



# Information Exchange

The newsletter of the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network

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## Best practice award for BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB

THE SUCCESS of BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB has been officially recognised, with the program winning the inaugural Samuel Wadham Award for Practice Change at the recent DPI Science Awards.

The award was shared by BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB and the Seasonal Climate Risk Project team, lead by Chris Souness from the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Horsham, for its e-newsletter *The Break*.

The 2009 DPI Science Awards recognised programs and people who made an outstanding contribution to science and innovation for Victoria's primary industry sectors.

The DPI Samuel Wadham Practice Change Award particularly recognises a DPI staff member or team for an outstanding contribution leading to practice change improvements for Victorian farm businesses and primary industries.

Samuel Wadham was a University of Melbourne professor who was highly regarded in the field of research and extension,



**Tim Hollier, Erica Schelfhorst, Lyndon Kubeil, Annette Taylor, Jason Trompf, Jamie Ramage and Peter Hanrahan at the award night.**

and passionate about working with the rural community and solving problems faced by farmers.

Australian Wool Innovation was recognised for its integral role and contribution to the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB project, in partnership with DPI. Peter Hanrahan was present at the ceremony as a representative for Australian Wool Innovation.

BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB program manager Lyndon Kubeil from DPI Benalla, said the award

recognised the assistance the program offered Victorian wool and sheep producers.

"The program provides farmers with a network through which they can access vital farming information, share best practices and develop social and business networks," he said.

"The program is committed to improving the capability and capacity of sheep and wool producers across Victoria, using a facilitated group learning approach.

"BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB has been running for 10 years and has 679 group members and 690 associate members.

"We're looking to expand the network of sheep producers across Victoria and are thrilled our efforts have been recognised with the award."

The Seasonal Climate Risk Project team's *The Break* newsletter delivers the latest seasonal climate risk information to farmers and other interested subscribers. It has been operating since 2006. ■

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# Greenhouse gas calculator an eye opener

LIKE A lot of other farmers, Denis Ryan hadn't given too much thought to the Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and the impact it could potentially have on his farm business.

But that changed when Denis and other members of the Nullawil BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB group explored the use of the Australian Farm Institute's FarmGAS calculator at a recent meeting with the Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) sheep officer Garry Armstrong.

Developed by the Australian Farm Institute, the calculator is an on-line tool that gives farmers a full picture of how changing farm practices will affect their gross margins and greenhouse gas emissions.

A decision on whether to include Australian farm businesses in the Australian Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) will not be made until 2013. If included, the earliest that farmers would be liable for farm emissions would be 2015.

The calculator estimates a farm's greenhouse gas emissions, both at the individual enterprise activity level and for the farm as a whole.

It also explores the financial impacts that different greenhouse mitigation options may have on farm business profitability.

## Web-based

"The calculator is a web-based tool that allows you to estimate the financial and greenhouse implications of changing enterprise mix or production options within your farm business by creating 'scenarios' online," Garry said. "Once you have logged in you can create scenarios and access your own information at any time."

## FACTS OF THE MATTER

DPI has a network of officers who specialise in climate change issues and are happy to visit BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB groups to discuss the FarmGAS calculator.

They are:

- South-west – Martin Dunstan, Warnambool, ph 5561 9903
- North-west – Keiran Ransom, Bendigo, ph 5430 4451
- North-east – Greg Ferrier, Rutherglen, Ph 02 6030 4609
- Gippsland – Stuart White, Maffra, Ph 5147 0836.

These staff members can visit groups to explain how the calculator works and discuss a range of farm management scenarios and their ramifications under a potential emission trading scheme.

While members of the Nulawil group had all read about the debate on greenhouse gas emissions and management in the papers, few had really thought through what impact these issues could potentially have on farms, Denis said.

"Using the FarmGAS calculator at the meeting gave everyone a bit of a shock in terms of the bill we could be facing if we have to pay for every tonne of carbon we are calculated to emit," he said.

"It was a real eye opener – changing some farm practices didn't have as much of an effect on reducing emissions as we would have thought.

"There was also the potential to look at incorporating trees into the farm – but that is not an option when you're farming in an environment that is not suited to trees.

"While agriculture will hopefully be excluded in the long term, this approach to

managing emissions is not going to go away, so we all need to understand what is going on, and the impact on our farm business and profitability."

## Understand emissions

The calculator applies the same methodology that is used by the Department of Climate Change in the estimation of Australia's National Greenhouse Gas Accounts.

Although major livestock and cropping enterprises are provided, FarmGAS does not currently include calculators for dairying, cotton or rice production.

"It's important farmers start to understand what emissions are associated with different farm activities, and what changes they might be able to make to modify them," Garry said.

"At this stage the FarmGAS calculator hasn't got the capacity to deal with a really broad range of crops or lamb feedlots, but it is being updated regularly.

"Most farmers who have seen the model have been shocked by the cost of offsetting carbon emissions from various enterprises.

"At this stage, the calculator puts a \$10/t value on carbon, which is the price set by the CPRS for its first year of operation. This price might be significantly higher once carbon is traded on the free market. At this stage carbon is trading for around A\$24/t in the European Union."

## Indirect impact

Even if agricultural production is excluded, farmers will still be affected indirectly, Garry said.

Producers of rural inputs will incur costs, as will processors of agricultural products,

"It's highly likely that input costs could rise," Garry said.

"It's important farmers are aware of the issues, have an understanding of how emissions trading works and develop a range of scenarios to help their business cope."

The FarmGAS calculator is free of charge and is found on the Australian Farm Institute website at [farmgas.farminstitute.org.au](http://farmgas.farminstitute.org.au)

The FarmGAS calculator project has been managed by the Australian Farm Institute, using funding provided under the National Heritage Trust, administered by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry through the National Agriculture and Climate Change Action Plan Implementation Program. ■

## AT A GLANCE

### Diary date

Mark the following dates in your diaries now, to be sure you can get to the 2010 Feweture Farming Annual Conference.

The conference is planned for June 23 and 24, 2010 at the Bendigo Exhibition Centre.

The conference will start with a dinner and a guest speaker on the evening of June 23. The following day will feature three key note speakers and 10 concurrent sessions.

### Well done Annette

**BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB project administrator Annette Taylor received the FSV award at the 2009 Farm Services Victoria Awards night.**

### Newsletter contributions

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

# Seminar tackles dry feed and water

MORE THAN 40 people took part in the recent BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB phone seminar about managing stock water and dry feed over summer.

The seminar featured Lewis Kahn from the University of New England and Craig Turton from Department of Primary Industries (DPI)'s Wangaratta office.

With stock numbers down on many properties and a reasonable spring, producers are carrying reasonable levels of dry feed over summer, but feed quality becomes an increasing issue as the value of dry standing feed deteriorates as the summer progresses and this, in turn, affects what sheep can eat.

## Monitor

Sheep production and nutrition specialist Lewis Kahn said it was important to monitor sheep condition and the quality of paddock feed to identify what was limited.

The digestibility, energy and protein levels of dry feed all fall to levels below those required for stock maintenance as summer progresses, and rainfall exacerbates the situation, he said.

The first step was to identify what various classes of stock needed and what they could eat from the pastures as summer progressed (Table 1). Dry ewes need between 7.5 and 9 megajoules of energy a day for maintenance, depending on their frame size, while pregnant and lactating ewes require up to 2.5 times more energy per day.

Lewis said it was important to manage animals on dry feed to:

- increase nitrogen and mineral content in the diet and, if possible, provide bypass protein as an initial response to managing stock on dry feed;

Table 1: Metabolisable energy intake (MJ/day) from dry mixed pastures – eastern Australia.

Feed on offer kg DM/ha	Digestibility					
	35%	40%	45%	50%	55%	60%
500	0.3	0.7	1.3	1.7	2.2	2.8
1000	0.9	2.2	3.5	4.6	5.8	7.2
1500	1.4	3.3	4.8	6.3	7.8	9.3
2000	1.8	4.0	5.6	7.2	8.8	10.2

- provide an energy source as pasture quality declined;
- ensure sufficient protein and minerals in the diet; and
- constantly evaluate the feeding program.

## Supplements

As the feed value of pasture quality declines (digestibility less than 45%) the response to protein falls and it is more important to provide energy as a supplement.

Calculating the feed values of supplements and amount to be fed can be done using tables on the website [www.lifetimewool.com.au](http://www.lifetimewool.com.au).

While protein and energy are the keys to growth and wool production, mineral levels also have a major role to play, Lewis said.

Diets low in nitrogen, phosphorous and sulphur result in poor rumen microbial growth and slow the rate of digestion. Slower digestion means feed stays in the rumen longer, reducing the animal's appetite, which results in less energy and protein intake.

Minerals, nitrogen, sulphur and phosphorus

### RULE OF THUMB:

Mixed pastures – eastern Australia: When pasture dries off, digestibility is around 60%, thereafter it declines by around 5% per month until it reaches a minimum of 35%.

could all be provided through blocks and loose licks to stock on dry feed and nitrogen.

## Stock water

Managing stock on dry feed also requires a good stock water supply.

Craig Turton from DPI Wangaratta said farm water supplies had become an increasingly important issue.

"Just a 10% drop in rainfall can result in a 40% drop in run-off into farm dams," he said.

"In recent years a lot of the rainfall events have been of 5, 10 or 20mm. We really need rainfall events in excess of 25mm before we get run-off.

"Over the past seven to 10 years, many established farm water supplies have begun to fail because of below-average rainfalls.

"If the dry seasons continue, people are going to have to look at different stock water options."

Craig said the first step in this process is to do a water audit, which involves calculating stock water requirements, water demand and its storage requirements (which could accommodate more than a year's supply).

In most cases the best option is to plan for one large dam that supplies reticulated troughs around the farm. ■



Minerals, nitrogen, sulphur and phosphorus can be provided through blocks and loose licks to stock on dry feed.

# Make the best of a profitable time

IT IS good to be writing this report at a time when there are record store sheep and lamb prices, as well as high mutton and lamb prices.

The sheep industry is certainly the place to be at the moment. However, we need to ensure that we position ourselves to take full advantage of the current demand.

Now is a great opportunity for groups to explore ways to increase their income from saleable sheep, while maintaining a sustainable flock structure.

Things that come to mind are the nutrition and condition score of ewes at joining and lambing,



**Jason Trompf,**  
chairman,  
BESTWOOL /  
BESTLAMB

lamb survival, pregnancy scanning to finetune feed allocation, genetic selection and performance, and marketing.

BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB was recently successful at the DPI Science Awards, taking out the inaugural DPI Samuel Wadham Award.

The award recognises an outstanding contribution leading to practice change improvements for Victorian farm businesses and primary industries.

This is great recognition for the whole BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB team, particularly Lyndon Kubeil (Program Manager) and Annette Taylor (Program Administrator).

The recent co-ordinators conference was a success, thanks to the commitment that they have all shown to the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB program.

The co-ordinators are dedicated to meeting their groups' needs and as a team they are continually looking for ways to improve how

their groups are functioning.

The conference focused on a number of key areas that groups should discuss with their co-ordinators, including genetic selection, getting the best from your agent, the modern merino and skin traction technology.

Since becoming chairman, I have appreciated the support that I have received via phone, e-mail and in person from those within and around the network.

As a network, I hope we can continue to enhance the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB program and the opportunities it provides for you as members.

## SMOKO

### An obituary printed in *The Times* of London

TODAY WE mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, 'Common Sense', who has been with us for many years.

No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape.

He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as:

- knowing when to come in out of the rain;
- why the early bird gets the worm;
- life isn't always fair; and
- maybe it was my fault.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies

(do not spend more than you can earn) and reliable strategies (adults, not children, are in charge).

His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned, but overbearing, regulations were set in place.

Reports of a six-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, only worsened his condition.

Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do

in disciplining their unruly children.

It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer sun lotion or an Aspirin to a student; but could not inform parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.

Common Sense lost the will to live as the churches became businesses; and criminals received better treatment than their victims.

Common Sense took a beating when you could not defend yourself from a burglar in your own home and the burglar could sue you for assault.

Common Sense finally gave up the will to live after a woman failed to realise that a steaming cup of coffee was hot, she spilled a little in her lap, sued and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

Common Sense was preceded in death, by his parents, Truth and Trust, his wife, Discretion, his daughter, Responsibility, his son, Reason.

He is survived by his four stepbrothers: I Know My Rights; I Want It Now; Someone Else Is To Blame; and I'm A Victim.

Not many attended his funeral because so few realised he was gone.



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](mailto:bestwool.bestlamb@dpi.vic.gov.au) or visit [www.bestwoolbestlamb.com.au](http://www.bestwoolbestlamb.com.au)