



---

## **BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB**

**Groups Annual Report 08/09**

---

Prepared by Annette Taylor from the Activity  
Database 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 08/09 there was 36 groups across the state with 1,241 producers listed on the database - 604 were paid members of groups whilst 637 were associate members.

These groups were managed by 17 coordinators that were either private consultants (10), representatives from Institutions (1) or Department of Primary Industry staff (6).

BWBL is based on a group extension model in which self directed groups determine their own activities. In this funding round groups must have 6 meetings in a 12 month period and 4 of these meetings should address funder priorities. 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 179 activities during the 08/09 year. There would have been more group meetings but due to emergency response duty of DPI staff some group meetings had to be cancelled. These activities covered pasture management, grazing management, farm business reviews, animal health and nutrition, soil health, fertiliser decisions and planning meetings. Of these meetings 141 were addressing their yearly plan. There were several that deviated from their yearly plan due to climatic circumstances in the area.

A couple of groups applied for and have received PIRD funding which included a nitrogen trial, a pasture trial, a fertiliser trial and a merino wether lambs and how to make them profitable trial.

## Level 1: Resources

The program had a budget of \$710,000. These funds came from DPI, AWI and producer contributions. The program consisted of a Project Manager, an Administrator, an Advisory Committee of 10 members including the project manager and administrator and 17 Coordinators who managed 36 groups.

## Level 2: Activities

There have been 179 activities over the 12-month period from July 08 to June 09.

Activities included:

### Animal Health - 16 sessions, this included

- Mulesing updates x 2
- Condition scoring training x 2
- Meeting the challenge of continuing high worm burdens
- Sheep inspection
- Weighing & assessing dressing percentage in lambs
- Sheep health diseases
- Pregnancy scanning x 2
- Reducing ewe and lamb mortality
- Demonstration and discussion about individual sheep management
- Autopsy
- Sustainable sheep health programs x 2
- Improving reproductive performance

### Climate Change - 4 sessions, this included

- Understanding weather forecasts x 3
- Impacts on businesses

### Carcass Competition - 4 sessions

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

### Crops - 16 sessions, this included

- Grain & Graze x 9
- Grain storage
- How to control weeds
- Pasture cropping x 3
- Chemical usage
- Grain varieties

### Farm Business Reviews - 20 sessions, this included

- Review host farm's operations/strategy development x 9
- Farm business tour exploring different agricultural products and systems
- How a very profitable business goes about their planning, research, evaluation and implementation
- Inspected and discussed the management of members business
- Field trip to a 2500 feedlot facility and a thorough insight into a 60 thousand acre grazing operation
- Business review of innovative pasture systems
- As specialist wool growers are we the last of the dinosaurs? Challenging the value/need for change at the moment
- Business analysis - use of benchmarking in doing this - value of regular reviews
- Visited Phil O'Callaghan to discuss his farming operation
- Farm tour of members property including weighing wethers lambs due to be marketed, inspection of dryland lucerne, inspection of DeKalb saltbush, discussion

- Comparing farm enterprises from area, identifying possible synergies with mixing enterprises - being aware of risks when changing enterprises

of grain and hay cropping program and farm finances, inspection of mulesing clips trial

- Teleconference with Bob Hall, Consultant WA - Analysis of production system - importance of scale in the production system

### **Fertilisers** - 11 sessions, this included

- Fertiliser test strips
- Alternative fertilisers x 4
- Lime phone seminar used for group discussions
- Using MMfS Manual for fertiliser applications

- When super is \$550/t what will you do?
- Presentation of the results of the PIRD nitrogen trials
- Developing fertiliser strategies
- Matching fertiliser requirements to production targets

### **Financial Planning** - 5 sessions, this included

- Analyse farm expenses and profits program
- Cost of production workshops
- Feed budgeting for coming months - calculating quantities needed - costing different options

- Gross margin comparisons between businesses
- Gross margins, profits, performance history - switching enterprises to achieve financial targets

### **Fire Assessment** - 3 sessions, this included

- Assessment of fire damaged pastures and financial analysis of fertiliser and sowing options

- Bushfires - the positives and the negatives - recovery plans - insurance

### **Genetics** - 3 sessions, this included

- Update on Sheep Genetics Australia
- Research into differences between and within breeds - ram selection - genetic selection using objective and subjective selection

- How does LambPlan and Merino Select work?

### **Grazing** - 9 sessions, this included

- Grazing management identifying and management of native pastures
- Cell grazing
- How to control weeds

- Evergraze presentations, discussions, field days x 4
- Broadford grazing trial
- Set stock vs rotational grazing

### **Health** - 3 sessions, this included

- Sustainable Farm Families

### **Marketing** - 11 sessions, this included

- Market analysis and price risk management
- Market opportunities for organic wool and

- Finishing techniques to optimise meat quality
- Visit to local butcher to view and cut up

- meat and management requirements to produce
- Lamb carcasses - to learn about the characteristics of a higher value lamb
- Lessons and pitfalls from direct marketing
- Sheep meat marketing industry tour x 3
- Marketing prime lambs
- Wool marketing and mulesing
- Sheep meat markets presentation by Kara Jones from MLA

### **New Technology** - 3 sessions, this included

- The use of the internet to source information
- Biochar
- New shearing shed and sheep yard designs

### **Nutrition** - 5 sessions, this included

- Lifetime wool data
- Managing scanned ewes
- Achieving weight gain targets throughout the year
- Lamb finishing
- Assessing weaners and their feed needs

### **OHS** - 2 sessions, this included

- OH&S audit of host farm

### **Other** - 5 sessions, this included

- Working dog school
- Sheep management using EID x 2
- Environmental regulations
- 2 day trip en route to annual conference visiting farms on route

### **Pastures** - 19 sessions, this included

- Pasture and crop inspection and discussion
- Pasture utilisation using MMfS
- Presentation on sowing new pastures - perennial and short term using MMfS x 2
- Growing and harvesting pasture for profit
- Turning pasture into product - MMfS
- A tour of pasture sowing was conducted, looking at successes and failures of recent sowings - discussion
- Pasture management & sowing strategies x 2
- Investigate pasture and soil constraints prior to renovation
- Pasture inspections of ryegrass re-seeding paddocks and dry sown oats
- Cost of sowing a failed phalaris pasture from MMfS x 2
- Resowing pastures
- Exploring lucerne and its economics
- Sowing options - the latest in research forage crops for winter feed x 4

### **PIRD's** - 8 sessions, this included

- Presentation of the results of the nitrogen trials
- Final field day for fertiliser PIRD
- Discussion of results so far from the "Profitable Merino Wether lambs trial" x 3
- Application and set up of pasture trial x 3

### **Production Systems** - 7 sessions, this included

- Farm management economics and what you need to examine if you want to change enterprises
- Rod Manning talking about the changes he has made over the past years and changes he could make in the future
- Working out the change from wool to meat to grain - change in risk profile, feed
- Presentation and discussion about the relative profitability of various sheep

- demand patterns & profitability enterprises
- XB ewes verses Merino's for lamb production systems x 3 - MMfS

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

- Review of achievements & planning for the next 12 months

**Soil Health** - 8 sessions, this included

- Understanding soil tests x 4
- Soil microbial activity
- Soil biology and earthworms
- Soil carbon - MMfS
- Secrets of healthy soil - MMfS

**Water Management** - 3 sessions, this included

- Water flow in the environment
- Looking at impressive stock watering system
- Water design in the landscape

**Members** have been involved in 10 field trips, 14 paddock walks and discussion, 26 workshops, 63 presentations, 17 member presentation and group discussion, 20 farm business tour and reviews, 2 farm business audit, 14 group review and planning sessions. 1 demonstration, 3 phone seminars and group discussion and 9 not defined.

**Workshops included** Sustainable Farming Families, Cost of Production, Grain & Graze and Scanning Ewes.

**Presentations** have been from Department of Primary Industries Extension Officers and researchers, Grain & Graze and private consultants.

**Level 3: People Involvement**

- There were 604 paid members in 36 groups coordinated by 17 coordinators
- Associates members numbered 637
- An Advisory Committee of 10 members including 4 grower representatives, one representative each from AWI and DPI, 1 coopted member, 1 Coordinator representative plus the project manager and administrator
- The management team included a project manager and an administrator

**Level 4: Reactions**

- Social interaction & exchange of ideas most important aspect
- Value access to good information & speakers

**Level 5: Changes in KASA**

There has been an increase in skills and knowledge in the areas of understanding weather forecasting, production systems, feed budgeting, how profitable businesses work, understanding soil health and soil tests, pasture management and grazing management.


○ Learnt how to calculate Cost of Production and	○ Planning session - Emphasis on measurement
--	--



develop enterprise benchmarks and develop strategies to reduce cost of production	and application & not the learning - Group filled out MMFS quiz
o Use of clip description in marketing clip	o Grazing management Soil biodynamic processes
o How to review your business establish, regular disciplined family meetings and strategic planning	o How a very profitable business goes about their planning, research, evaluation and implementation
o Better understanding of ruminant nutrition	o Lucerne pasture management
o Benefits of high fecundity sheep and genetic gain	o Issues surrounding the use of super on pastures when the price is \$550/t
o Current legislation re agricultural chemical use and the implications	o Techniques to improve lamb finishing ensuring meat are tender and not dark cutting
o Identifying the strengths and weaknesses in pastures and how to best deal with the weaknesses	o Participants have really adopted this new crop grazing technology and as a result more of them are applying the knowledge
o Grazing crops - many were surprised at how shorter time it takes for them to grow back to their normal state the extra value and feed that could be obtained from their crops and the stage at which grazing should begin	o Participants gained skills in the following areas: Comparing fertiliser prices per kg nutrient and comparing the cost/benefit of harvesting options
o A better understanding of different weather terminology. They also found out how some weather predictions are made and got an idea of their reliability	o Understanding of how drench resistance develops and what the current district situation is. A general approach to achieving sustainable animal health program for sheep
o How to identify crops at GS 30, How to understand the yield predictor described in 'The Break' newsletter	o Financial Planning. How to enter figures into a spreadsheet and recognise the profitability of the different enterprises on their farm
o Update on operation of SGA, and what it offers lamb and wool producers	o Use of options and futures to buy feed & understanding of the Agency Industry
o Making better use of natural immunity in sheep health program. Pushing the limits - only drench if > 300 epg. Aiming for less than 1 drench/head/ann.	o From today participants have gained knowledge in property design, water in the landscape. Keyline principles and aeration with Yeoman's plough
o Management of cereal crops within pasture systems	o Measurement of pasture & fat scoring stock
o Change following this day. Simplify shearing operation. Lamb Sept, not August, not joining maidens, change time of joining	o Understanding how to work out how much fertiliser to put on for maintenance and to increase soil levels of different nutrients
o Strategies to control weeds in pastures particularly barley grass	o Value of Lucerne confirmed, pasture establishment and management techniques
o During this program the participants learnt how to better manage their personal health and well being. They learnt health assessment skills. They learnt how to read food and product labels. They refreshed their knowledge of farm OH&S	o The benefits of early sowing - using appropriate sowing fertilizer & cereals for winter feed, better grazing management to grow more feed and sustain pastures. The importance of spring weeds control before sowing. Monitoring crop and pasture sowing to control RLEM
o How to plan and put out a set of fertiliser test strips	o Key issues being considered under soil health. Current practises to improve soil health
o Why, what, how and when to successfully	o More able to spray weeds effectively

pasture crop to enhance the existing perennial pasture base and provide additional management options	Strategies to control Barley Grass Hedging to reduce price risk Flock structure changes to maintain a merino Female base
○ How the sheep genetics program works. How it can be used on farm to improve the genetic merit of stock	○ Sow early for winter feed Use of DAP as a sowing fertiliser Fire damage to pasture can be variable - it is better to assess pastures before sowing
○ Improved farm business management awareness. Market knowledge and strategies for implementing a selling program	○ Management opportunities with native pastures. Opportunities for including Lucerne in a pasture program
○ Understanding of the detrimental impact of chemicals on soil ecology	○ Some of the farmers that do not currently scan will look at doing this in 2009

## Level 6: Changes in Practice

Practice changes noted were personal health goals, scanning ewes, grazing crops and management, improve fertiliser program, follow climate maps, soil testing and use clips and condition scoring to achieve better outcomes on farm.

○ Some more inclined to use clips when next lamb marking, rather than surgical mulesing	○ A few more farmers will look at scanning this year due to the information presented
○ Several said they were empowered to follow the climate maps on the web more closely and subscribe to "The Break" newsletter	○ The discussion on soil moisture availability prompted group members to make decisions on sowing dates
○ Need to improve my fertiliser program, will manage ryegrass better could grow phalaris on our lesser paddocks, will use rotational grazing - sowing annual ryegrass into perennials - need to balance spending on species and fertiliser	○ It was suggested that farmers have a look at condition scoring a few of their sheep and plot this on a graph - much like the LTEM groups. The MMFS quiz went well & provided me with plenty of information about what the group would like to learn in the future
○ Started grazing fodder crops & lucerne	○ May try self feeding oat crop for lambs
○ Better use of liming in their pasture program	○ Personal health goals changed
○ Will do more feed budgets & measure pasture growth rates	○ There is now a 3rd year & more formal action plans were completed
○ Good feedback from Perennial pastures visit to Mansfield (last meeting) visit More are planning to manage rye grass pastures to Re-seed in spring	○ One farmer is trialling ryecorn as an option for quick winter feed as a direct result of the presentation - interestingly, this member was not present on the day but was told about the presentation by another group member. The direct feedback from the activity was generally extremely positive
○ People said they are more aware of the benefits to soil of rotational grazing. Doing soil tests of sub-soil important From the Making more from sheep evaluation sheets filled out on the day Will you make any changes to your business based on the information provided today? 7 said YES 0 said No If YES, What is it likely to be?	○ Feedback from Review session conducted at the Euroa Women's Group  U:\07941\4 Groups\ 4.1 All Groups\Woora ○ Feedback from the Euroa Grazing Group review of bus trip to the SW district farms

<p>Rotational grazing Conduct deeper and more soil tests More soil tests at deeper depths &amp; rotational grazing Monitor soil more closely and treat accordingly Possibly re-examine soil tests and look at rotational grazing Soil tests from B horizon Extend soil testing to sub-soil Improve soil structure, add lime, direct disc into stubbles.</p>	 <p>U:\07941\4 Groups\ 4.1 All Groups\Euroa(</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Report to MLA re Maryborough PIRD</li> </ul>  <p>U:\07941\4 Groups\ Regional group\Repoi</p>
---	--

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

Members consider that BWBL has benefits of a personal nature which help with decision making on farm including improvements in self confidence.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This group originated from a Landcare group, so many sound environmental practises implemented through it's program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Group wants more structured notice of meeting times and so a list was drawn up of when they would occur</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Direct drilling crops into an existing pasture base instead of ploughing up paddocks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ More minimal till of crops. More frequent use of containment areas</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Looking at farmers having a learning log so that we can keep track of changes being made on farm as a result of meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ More members coming to group meetings &amp; staying longer, members interested in opening up their farms for inspection and visits</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The King Valley group has been meeting with the Ovens group - the network is expanding they enjoy the larger group discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use of alternative fertilisers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Started incorporating biodynamic fertilisers instead of conventional chemical-based fertilisers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ They have probably become more concerned about their future as yet another year comes and goes with difficult conditions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Members of the group have been involved in a number of research trials this year including Green Graze, Convention or Innovation- A Practical on farm trial and a Future Farm Study into Biodiversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul>

## References

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

Further relevant reports from BWBL coordinators