulesing and breech strike prevention suddenly appears over night.

The attention paid to livestock industries by animal welfare groups is here to stay, according to livestock veterinarian and University of Melbourne lecturer Dr Andrew Fisher.

Speaking at the recent BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB industry update in Bendigo, Andrew said livestock producers should expect greater scrutiny by animal welfare groups of a number of routine farming practices such as castration and tail docking.

Reasons for interest

Increasing urbanisation and improvements in wealth and the standard of living were behind the growing interest in animal welfare on farm, he said.

"People in our society have greater food security and fewer challenges to their daily personal needs today than ever before. As a result, people are looking beyond their personal issues at other areas of 'moral concern'," he said.



Dr Andrew Fisher

"Animal welfare doesn't rank as highly as health, education, the economy, and law and order, but it is still on the 'radar' in western countries, and it doesn't take much for a particular animal welfare issue or controversy to gain strong traction."

Andrew said farming industries needed to anticipate potential animal welfare issues related to livestock production and put strategies in place to deal with criticism and demonstrate their responsible animal management.

Target categories

Farming practices likely to attract the attention of animal welfare campaigners could be divided into four broad categories:

- confinement of animals;
- surgical husbandry practices;
- long distance transport; and
- disease or problems in the production environment.

"Every livestock industry needs to look at which of their practices fall into these categories and to anticipate what needs to be done to address any possible animal welfare questions," he said.

"It's important to be proactive, by having data about the welfare of animals, the benefits of the practice, evaluation of alternative practices and planned responses to any welfare-related questions that might come from interest groups or your customers."

Andrew said current farming practices were often the best approach for the best financial return with acceptable animal welfare. Changes to current practices often had financial implications for producers.

"Australia was very vulnerable

to animal welfare criticism of mulesing because few countries have a specialist wool industry dependent on exports and no other countries openly practise mulesing," he said.

"Producers who've stopped mulesing have incurred the additional costs of extra crutching and chemical treatments. Initially there were no clear marketing mechanisms in place for non-mulesed wool, but this has changed as the industry moves towards changing the practice."

New welfare strategy

Andrew said the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry had developed the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) to ensure a more consistent approach, based on scientific evidence, for the treatment all animals.

The AAWS will result in standards and guidelines that will replace the current Model Codes of Practice that apply to Australian livestock.

The guidelines will be available for public comment in early 2010. ■

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Persistent pastures a top priority

PERSISTENT PRODUCTIVE pastures that can cope with dry conditions are on the wish list of most people with sheep, but are the focus of the Euroa Grazing Group.

The BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB group took a tour of western Victoria recently to see the latest in plant breeding and innovative grazing techniques that members could use back home.

Farm businesses are members of the group and 28 members took part in a tour that encompassed research trials and a number of innovative farmers.

The trip was part of a Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Resilient Pastures Project that started in November as a drought initiative.

The project funded 23 bus trips and these have included six BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB groups according to Seymour-based DPI pasture agronomist Kate Sargeant.

“Members of the Euroa group are looking for more persistent perennial pastures because they’re finding the pastures they’ve had are dropping out of the system, leading to a heavier reliance on cropping” she said.

“Phalaris has been the backbone of people’s pastures around Euroa, but we thought we would have a look at what innovative farmers were doing outside the district and what research trials were developing for the future.”

The two-day trip took in three farms involved in wool and prime lamb production, as well as the EverGraze research site in Hamilton and the Future Farm Industries CRC research site in Bealiba.

Millbanks

The first farm visit on the itinerary was to Ben Greene at ‘Millbanks’, Elmhurst, which featured dual-purpose cropping, lucerne, phalaris and native pastures.

The property ran bull beef, prime lamb and Merinos and used rotational grazing on hill country in conjunction with stock containment areas to protect ground cover over summer and autumn.

The farm management included a documented plan that set out a clear decision chart for three possible seasonal scenarios with trigger points for adopting each management option.

The key to acting on the trigger points was the stocking rate flexibility created by the bull beef trading enterprise.



Geoff Penny at the Bealiba research site looking at Bitumenaria, a new plant species the group was interested in for its persistence and because it produces similar quality feed to lucerne.

Quamby

The group then visited Charles de Fegley at ‘Quamby’, Ararat. He was grazing perennial pastures and had established a lamb finishing system that used electronic NLIS ear tags to draft and weigh sheep.

Mr de Fegley also had a documented set of dates that he used to monitor the season and make management decisions.

Jigsaw Farms

The third farm visit was to Mark Wooten at Jigsaw Farms, where the findings of the EverGraze project were being implemented across the property with the use of perennial and summer active pastures and gibberlic acid to manipulate pasture production over winter. He has established phalaris, winter active tall fescue and lucerne in place of the less-persistent perennial ryegrass.

Mark runs 30,000 sheep, has established 1000ha of tree plantations and shelter belts for biodiversity and timber production, and last year sold 86 bales of carbon neutral wool through The Merino Company.

Jane Davey is a member of the Euroa Grazing Group and runs 1100 Merino ewes joined to Dorset and Merinos sires.

“Persistence of pastures beyond three years has been a real issue for us in recent seasons where we’ve had low rainfall,” she said.

“We used to have phalaris everywhere, but now we never have dry standing feed

– we’re looking for management approaches that maximise ground cover and pasture species that can perform in our conditions and are palatable to stock.

“I was really impressed with the written plans at a number of the farms we visited, as they helped people make management decisions at the right time.

“The farmers we visited talked us through what they did, warts and all, and seeing what they’ve achieved has certainly given me the confidence to have a go at using some of their techniques at home.”

Another group member, Geoff Penny from Terip Terip, runs a self-replacing Merino flock with cull ewes joined for prime lamb production and is using pastures including chicory, lucerne and tall fescue to provide feed over summer.

“I was really impressed with Ben Greene’s use of rotational grazing and stock containment areas to manage pasture cover on hills,” Geoff said.

“His topography was similar to ours and his approach is one way of improving pasture persistence and avoiding overgrazing on both improved and native pastures.

“The discussion about carbon neutral wool at Jigsaw Farms was interesting because there’s the opportunity to link tree planting with a premium for wool, although it doesn’t apply to existing stands of native vegetation.”

Research trials

The group also incorporated visits to research sites at Bealiba run by the Future Farm Industries CRC and the EverGraze Proof Site at the Hamilton research station.

Both sites featured new and existing perennial pasture species that were being assessed for their production, persistence and ability to respond to rainfall at different times of the year.

“Members of the Euroa Grazing Group are keen to try new species to get a shoulder of extra production on either end of the season,” Kate Sargeant said.

“The group is establishing its own perennial pasture trial with support from DPI and MLA, and have brought back ideas that they could test in the district.”

The group’s trial is located on the farms of two group members in Longwood and Euroa and is looking at the performance of Uplands cocksfoot, Yarck Cocksfoot, Landmaster phalaris, Flecher tall fescue and Excelsa brome. ■

Girl power gets going in Euroa

A BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB group catering especially for women is proving popular in central Victoria.

The Euroa Women's Farming Group started at the end of 2008, due to the initiative of co-ordinator Cheryl Graham who drew members together after advertising in local papers and asking women to contact a friend or neighbour.

"I have been facilitating the Wooragee BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB group near Beechworth for the past five years. That group consists mainly of women and it works well so I thought I would try the concept in another location," Cheryl said.

"There are many women who are actively involved in the farm business but are at a different learning stage in certain areas than most men. They often fear they can't contribute to a group discussion or will slow a group down. They need to ask questions on their own terms. That's why this women's group is so successful."

The 14 group members come from an area stretching from the Strathbogie Ranges to Violet Town and Glenrowan. Some are from commercial properties and others are semi-retired or in the process of establishing lifestyle farm operations.

Topics of interest

The group has had five meetings.

The last two sessions dealt with soils, fertility, interpreting soil test results and working out fertiliser requirements based on stocking rate and how much the members wanted to lift the fertility of their soils.



From Left: Chrys Antonis, Diane Boede, Pauline and Brent (behind) Bailey, Cheryl Graham (group co-ordinator), Beat Van der Schoor, Caroline Harlow, Helen Peters at Chrys' property at the foothills of the Strathbogie ranges.

Other topics the group wants to cover are animal nutrition, animal health, establishing new pastures and grazing management.

Personal experiences

Group member Helen Peters, who has a small farm in the Strathbogie Ranges with her partner, has found real benefits in it being for women only.

"We've done a whole farm plan and are in the process of renovating pastures, subdividing paddocks, fencing off the creek and installing a reticulated stock watering system," she said.

Mary Kelly of Creightons Creek has also found membership of the group a worthwhile experience.

She is involved in a mixed farm and was a member of another mixed sex BESTWOOL

/ BESTLAMB group along with her husband, Brian.

The Kellys run two properties – 420ha at Creightons Creek and a 530ha leased property in conjunction with their son at Benalla. Their enterprises cover cropping, beef and prime lambs.

"I finished teaching four years ago and was keen to get more involved in running the farm," Mary said.

"When I heard about the women's group I decided to join because I thought it would be interesting to have a group catering for women, both from a learning aspect and a social interaction.

"Women are an integral part of farming and have so much to offer. In our family business we all share in the decision making." ■

AT A GLANCE

Clip Preparation

AWI and AWEX have produced 'Pick of the Draft', a free DVD that demonstrates how simple measures in 10 key areas can result in a quality clip that attracts a better sale price.

To receive a copy of the DVD, phone the AWI Helpline on 1800 070 099.

Farm Day figures

More than 730 families participated in this year's 'Farm Day' which is designed to provide city families with the opportunity to visit a working property and get hands-on experience of life on the land.

Held on May 30 and 31, farmer registrations were up by 33% this year, to a total of 568. Victoria led the way with 203 farms, followed by NSW with 175 and Queensland with 119 (WA 31, SA 29, Tas. 10, NT 1).

Mulesing alternative

Clips developed as part of Australian Wool Innovation's research into alternatives to surgical mulesing are now commercially available.

Produced by Leader Products, the clips are made of plastic and can be removed between eight and 14 days after application. The clips can be reused at least once.

Wool from sheep treated with the clips can be declared as 'non mulesed' on the national wool vendor declaration.

The clips can only be used by accredited operators and courses are available for woolgrowers wanting accreditation.

For clip orders, contractor and training details, phone Leader Products on (03) 9308 2355.

Newsletter contributions

WE are keen to hear suggestions for this newsletter and are happy to take contributions. Phone Jane Court on 5735 4351.

Plug in to new technology

THERE HAS been rain in some parts of the state and I have seen many tractors sowing late into the night on my travels. It is even looking green.

The BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB FEWETURE Farming conference was again a great success.

Producers and service providers both enjoyed the keynote speakers and concurrent sessions.

The trade tables were another highlight, as they were an opportunity to display and discuss the latest projects and research.

It always amazes me the speed at which technology takes hold of



Jamie Ramage,
chairman,
BESTWOOL/
BESTLAMB

our lives and makes us think about the way we run our enterprises.

More and more producers are using e-mail as a quick-and-easy communication link with friends and industry service providers.

The next big change will be the way we use the Internet.

I am a big fan of the Internet

and use it to gather information and talk to farmer groups. Now BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB is also offering its members a forum section on our website.

An invitation is being sent to all members that contains an e-mail address and instructions on how to join the website and add comments on the forum posts that are managed by BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB.

It is easy to access once you have replied to the invitation e-mail. Go to the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB website at www.bestwoolbestlamb.com.au and use the login button to access the

comments on the posted items.

Congratulations go to four young candidates for the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership program who are all BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB members.

Hannah Marriott and Amanda McClaren are being funded by BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB, while David McClure and Gavin Brien are being funded by the Department of Primary Industries' Bill Easton Memorial Scholarship.

It is the younger people on the farm who will take the new technologies and use them to progress our industry. ■

SMOKO

Fumbling fingers make for funny work

THESE SENTENCES actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services.

- The Fasting and Prayer Conference includes meals.
- The sermon this morning: 'Jesus Walks on Water'. The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus'.
- Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.
- The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.
- Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our community. Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say 'Hell' to someone who doesn't care much about you.
- Don't let worry kill you off – let the Church help.
- Miss Charlene Mason sang, 'I will not pass this way again', giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
- The Rector will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing 'Break Forth Into Joy'.
- Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.
- At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.

- Eight new choir robes are needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.
- Scouts are saving aluminium cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.
- Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.
- The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.
- The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.
- This evening at 7pm there will be hymn singing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.
- Ladies Bible Study will be held Thursday morning at 10am. All ladies are invited to lunch in the Fellowship Hall after the B.S.
- Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7pm. Please use the back door.
- The eighth graders will be presenting Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' in the Church basement Friday at 7pm. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.
- Weight Watchers will meet at 7pm at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.
- The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new tithing campaign slogan Last Sunday: 'I Upped My Pledge – Up Yours'.



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.bestlamb@dpi.vic.gov.au or visit www.bestwoolbestlamb.com.au