



## **BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB**

**Groups Annual Report 07/08**

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completed by BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Coordinators

## Summary of Findings

### Overall

The primary purpose of the BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB (BWBL) project is to - "Assist Victorian wool/lamb producers lift their on-farm productivity and profitability, as well as fostering environmental and social outcomes."

At the end of the financial year 07/08 there was 40 groups across the state with 989 producers listed on the database - 556 were paid members of groups whilst 433 were associate members.

An evaluation conducted in early 2008 by Hassall and Associates has demonstrated that the BWBL project has achieved the aims of the project. BWBL is enabling groups to function well and to access technologies that were highly suitable to members' enterprises.

These groups were managed by 19 coordinators that were either private consultants, representatives from Institutions or Department of Primary Industry staff.

BWBL is based on a group extension model in which self directed groups determine their own activities. This model generally results in improved outcomes for members compared to alternatives. The results from the activity database and the evaluation shows members have a positive attitude towards the technologies/practices offered, rating them as appropriate to their needs and presented in a way that has been easy to understand. They also considered there was a good balance of activities between productivity and profitability

There have been 246 activities during the 07/08 year which exceeds the contractual milestone. These activities covered carbon trading and climate change, animal health and nutrition, pastures, grazing, business management, benchmarking and drought being the most popular.

The Front Foot Farming workshop was developed quickly as the 07 season deteriorated quickly in September. The workshop was delivered to 8 groups with 102 participants attending.

## Level 1: Resources

The program had a budget of \$758,443 including carry forward funding from the previous year 06/07. These funds came from DPI, AWI and MLA. The program consisted of a Project Manager, an Administrator, an Advisory Committee of 12 members including the project manager and administrator and 19 Coordinators who managed 40 groups.

## Level 2: Activities

There have been 246 activities over the 12-month period from July 07 to June 08, which exceeded the milestone set in the contracts with AWI and MLA.

Activities included:

### Animal Health - 7 sessions this included

- Mulesing updates
- Condition scoring
- Lamb growth rates - hook up to phone seminar with David Rendell "Ewes and lambs - don't lose them"
- Pregnancy scanning
- LTW messages

### Benchmarking - 15 sessions this included

- CoP x13
- Feedback session
- Extending the benchmarking program

### Business Management - 42 sessions this included

- What we expect our business to look like in 30 years time
- How the community perceives farming businesses and the consequences of this
- Keys to success x 3
- Gross margins analysis of enterprise options
- General business overview
- Business review of innovative pasture systems
- Holistic business review
- Accountants - what we get, what we would like
- Tender application for pasture cropping x 3
- 6 Thinking Hats presentation
- Comparison of new breeds based on gross margins
- Visit another different farming enterprise / buying and selling rural land
- Comparing farm enterprises from area, indentifying possible synergies with mixing enterprises - being aware of risks when changing enterprises
- Managing cash flow
- Review host farm's operations/strategy development x 14
- Strategic planning and decision making
- Leasing out the farm
- How to make money out of wool
- Proposed business structure examined and discussed
- Sustainable production for a profitable future
- Maintaining profit margin

**Carbon / Climate Change** - 11 sessions this included

- Opportunities and threats with climate change, carbon trading, carbon farming
- Carbon trading and future possibilities for agriculture
- Understanding weather forecasts
- Climate change visit to Rutherglen research station
- Climate change forecasts for our region - impacts on our business options
- Sustainable agricultural opportunities

**Carcass Competition** - 10 sessions

- Planning and organising the Colac and Campaspe Carcass Competitions - giving producers the ability to follow lambs through the production chain

**Crops** - 4 sessions this included

- Crop walk to assess the potential and plan harvest strategy
- Cutting cereals for hay versus grain
- What options exist for planting crops for grazing
- Pasture cropping

**Drought** - 35 sessions this included

- Drought buster bush poetry night
- Progress with drought recovery program
- Drought management strategies
- Drought aid has changed - reviewed eligibility
- Review of management action used during the drought
- Look at feeding equipment and discuss how it was done - grazing strategies and animal health
- Stock feeding options
- Front foot farming x 8 groups x 102 members attending

**Fertilisers** - 5 sessions this included

- Better fertiliser decisions
- When superphosphate \$550/t what will you do?
- Effective fertiliser use
- Looking at rye grass variety trials and alternative fertiliser options

**Genetics** - 11 sessions this included

- Update on Sheep Genetics Australia
- Cross breeding systems in cattle performance recording
- Maximising the reproductive performance of your rams and ewes
- Sheep Classing and sheep selection
- Inspection of Wethers in the wether trial
- Using composite sheep genetics
- Increasing profitability through improved fertility
- Understanding breeding Values
- The basics of sheep breeding
- Breeding your own rams for a wool growing enterprise

**Grazing** - 23 sessions this included

- Grain & Graze presentations, discussions, field days x
- Evergraze presentations, discussions, field days

- Cell grazing
- Lucerne production systems - the value in a grazing business
- Lifting the baa - innovation in the grazing industry

**Harvesting** - 2 sessions this included

- Setting up the combine harvester to make the best of different crops in different conditions

**Health** - 6 sessions this included

- Sustainable Farm Families

**Marketing** - 19 sessions this included

- Economic analysis of finishing v selling unfinished lambs
- Meat processing
- Phone presentation on outlook for red meats
- Managing price risk for wool, beef and grain
- Market opportunities for organic wool and meat - management to produce
- Visit to wool broker, wool auctions and AWTA
- Involved with survey to explore what information growers need in order be able to better market lambs and hopefully increase profitability

- Techno grazing systems
- Grazing the living haystack. Is this the future?
- Using herbicides in a grazing business

- Crop walk to assess the crop potential and plan harvest strategy

- Finishing techniques to optimise meat quality
- Seasonal market prices
- Wool market trends - meeting consumer concerns
- Reducing the cost of selling stock
- Brenda McGahan from The Woolmark Company
- Marketing prime lambs
- Value adding "How Rutherglen Premium Lamb Works"

**New Technology** - 3 sessions this included

- The use of electronic ID of sheep and benefits

- Machinery used in this area

**Nutrition** - 14 sessions this included

- Winter feed management
- Sheep feed rations
- Comparing summer feeds
- New options for feeding store lambs - straw and additives
- Feeding pellets

- Silage feeding and making, costs, methods
- Grain storage
- Stocking rates for containment feeding
- Weaner nutrition through summer
- Feeding stock costs and options

**OHS** - 1 session this included

- OH&S audit of host farm

**Other** - 5 sessions this included

- Working dog school
- Trees on farm
- Christmas gathering
- Environmental regulation and farming in Europe

**Pastures** - 8 sessions this included

- Pasture and crop inspection and discussion
- Pasture species
- Sowing pastures - which paddocks - how many - methods - pasture selection
- Hay verses grain decision making
- Growing and harvesting pasture for profit
- Weed control
- The grass is not greener on the other side of the fence - inspection of newly sown lucerne, phalaris and fescue pastures
- Pasture establishment techniques - summer fodder crops

**PIRD's** - 4 sessions this included

- Presentation of the results of the nitrogen trials
- Results of 2 PIRDS - Trace element nutrition of sheep and lambing lambs as lambs. Fertiliser decisions for pastures and crops in spring 2007
- Preparation of PIRD application

**Production Systems** - 5 sessions this included

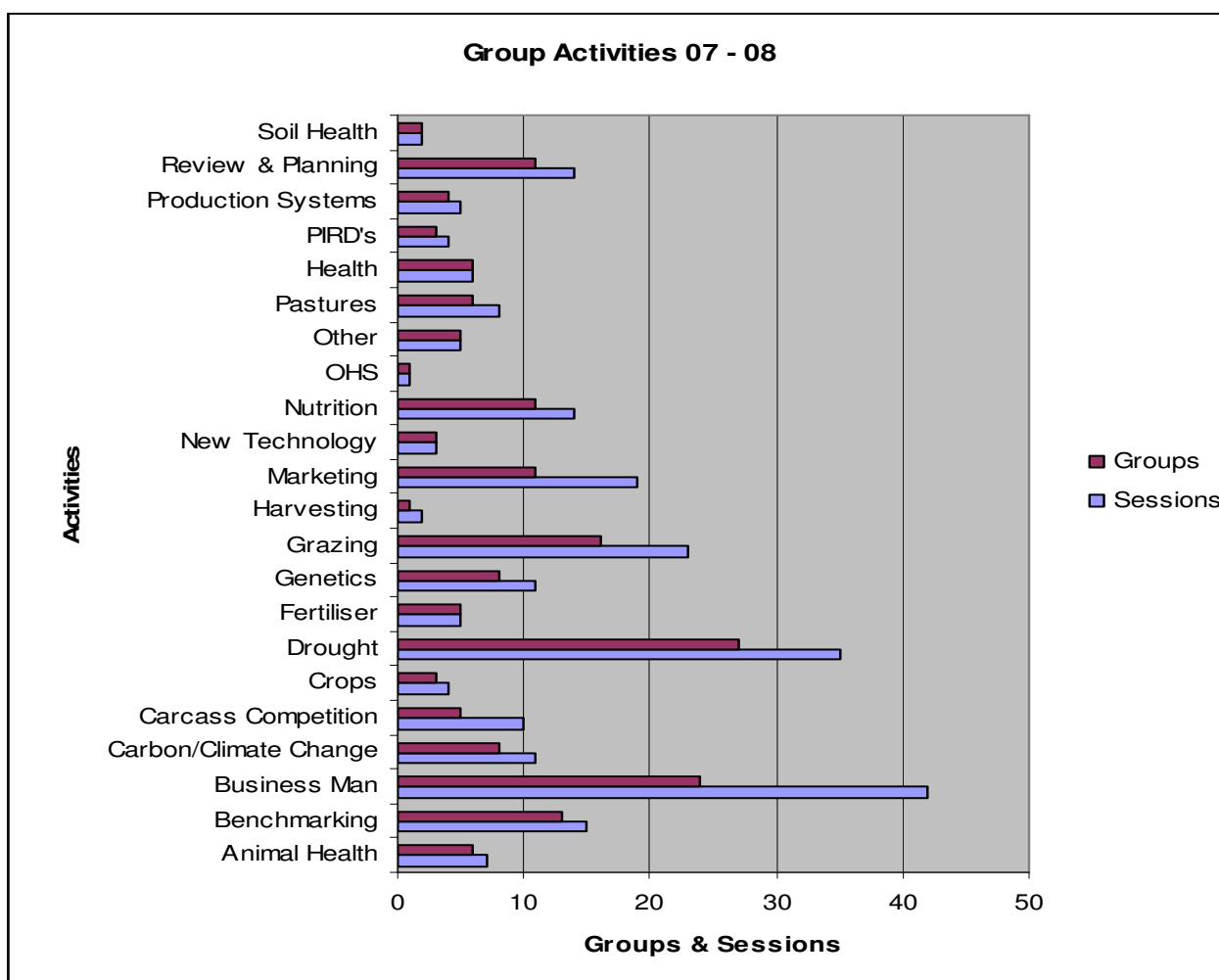
- Study tour of Tasmania. Focus was on looking at different production systems for wool, prime lambs in the Midlands and in the North Central area
- Prime lamb production
- XB ewes verses Merino's for lamb production systems
- Profitability of merino vs cross breeds for prime lamb profitability
- Biological farming principles

**Review & Planning Meetings** - 14 sessions this included

- Review of achievements & planning for the next 12 months
- Review of previous meeting about soil health and discussion

**Soil Health** - 2 sessions this included

- Soil biology visit to Rutherglen
- Overview of soil properties



**Members** have been involved in 40 field trips, 15 paddock walks, 23 workshops, 83 presentations, 70 group discussions and 15 undefined.

**Workshops included** Front Foot Farming, Sustainable Farming Families, Cost of Production and Life Time Ewe Management.

**Presentations** have been from Department of Primary Industries Extension Officers and researchers, Grain & Graze, The Merino Company, the Wool Market Company, AWI, MLA, District Health Services representatives, Centrelink, Rural Finance officers, Community Engagement Officer, University researchers, veterinarians, bankers, agents, consultants and group members,

### Level 3: People Involvement

- There were 556 were paid members in 40 groups coordinated by 19 coordinators
- Associates members numbered 433
- An Advisory Committee of 12 members including 6 grower representatives, one representative each from AWI, DPI and MLA and 1 coopted member plus the project manager and administrator
- The management team included a project manager and an administrator.

#### **Level 4: Reactions**

Hassell & Associates Evaluation of BWBL found that 68% of the BWBL group members think more about planning for the future and 65% were more confident about facing future challenges.

#### **Level 5: Changes in KASA**

Hassell & Associates Evaluation of BWBL found an improvement in member knowledge, skills, confidence and aspirations with 96% of members indicating they had gained new knowledge.

There has been an increase in skills and knowledge in the areas of carbon emissions and climate change, production systems, calculating cost of production, presenting about their own enterprise, meat quality, soil biology, pasture management and grazing management.

- Business analysis - Asset accumulation
- Realities of intensive animal production
- Understanding of carbon emissions' and sequestration, carbon trading, implications for farming both threats and opportunities
- How a very profitable business goes about their planning, research, evaluation and implementation
- Those skills needed to calculate the cost of producing a kg of prime lamb including identifying the key financials needed for the calculation. The program also develops an appreciation of the importance of CoP
- Insight into benchmarks for good practice
- Carcass competition challenges competitors to produce prime lambs with high retail meat yield that meet market specifications
- Worked out feed budgets for the coming season
- Taking a broader longer term view of the business, analysis of the situation and planning for the next 3 years
- Understand the succession of soil organisms to improve soil fertility and pasture productivity
- Sheep containment areas
- Planning key management activities (lambing, weaning, supplementary
- Reasons why to sow lucerne and fescue
- Better management their own health
- Management financial and analytical skills as well as understanding the performance of their farming operation in relation to their peers
- Issues associated with sustainability and climate change
- Experiences with fertiliser use, and non use in 2007. Most exciting one was spraying out onion grass and then just leaving the pasture to regenerate. Great value for money.
- How to deal with a challenging environment
- Evaluating the potential of their crops and then decide on the best use of those crops
- Mulesing alternatives available
- Understanding the operation of SGS and what it offers lamb and wool producers
- Techniques to improve lamb finishing to ensure meat is tender and not dark cutting
- Lucerne pasture management
- Benefits of deep-delving non-wetting sands, bio-diverse pastures and the use

- feeding) according to the growth phases of their pastures
- Skills to set up their equipment for the seasonal conditions thus allowing them to save grain for feeding or make the best of stubble for hay
- Importance of Banquet Ryegrass and subclover in pasture Mix Importance of paddock size to lamb survival Matching peak stocking rate and peak pasture production. Relationship building in marketing
- Knowledge of wool and retail marketing
- Growth rate of merino lambs Pasture assessment skills Pasture management skills
- The role the new Multi Meats Breed can have in the prime lamb Industry. How to manage sheep that have high reproductive rates. Setting up breeding programs to use Multi Meats
- Understand the implications of poor soil structure
- Meeting the nutritional requirements of store prime lambs, merino weaners and dry sheep using minimal amounts of grain
- Use of clip description in marketing clip
- Duties were given to group members to follow up for tender
- Participants in the economic analysis have reviewed the inherent objectives of their business, and some have decided to have a more open mind when it comes to opportunistic selling of unfinished lambs. While the results were variable, if a selling opportunity can be found it is cost effective to sell rather than hold lambs
- Environmental regulation in Europe would currently consider as current best practise. Not onerous
- How to run a profitable first cross beef operation on difficult stony barrier country
- The group gained higher level skills in
- of grazing charts to make strategic decisions
- Great experience and skills have been gained during the year including the practical aspects of sourcing drought feed, monitoring prices and fodder quality and availability
- The grazing of cereals has altered and stock will graze one crop for weed control in a potential spray graze situation and another paddock will be fenced off and grazing will occur in selected areas of the paddock
- Knowledge of climate drivers
- Looked at the growth stages of cereal and the important times to graze and not to graze
- Knowledge of what different breeds look like cut up as well as an appreciation of what a butcher looks for in a lamb for a high quality market
- Understand how to operate a techno grazing system
- Selecting the right species for the terrain and soil type. Where to put the emphasis in making fertiliser decisions
- The group is building a group strategic plan
- Key profit drivers - what they are, how to manipulate them
- The aim for this year is to get a better understanding of soil and in particular soil biology and chemistry. This knowledge will be used to make better fertiliser decisions and manage pasture production more sustainably
- Knowledge of the interaction between soil biology and pasture/crop productivity
- How to develop strategic alliances with customers for weaner sales
- Methods used in going about breeding

- pasture establishment and weed control
- All were aware their CofP was up due to the drought but had not quantified it
- your own rams. Certainty and accuracy
- Participants learned what a blueprint is and how to start completing one

### **Level 6: Changes in Practice**

Hassell & Associates Evaluation of BWBL found as a result of improved skills and knowledge 45% of members felt their involvement in BWBL had led to on farm production increases, while 33 % felt farm profitability had increased.

Practice changes noted impacted on a change of enterprises, stock handling, change in cropping styles, grazing management, pasture management, sheep nutrition and genetics and business management to achieve better outcomes on farm.

- Time to take the initiative and make some changes rather than waiting to have them imposed on us. eg EMS policy and program
- Change of emphasis on different enterprises. Introduced some cropping
- Changed cropping programs. Changed crop use
- Sowing oats or rye grass into existing lucerne stands for increased winter feed and improved fodder production
- Considering implications of events like drought in the longer term
- Pasture cropping Trailed compost teas
- Several members building SCA
- One producer has decided to purchase sheep scales as a result of a previous meeting
- Managing the landscape to promote soil biology and biodiversity
- Many of the farmers undertook best practise with regards to their ram management
- Regular Strategic reviews of their business position
- Some farmers made the comment that they are going to look at grazing their wheat or barley crops and will look at weaning their lambs onto their crops
- Very good acceptance and positive stories about stock containment areas in droughts
- Participants have taken on board key concepts when selecting pasture varieties for the next renovation program
- Using each others input to develop sound management strategies
- Started to plan for a non mulesing sheep flock
- One member as a result of the meeting has used AWI's Raceside Classer to select sheep for a breeding program
- Writing down plans. Searching for broader range of alternatives
- Use of pig manure for pasture fertiliser
- Rotational grazing
- Two members have use Sheep Genetics Australia website to help select merino rams
- Three of the group grazed cereals after this session
- Planning to employ a manager while he pursues off-farm consulting/agronomy employment
- Grain purchased early and stored. Used to offset contract
- Sold sheep and lambs direct to Stawell abattoirs. Followed lambs through abattoirs. Weighing lambs before selling. Agent using abattoirs for direct sales
- Review pasture situation paddock by paddock. Knowing soil P level

- Three members have bought sheep scales in the last 3 months. They are all using them to help with marketing lambs
- Better fertiliser decisions on the back of higher fertiliser prices
- Likely that some will try the merino lamb recommendations. About one sixth the cost of normal feeding program, and less work
- Farm expansion. Focussed fertiliser use. Wool marketing. Improved animal health. More profit. better decisions through more reasoned debate
- Redesigned their operations to focus more on dual purpose sheep and cell grazing management
- Members of the group traditionally selected sheep objectively. An ongoing theme of activities has been promoting objective measurement. Following a field trip to NSW a couple of years ago one of the group members began purchasing sheep from an objectively measured flock. This year another member began purchasing weaners from the member because of the genetics of the flock
- MD - placed sheep for 2 weeks on cereal & doesn't even look like its been grazed now Jmck - placed on barley & then changed mind & placed on different crop - taking sheep off now
- Drought management continues to improve and understanding of off farm aid continues to grow though many members have gone for off farm jobs to be viable rather than to recipients of aid. Unfortunately those with motivation are often poorly rewarded
- Some are trying summer fodder crops for the first time
- Value Adding - selling own lamb products rather than livestock. Starting to supply 5 star restaurants!
- Don Moore the Bairnsdale BWBL coordinator resigned his position in November 07 and sent the attached
- Watching further developments. Could mean more tree planting. Certifications going to be a key issue
- Selection of better winter ryegrass species for winter production
- Herbicide programs will be modified. Species selection more focussed. Participation in pasture subsidy program to be reviewed
- Some of the participants are condition scoring, using scanning contractors and using teasers to get tighter joining patterns
- Greater emphasis has been placed on managing ewes to achieve higher lambing percentages
- Lambing practises to be tried in 2008 included: early lambing - May/April increase lambing to 200% from 178%, marking 150% (these are finn breeders) wean lambs at 38-40kg Split single & twin mobs Scan for multiples look at stock containment split maidens from older sheep run smaller paddocks & grain feed Wont shear close to lambing again more intensive feeding
- Redesigned their business to focus on cell grazing stud & breeder enterprise with a sheep trading enterprise. Utilising the excess growth during the spring
- A range of management changes including: Buying rams with EBV's Focus Feeding, worm testing, drenching stock onto the place, vaccinating, lambing down in paddocks with better shelter, having stock in more appropriate condition Know where to source information now
- Planning to sow some lucerne this spring
- Realising that smaller businesses may need to work with each other to remain viable and to achieve new outcomes



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document about the changes he had noticed whilst coordinator of the group

### **Level 7: Changes in Social, Economic, Environmental Conditions**

Hassell & Associates Evaluation of BWBL noted that natural resource management (NRM) had also improved with the use of stock containment areas during drought being highly rated. However, members considered that productivity/profitability were their main goals.

Almost 90% of members attributed a social benefit to BWBL, nominating networking opportunities to assess different technologies as most important. Members also considered that BWBL had benefits of a personal nature, including improvements in self confidence and improvements in mental health during difficult times.

- Some non members who participated are keen to join a BWBL group as they see benefit in being involved
- Support of each other through this dry time
- Use of alternative fertilisers
- Working on the soil pits and running the on farm trials had lead to the group asking a lot more questions, trying to gain an understanding of what is happening in their environment. The Workshop with Paul Horne on good and not so good bugs had lead to the use of insect traps and clear decisions being made before the application of sprays and in some case no application at all
- 10 members have installed stock containment areas and used them over the last year
- People that fed considerably through the drought found it quite relentless, sometimes soul destroying and financially expensive
- The importance of networking was a feature of set up new enterprises and markets which the participants have been working more on lately
- Better suited species to soil type to enhance water use efficiency
- Support from each other during the drought. Group members looking after each other
- More long term planning for droughts including the use of silage stored underground for the long term
- Group is in the doldrums again due to the bloody terrible weather
- Potentially 3 new members to the group
- Member felt that the group contact and meetings was critical in working their way through the drought. It allowed them to share concerns, share management options as well as getting moral support from each other
- Two BWBL groups interacting, both coming from very different paths and backgrounds
- Group wants more structured notice of meeting times and so a list was drawn up of when they would occur - every 2nd wed of the month
- This group originated from a Landcare group, so many sound environmental practises implemented through it's program
- The importance of a changing enterprises to achieve work life balance
- Importance of having good facilities to handle the cattle has highlighted the need for upgrade on some properties

- Environmental conditions have been poor but the grain markets have been strong. This has helped the farmers get through this tough period. It has however had a negative impact on the people that had been finishing lambs on grain
- The group is working well together to achieve the groups goal, but this must also achieve our own individual goals
- How to manage a brittle landscape so that it is regenerative
- Host has ceased phosphate fertiliser spreading since doing a Triple P trial. Trialling rock phosphate instead

### **References**

The BWBL Activity Database completed by the BWBL coordinators after each activity has been interrogated to compile this document.

Hassell's & Associates "Evaluation of the BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Project 2005 - 2008".