

Northern muster

Information for rural business in north Queensland

**Producing quality food and fibre
for a healthy bottom line**



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Issue 18 April 2008

editorial

Welcome to this edition of the *Northern muster*.

Many have had an exceptionally wet, wet season, yet other parts of the State are still experiencing low rainfall levels. There were also areas where there was major flooding with loss of livestock, infrastructure and facilities. Through all this, we regularly witness the resourcefulness of country people to overcome hurdles and move forward. Well done!

With these sort of seasons and industry issues of the dollar, fuel and fertilizer prices, it becomes even more important to plan better and work smarter. Producer groups are sourcing information and trialing new technologies. Many of these technologies and skills are able to make enterprises more profitable. We encourage you to take all opportunities to share and learn new skills.

This issue of the *Northern muster* looks at some project outcomes, Market Outlook, Dalrymple Diary, some disease and vaccination issues and more.

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Enjoy the newsletter, and call DPI&F on 13 25 23 for advice and contacting staff. Please fill out the Feedback Sheet and send it in.

We need to know what you are seeking, so let us know.

Thank you to the Editorial support team in Mareeba, Ayr and Rockhampton.

**Alan Laing
Editor**



Preg testing course in the Deep North... anybody interested??



Anyone interested in attending a pregnancy testing course at Malanda in August/September 2008, please call Rebecca Matthews, DPI&F Kairi (07) 4091 9416 or email rebecca.matthews@dpi.qld.gov.au to register your interest.

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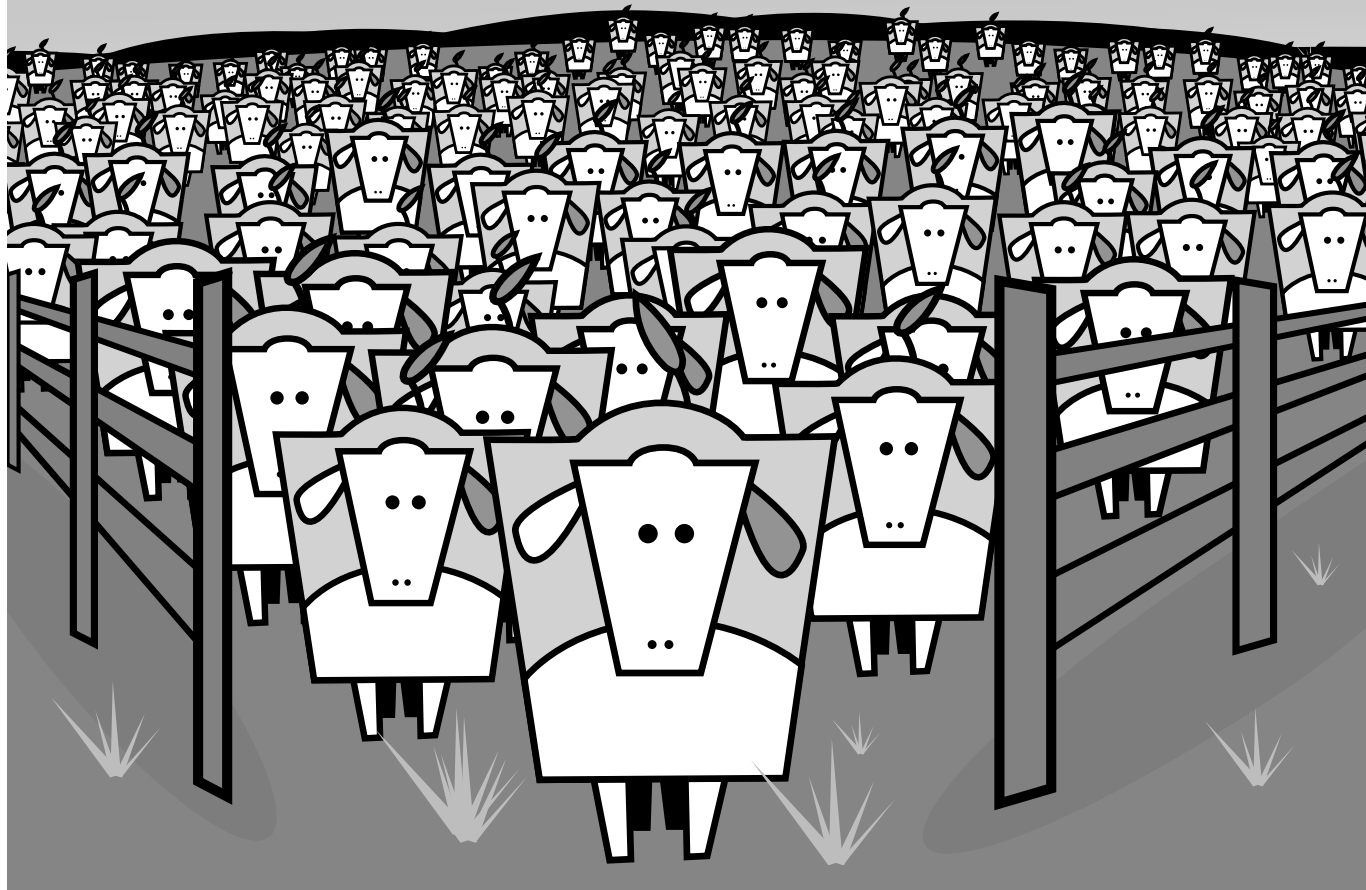
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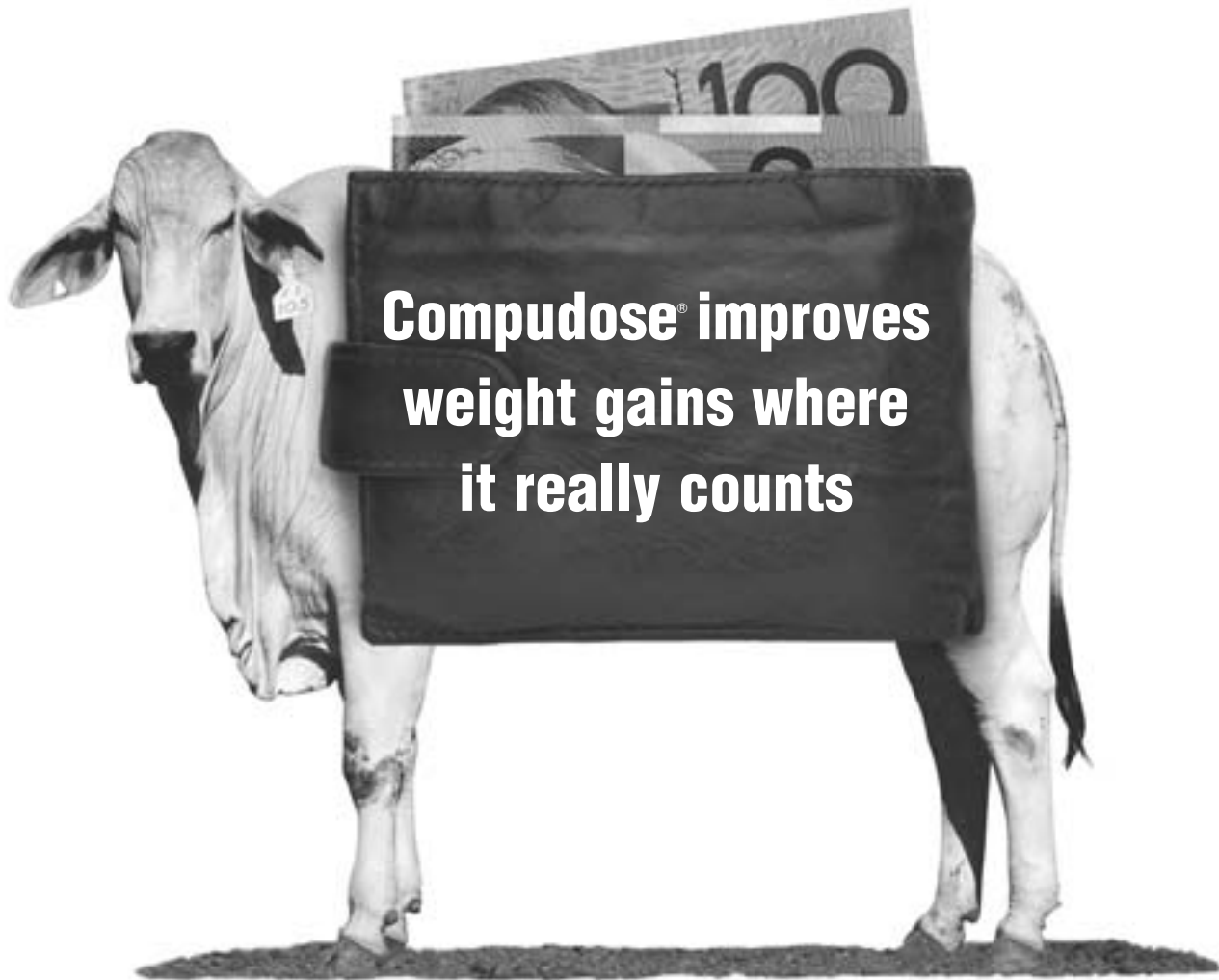
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Highlights from the SPIRAL project ('Strategic Partnerships Incentives for Revitalising Active Landcare') in the Burdekin Rangelands

The Year 3 project works have progressed well in recent months, despite the heavy rainfall across most of the Dalrymple shire during the wet season. As we head into March, the chance of more sunshine seems to be increasing, bringing with it opportunity for completion of on-ground works.

As the drier months approach, and the final year of the National Landcare Programme SPIRAL project draws to an end, we hope to see strong results, particularly those undertaken in early years of the project. Despite the end of the on-ground works, there is still subsidies available for further education and training as well as the Good Land Management Awards as detailed below.

Training subsidies for producers undertaking GPS and Computer Mapping courses: The subsidisation of up to 50% of costs for GPS training and Computer Mapping training will again be offered to landholders this year. Three workshops for GPS essentials and Computer Mapping have been booked with AgForward. For April and May 2008. Interested landholders should register with John Nicholas on phone (07) 4761 5170.

GLM training subsidies: The MLA Edge Network Grazing Land Management and other similar courses also qualify for subsidisation of 50% up to \$500/enterprise. Any landholder who is planning on undertaking any of these courses or other education and training programmes before June 2008 should contact John Nicholas to discuss eligibility for receiving these subsidies.

Clarke River and East Burdekin Project

The Clarke River and East Burdekin Project funded under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality is progressing well. Project Officer June Brundell has been busy reporting on progress to date of on-ground works projects. The significance of the projects in terms of on-ground change are also being mapped to show the extent and spread of the project.

Project Officer June Brundell will finish up with the Dalrymple Landcare Committee on Thursday 20 March, to pursue a role with Landcare in southern Queensland. Project co-ordination and supervision will be taken over by John Nicholas, who will be more than happy to follow on supporting landholders in their completion of on-ground works. June would like to take this opportunity to the all landholders who she has worked with for their support as well as the Committee for their assistance over the past 14 months.

Planning for the future – A new era for the Dalrymple Landcare Committee

Support for On-ground works during *Natural Heritage Trust Round 1 and 2* and through other on-ground incentives programmes offered through the National Landcare Programme and the Weeds of National Significance have bolstered the activity and involvement of the Dalrymple Landcare Committee.

However, at last years Annual General Meeting, the committee struggled to secure a chair for the group. Then chairperson, Sue Bennetto of *Virginia Park Station* stood down from the role after 3 years as Chairperson and has since taken up an active role as chair of the local AgForce branch. The diversity of issues being faced by landholders in the region and the wide and varied range of activities and research being undertaken in the Burdekin Rangelands is seeing many people gain insight and knowledge about the land in which we live on.

As 2008 marks 20 years of the Dalrymple Landcare Committee it is somewhat disappointing to see the group without a chair as it reaches this milestone. Looking back through the history of the group, before the days of incentive schemes, the group met to share knowledge and insight with one another and hear from guest speakers about issues that concerned landholders in the region. Despite Landcare group meetings falling in number each year, the quarterly general meeting of the DLC still offer insight into a range of grass-roots issues and I would urge landholders from around the shire to make it at least one of the four meetings held throughout the year to hear from the guest speakers and host landholders about how certain improvements on-property have helped them. Efforts to improve the information presented at these meetings will be made to ensure that simple facts are provided as well as a breakdown of the costs of implementing such improvements.

Keep a keen eye out for the next DLC General meeting in the region coming up in May 2008. All landcare groups and landholders from around the shire are invited to attend such meetings. In addition to this, the DLC will be holding a dinner to mark 20 years of Landcare in Dalrymple Shire in late April / early May to celebrate this milestone. I look forward to hearing and seeing many of you there to re-visit the achievements of Dalrymple Landcare Committee over this time.

Composed by

John Nicholas

Project Officer – SPIRAL Dalrymple Landcare Committee Inc.

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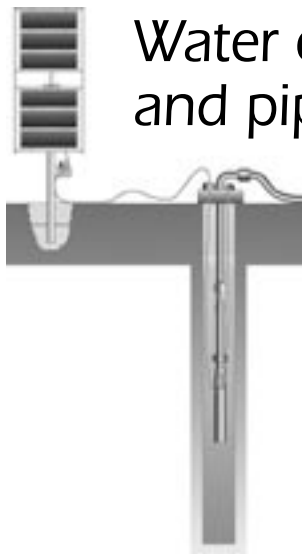
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Pinkeye vaccine now available in Australia

A pinkeye vaccine that has been extensively used internationally for over 15 years has recently been registered for use in Australian cattle. The vaccine is Coopers® PILIGUARD® Pinkeye-1 Trivalent Vaccine.

Dr Damian O'Brien (Veterinary Technical Advisor with Coopers Animal Health) said, 'Piliguard represents a significant step forward for Australian cattle producers in the fight against pinkeye. No longer do farmers have to rely solely on management factors such as fly and dust control to decrease the incidence of pinkeye in their herds. Pinkeye is a huge problem in many areas of Australia, with some farmers reporting up to 80% of calves affected in some years. The disease causes severe pain and suffering as well as significant production losses in affected cattle.'

Husbandry factors are important in assisting with the prevention of pinkeye. It is not advisable to rely solely on vaccination to guard against this readily transmittable disease. 'Traditionally in Australia, farmers have controlled pinkeye by controlling fly numbers, segregating affected stock and avoiding yarding animals in dry, dusty conditions. Piliguard will aid in the control of pinkeye but vigilance with these other management practices is still required', Dr O'Brien stated.

Coopers Piliguard pinkeye vaccine is a formalin inactivated, oil adjuvanted vaccine. This vaccine allows long lasting antigenic stimulation and thus only one initial vaccination is required for protection. The dose rate for Piliguard is 2 mL for all classes of cattle and it can be administered either intramuscularly or subcutaneously high into the side of the neck. Piliguard is available in 100 mL (50 dose) or 20 mL (10 dose) plastic bottles.

As pinkeye is most commonly seen in young stock, Coopers recommends that all calves (from 1 week of age) and replacement heifers should be vaccinated. 'The vaccine should be administered 3-6 weeks before the expected onset of the pinkeye season and then an annual booster should be given. Most farmers recognise pinkeye as being a problem in younger stock but if a general herd problem exists then Piliguard can certainly be used on the whole herd', Dr O'Brien said.

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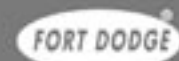
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¹ A single dose of Longrange will give protection on average within 3 to 6 months of an initial dose, and should confer protection for 12 months.



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Market report – February 2008

A lot of rain has fallen in some areas since our last report in November 2007. However, there are still areas of the state in drought, especially western Queensland and other districts where rainfall has been patchy. Generally speaking, the wet season has been satisfactory in north Queensland so far, but large areas of the Southern Gulf down across the Richmond – Mt Isa line need more rain.

Swifts abattoir, Townsville, has been open and shut several times with heavy rain in coastal districts disrupting mustering and cattle transport. We have also had reports of widespread three-day sickness cases especially to the south of Charters Towers.

At the time of writing this report, our dollar is 92.5 cents. This is bad news for our live export and meatworks prices. Store cattle prices in southern Queensland for cattle under 300 kg is above \$2/kg live. When the green grass fever runs out in several months, and if our dollar stays above 90 cents, cattle prices will be under downward pressure.

In mid February 2008, 65,000 tonnes of beef from a Californian abattoir in the USA was recalled after secret video evidence revealed cattle mistreatment and slaughtering of animals that could not walk. A lot of this beef would have been consumed already but the danger to us is if the American public react to the safety of eating beef.

Brazil is having problems in their EU market accessibility to do with traceability, causing a spike in demand and prices for EU accredited beef in Australia.

Domestic market

The Australian population is still eating beef, lamb and mutton with 2007 domestic consumption at 1.1 million tonnes, 6% up on 2006 with an estimated value of \$9 billion. Beef's share is estimated at \$6.6 billion.

2007 Tonnes beef and veal processed by state	
QLD	1.07 million tonnes
NSW	468,343 tonnes
VIC	379,119 tonnes
SA	87,993 tonnes
WA	118,800 tonnes
2007 total	2.18 million tonnes
	8.1 million head slaughtered including 3.85 million head of adult females
Estimated Australian cattle numbers for 2007 – 27.8 million head	

Primary industry gross value of production in Queensland was worth \$10.485 billion over the 2006-07 financial year with cattle contributing \$3.625 billion.

Predicting cattle price trends for 2008 is always difficult and as mentioned earlier, the value of our dollar will be important. The widespread rainfall will increase demand from droughted properties re-stocking, and producers not having to force sell cattle. Our feedlot sector is running at approximately 50% capacity so that cattle buying from this sector will be lower.

The USA economy slowdown will impact on demand, plus record numbers in their feedlots. Live exports are very sensitive to cattle price and we have an unhealthy reliance on one market at present – Indonesia.

Japan

Total Australian beef exports in 2007 were 941,000 tonnes, worth \$4.5 billion. Japan took 43% of this or \$1.9 billion worth.

The Japanese ate a total of 377,864 tonne of beef from Australia, 34,148 tonne from USA and 33,710 tonne from New Zealand. As our most important market, a lot of effort goes into marketing our clean green image and traceability. However, with our competitiveness affected by the value of our dollar and lower volumes of grain fed beef, trading conditions into this market will be tough this year. The US is still only getting small volumes into Japan but this could change at any time.

Live export

Australia's 2007 live exports had a four year high with 723,072 head exported, valued at \$516 million with Indonesia being our largest customer.

Main live export customers

Country	Live cattle 2007	Dairy cattle 2007
Indonesia	520,521	-
Israel	36,895	-
Malaysia	35,018	-
Philippines	20,370	-
Japan	21,083	-
Saudi Arabia	16,254	4,463
China	8,785	-
Mexico	-	22,167
Russia	-	6,975
Kuwait	-	4,479
Turkey	-	2,838

Prices for male cattle exported out of north Queensland in early 2008 have hovered around \$1.55/kg live.

There has been resistance to the price of our cattle in Indonesia, and they have begun looking for alternative live cattle sources with little success as yet. We also have welfare groups making a lot of noise to the government regarding animal welfare conditions on live export boats and pushing for the government to discontinue live exporting of sheep and cattle. These issues are adding much uncertainty to the future of our live export markets, especially in the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia that rely heavily on the live boat trade.

Korea

The important news in this market is that US beef is still only trickling in because of the BSE business. Australia exported 148,930 tonne into this market in 2007.

Korean beef imports

Country	2003	2006	Oct 2007
Australia	69,000 t	162,734 t	16,034 t
USA	224,036 t	0	3,071 t

The free trade agreement between Korea and the US has not happened yet and a new government will be in power in Korea in 2008, with elections in the USA later this year as well.

USA

There are several negative factors in the US markets this year, with record numbers in feedlots (12.1 million head) that will put a flush of beef into the market place and place downward pressure on prices. The economy is running a bit flat, our dollar is making our prices unattractive, and competition from Uruguay is increasing. We exported 296,099 tonnes to the USA during 2007.

After the *E. coli* trouble in ground beef in America in 2007, all imported beef will have to be tested for *E. coli* from January 2008. This will add extra costs for our meat marketing companies.

Bernie English

Extension Officer, DPI&F Kairi

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Positive changes in the north...

It is pleasing to kick around extensive beef enterprises in the far north and see on-ground success stories. Through the \$avannaPlan program our beef team works with over 100 properties in Cape York, the Northern Gulf and the Mt Garnet to Greenvale area. Here is a snapshot of what some beef producers are doing to improve their country and profits.

Since taking ownership of a property several years ago, one producer reports weight gain increases from 50-60 kg/head/year to 130 kg/head/year in some paddocks due to wet season spelling, lower stocking rates and targeted supplementation.

One enterprise reduced breeder numbers from 2000 to 1200 head, but continued to brand the same number of calves each year and increased weaning weights. Feeding costs have been substantially reduced, breeder paddocks are responding to lower stocking rates and perennial grasses are regenerating.

Sixteen of the 37 businesses engaged in \$avannaPlan in the northern Gulf are undertaking wet season pasture spelling practices. Depending on the paddock, wet season spelling has resulted in substantial improvements in pasture yield and cover within 1-4 years. Recovery of 3P (perennial, palatable and productive) grasses is taking longer on some properties.

Another enterprise runs most of their breeding herd across three paddocks, two of which are spelled each wet season for 4-5 months. At any one time there is a paddock being spelled for a second consecutive wet season. Pastures have thickened and set seed and 3P grasses are increasing.

Many producers are tightening calving windows through pregnancy testing to identify and cull empty cows or those cows calving out of season. Controlled mating has been implemented on at least two properties with success. These producers advise a 'gradual swing' across to controlled mating and warn that calving rates will suffer initially.

Two producers have used fire, mechanical means and re-seeding to transform frontage country previously choked with woody weeds. Carrying capacity has improved on these areas from a beast to 20 ha to a beast to 4 ha.

Twelve properties have enlisted a professional facilitator to run family meetings to resolve succession issues. These include asset transfer, family communication and roles and responsibilities of family members in the beef business. Most of these families are in the process of handing over the operation and are finding simple ways to combine the experience of the older generation with the enthusiasm and new ideas of the younger generation. Some families run regular operational meetings to keep the communication lines open and avoid major 'blow ups.'

One property owner has mapped large areas that presently run half the cattle historically carried. Areas are being fenced off and spelled until land condition and carrying capacity improves.

Obtaining the correct supplementary feeding intakes/head is a key part of running a profitable herd. Generally, phosphorus intakes during the wet are too low and protein intakes in the dry are too high and too costly. A few properties keep track of supplement intakes and costs/head. One property carrying 3500 head spends \$29 head/year on wet and dry season supplements and production feeding mixes. The Smart Manager Project, which included herd and financial benchmarking across 100 northern properties, found those who spent more on licks and other cattle costs were more profitable.

Several properties have taken on agistment as a means of guaranteeing annual income to service large debts. Some agistment paddocks have been severely degraded from decades of overstocking with little or no wet season spelling. A mid-wet season visit to one of these properties was depressing with bugged all perennial grass and less cover than hair on my head. A subsequent visit to this property at the break of season (December), 19 months later, was uplifting with evidence of spelling, old feed and ground cover to ensure a good response to the coming wet season. This producer has adjusted stocking rates and is very determined to have feed reserves up to the break of season.

'I can't stand the worry and I know the country won't respond to rain if it is bare. Having paddocks in good condition with feed on hand is essential for our business,' he said.

Some properties are also introducing softer bulls to their herd, and reaping the benefits of crossbreeding, to meet premium store markets. These producers are careful to retain high grade Brahmans as their core breeding herd. Many producers are reporting premium prices at the saleyards and in the paddock for good type, temperament, weight for age, and presentation.

The FNQ Beef Team consists of Rebecca Matthews, Bernie English, Jim Kernot, Kev Shaw and myself. Our \$avannaPlan partners include Northern Gulf Resource Management Group, terrain, Burdekin Dry Tropics and Cape York Landcare.

Joe Rolfe
Senior Extension Officer, Kairi
Ph (07) 4091 9424



Guiding primary producers to software solutions

From laptops in the shed, precision tools in the field and supply chain management in the market, there has been an explosion in the amount of software now available to primary producers.

'The modern farm is constantly being challenged to increase the productivity of its systems and processes: a challenge increasingly being met by the adoption of computer software,' Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries Tim Mulherin said.

'A problem though has been tracking down the right software for your business - until now.

'Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Rural Information Specialist JoAnn Resing has just completed an audit of all farm software available in Australia, something that hasn't been done since 1999, when just 175 applications were listed.

'The new millennium has seen a massive increase in the software available to the primary production sector.

'The audit discovered over 1500 software titles, with over 650 currently being distributed and used in Australia.

'What DPI&F has come up with is the *Australian Farm Software Directory*, a free publication that acts as a guide to software.

'It can be used to find software in three ways: flipping through a software product catalogue, using a subject index to find software for a specific industry or searching for products made by a particular developer.'

'The directory covers a huge number of topics from animal health to insecticides and plant equipment.

'At the touch of a computer key information such as a flowering calculator to CASHmanager rural to a piggery assessment spreadsheet is available.'

Ms Resing said computers were now a must-have business tool, but buying the right software to make the day-to-day enterprise run more efficiently was still a task.

'I am hoping the *Australian Farm Software Directory* becomes a bit of a reference bible for primary producers, letting them quickly source a list of software that they can review, and then choose the one that is appropriate for their needs.'

She said the directory was also being used by software developers, as a reference of what is already available, and where there are gaps in the market.

The *Australian Farm Software Directory* was created as part of a larger research project on farm software and was funded by the Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation.

For instructions on accessing the free download and on how to best use *The Australian Farm Software Directory* visit www.dpi.qld.gov.au.



Tackling pest animal issues

My name is Mike Spinaze. I have been employed as a Pest Animal Coordinator in a project funded by the Queensland State Government under the Blueprint for the Bush program. There are also contributions from the Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM, Burdekin Shire Council, Charters Towers City Council, Dalrymple Shire Council, Hinchinbrook Shire Council, Townsville City Council and Thuringowa City Council.

This project is funded for two years with the aim to identify and implement Best Practice management and control programs for feral pigs and wild dogs in the HESROC group of Local Governments.

In conjunction with Local and State Land Protection Officers, I will be assisting land owners and managers to better control their feral pig and wild dog issues to reduce the impacts on their enterprises and the environment.

The formation of local syndicates with ownership by all local land managers has been a proven method of pest animal control in many regions of Australia. This alleviates costs and increases the effectiveness of pest animal management. These syndicates need to have representation from all land managers in the area including Local, State and Federal Governmental Bodies. The formation of these syndicates allow for better financial and environmental outcomes by;

- Better coordination of programs by applying a nil tenure approach
- Reduction in duplication of effort

- Asset and resource sharing
- Alignment of Pest Management Plans across tenure types
- Data, statistics and information sharing
- Improve the community image of Government Agencies, farmers and graziers as land managers
- Training and skills sharing
- Assists landholders in meeting their requirements under the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002
- Increasing effectiveness of effort by reducing the numbers over larger areas of land slowing down reinfestation rates
- Collaboration of research into Best Practice methodology

A meeting with Local, State and Federal (Military) Government Land Managers took place at Thuringowa in early February. A general consensus was reached to aim towards a Memorandum of Understanding between Government agencies to be signed off this year. In the mean time agencies such as QPWS will join in local feral pig and wild dog management programs.

A meeting with sugar cane growers in the Burdekin has resulted in the implementation of 1080 baiting of feral pigs on a number of occasions with excellent results. We have also set up 4 traps to soak up any pigs between baiting episodes.

Feral pigs are a huge issue to not only the horticultural industry but also to cattle producers. There is environmental damage to pastures especially flood country and riverbanks, dams and watering



Feral pig activity where diseases can be spread to other livestock

points. They can also carry many diseases which affect cattle and humans. These include:

- Brucellosis (Endemic)
- Murray Valley Encephalitis (Endemic)
- Leptospirosis (Endemic)
- Melioidosis (Endemic)
- Sparganosis (Endemic)
- Q fever (Endemic)
- Ross river virus (Endemic)
- Japanese encephalitis (Exotic)
- Trichinosis (Exotic)
- Rabies (Exotic)
- Screw worm fly (Exotic)

The use of 1080 baits is the cheapest and most effective way to knock down large numbers of pigs. And if done late in the dry and after mustering, only involves baiting around water holes and

watering points. Any baits not picked up by pigs are concentrated around the waters and will be inactivated by the first substantial storm.

Landholders interested in tackling their feral pig/wild dog issues can see me at the Dalrymple Shire dog baiting days. If a number of graziers wish to meet at a neighbour's property, I am more than willing to meet them.

My contact details are Ph (07) 4783 9871 or mike.spinaze@burdekin.qld.gov.au



Review supports continued use of 1080

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) endorsed recent Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority's (APMVA) findings into environmental impacts of sodium fluoroacetate (1080), the poison used for feral animal control.

The review, held by the national body responsible for the assessment and registration of pesticides and veterinary medicines, also examined the labelling and use of sodium fluoroacetate (1080).

Biosecurity Queensland, (DPI&F) Land Protection manager, Kevin Strong, said DPI&F, Biosecurity Queensland, accepts the APVMA's new regulations and already has in place a clear set of requirements and guidelines.

'Mandatory labelling changes are being introduced into our feral animal control programs,' Mr Strong said.

Mr Strong said the AMPVA review was satisfied that with the new introduced changes to labelling and registration conditions, the continued use of 1080 was unlikely to cause significant harm to the environment or other species.

He said Biosecurity Queensland accepted the changes and would in addition put more stringent conditions where necessary.

Mr Strong said while Biosecurity Queensland supported research by the Invasive Animals

Cooperative Research Centre into alternative toxins, it would continue to use 1080 as it was the most effective, humane and environmentally-low impact poison currently available.

Biosecurity Queensland, DPI&F, will continue researching impacts on other animals affected by 1080 in its integrated feral pig management program to provide information to the AMPVA on longer term environmental outcomes.

Mr Strong thanked the AMPVA for its findings and continued work to safeguard the Australian environment.

Kelly Murphy
Media officer, Biosecurity Queensland
Ph (07) 3239 3014





Improving Burdekin beef profits – Research to Reality project

Imagine 10 years ago (or even two) neighboring graziers sitting around a table not merely discussing their financial details, but scrutinizing their intimate banking and financial statements as well.

While cattlemen from older generations might not believe, and scoff at the thought, such was the case last week in Charters Towers. Where 25 such cattle graziers, from all parts of the district met, not merely to discuss their relative finances, but to compare management strategies and be briefed by a team of modern day experts of the rapidly changing beef growing industry.

It is the modern day approach to cattle producing and the cattlemen are all part of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management and DPI&F project titled Research to Reality - a model based on the highly successful national and award winning concept - the Beef CRC's Beef Profit Partnerships whose initiative is to improve beef business profits by at least five per cent in two years.

Research to Reality, the local version of Beef Profit Partnerships was developed two years ago by Charters Towers based DPI&F Senior Project Officer Brigid Nelson and last week's conference was the celebration of round one.

The vibes, and very visible camaraderie among the graziers, indicated it's a project well and truly worth the early agonizing and effort.

'The outcomes couldn't have been better,' said Brigid as she enthusiastically recounted how the producers had supported each other, and adapted new management strategies in their own backyards.

'The whole idea of the project is to give producers the skills and the capacity to make decisions on their properties so they can improve sustainability and profitability. And help each other.'

It is really that simple.

The project, funded by not-for-profit Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM, is divided into three areas, Belyando, Collinsville and Northern Speargrass. Most of the project's graziers, though some severely hindered by the heavy rains in the Belyando River area, made it to the two day conference at which they gave and discussed individual summaries of their enterprise profit indicators over the preceding two financial years.

According to Mrs Nelson there were some very positive outcomes, with all participants eagerly anticipating round two of the project.

'They're receiving tailored support for implementation of their projects. These include innovative property development design for integration of wet season spelling into the beef business, and investigation into animal nutrition for improving first calf heifer performance', she said.

The R2R project is in its final six months and the producers are busy working on their projects. A number of field days open to the grazing community will be held from April through to June. These will cover the profitability of wet season spelling, animal nutrition, and succession planning – look out for these events.

Terry Butts Freelance Journalist and
Brigid Nelson Senior Project Officer, DPI&F
Ph (07) 4761 5158



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Fuel tax credit changes

Fuel tax credits provide most businesses with a credit for the fuel tax (or excise duty) included in the price of fuel used in business related activities.

From 1 July 2008 the eligibility criteria will expand which means most fuels (including diesel and petrol) used in business will be eligible for fuel tax credits. This includes fuel used in a variety of tools, machinery, plant, equipment and heavy vehicles greater than 4.5 gross vehicle mass (GVM).

The credit, depending on type of fuel and activity would range from 19 to 38 cents per litre.

Below is a link to the ATO website and to a current information product which relates to fuel tax credits. Please note that this information product will be updated soon to include the eligibility criteria expansion.

<http://www.ato.gov.au/fuelschemes>

http://www.ato.gov.au/content/downloads/n15397_01_2007.pdf

from the Australian Tax Office

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Your farm, whose future?

If you are one of the many family owned farms in the region, you don't need to be told that family farming is pretty unique. The farm is not just a place of work, it is also a residence, a career and often a family tradition. In this context, how you plan and manage succession, inheritance and retirement on family farms can get complicated, because three objectives are being juggled:

- how to maintain a viable farm business
- how to treat all the children (and their families) fairly
- how to provide for your own retirement.

And that's not even mentioning the different views often held by different generations about things like business structure!

A recent farm succession study, undertaken by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), found that there is generally more discussion relating to succession and inheritance issues within Australian farm families, compared with other countries. Just over half had identified a successor for their farm business, most likely a son. However, the study also found that properties greater than 50 000 hectares were less likely to have identified a successor. The study also found that farmers tend not to consider succession before the age of 50.

The report concluded that the difficulty in making decisions about succession often results in families avoiding the issue altogether. One family member was quoted in the report to say:

'This issue is the most underrated impediment to business performance. From my experience, differences between generations and siblings can stall business development for a decade or more, until the issue is dealt with openly.'

If any of this sounds familiar, the good news is that there is a heavily subsidised programme to support succession planning for family businesses in the Gulf Savannah and Atherton Tablelands right now.

Gulf Savannah Development (GSD) has AusIndustry funding to help businesses in the Gulf Savannah and Atherton Tablelands to pass over to the next generation. Until 30 June 2008, a maximum of 30 businesses in the Gulf Savannah and Tablelands are able to develop succession plans, at minimal cost to their business. The succession plan is developed through a facilitated 1-day family business meeting.

What does GSD provide?

- a professional succession planning facilitator and note-taker

- catering and venue hire, as required.

What do you need to do?

- organise participation from your family members and confirm a date
- organise inputs from your lawyer and accountant, and meet their costs
- pay 20% of the professional fee of the succession planning facilitator.

The first businesses to register and confirm a time for the family meeting will be eligible. This programme is available for any businesses in the Gulf Savannah and Atherton Tablelands. References are available from others who have been through this programme.

Please contact GSD on 1800 630 119 or info@gulf-savannah.com.au for more information or to register your interest. The RIRDC report can be found on the web at www.rirdc.gov.au.

Understanding business risk from a financial perspective

Financiers are in the business of understanding your management risk profile and your industry risk profile. Financiers are essentially silent partners in your business. However, they will set targets to be met, and this is to ensure that the business is not overly exposed to risks.

To better understand what a financier may be assessing, you need to analyse and be aware of:

- Account performance;
- Financial data;
- General information; and
- Industry trends.

In the coming *Northern Musters* I will be providing information on the above mentioned four points.

In this issue I will briefly cover security.

Security

What is an acceptable level of equity based on security held? There is no correct answer to this, remember financial institutions are in the business of understanding risk and lending money. With regard to security they generally assess the market value and then adopt an extension value. Think of this as a safety net, should there be an event of default. The extension value is around 60% for freehold land in main stem agriculture. For example: your \$1 million property is valued at \$1 million, it is then adopted by the financiers as \$600,000, the extended value. If you are borrowing say \$800,000 to buy that \$1 million property then there is a security shortfall of \$200,000 or 25%. They may still lend the money but the interest rate may

compensate for the shortfall and associated risk.

Note: the equation to calculate your extended value percentage is:

$((\text{property value} \times 60\%) \div \text{borrowings} \times 100 = y\%)$
y% is your extension value or level of securitised equity.

From this, you can determine your equity on an extended value basis; which will impact on your risk profile. A point to consider is that not all financiers will have 60% as their extension ratio, some maybe higher and some maybe lower. The general result will be the same; a low risk customer at one institution will be a low risk customer at another institution.

Should you need to discuss your financial situation in more detail please contact

Mareeba Alison Larard 4048 4640
Innisfail Ian Jackson 4064 1133
Townsville Gavin Solinas 4722 2633
Bowen Tom Mullins 4761 4000 or
Mackay/Proserpine Richard Lewis 4967 0715.

Information sources:

Australian Prudential Regulation Authority – please refer to www.apra.gov.au/

The QRAA rural debt survey provides useful insights into this field - please refer to <http://www.qraa.qld.gov.au/>

The Australian Bankers Association has additional information and insights – please refer to Financing Your Farm www.bankers.asn.au/

Evan Burt

Agricultural Economist, DPI&F Charters Towers
Ph (07) 4761 5168

Still on the trail of tails

There was widespread response to the tail rot article published in the previous issue of the *Northern Muster*. Producers and animal health professionals from a wide area of Queensland and the Northern Territory responded. In the Northern Territory, replies came from Katherine and Tennant Creek. Queensland responses came from Clermont, Hughenden, Mackay, Nebo, Home Hill, Townsville, Charters Towers, Mt Garnet, Herberton and Croydon.

Many thanks to all those people who gave their valuable time to discuss their experience with tail rot. You have helped compile information from reported cases in terms of cattle condition, possible causes and/or related environmental factors, and extent of the problem. Individual properties have reported 12 or more animals affected each year and consider it to be a production issue. Others have only experienced 1 or 2 cases occasionally. Treatment of the condition by amputation of the tail well above the infected area seems consistent across northern Australia.

It has occurred on cracking clay soils in hot, humid and wet weather where mud and faeces stick to the tail and a crushing injury is thought to trigger infection. It has also been reported in high rainfall areas on sandy/spewy soils with higher numbers affected in the wet season. However, other areas found no pattern in occurrence, with cases occurring at any time of the year.

One producer suggested a possible link with bacteria carried on the thorns of Chinese Apple. Another thought a restriction of blood flow by an encircling fungal infection may cause the rot, after a similar looking infection on the family dog was successfully treated. Furthermore, a producer questioned if it

could be associated with external parasites such as mites and flies and possible allergies.

Some commonalities that appeared included a higher incidence in Brahmans. This was observed by those who had composites such as Santa Gertrudis, and/or European crossbreds among their herd. Could this be a result of genetic differences and/or different management practices? Do people treat their softer crossbreds with pour-ons or insecticides that inadvertently protect them from the rot?

Perhaps it is simply a case of proportion with a much larger number of high grade Brahmans across northern Australia than composite, crossbred or European cattle?

Response also included mention of previous sample analysis and investigation with varied results but respondents were unable to recall contact details of the people involved with such investigations. Has anyone in the reading audience been directly involved, or know people that have been involved with previous investigations into this problem? Any information would be greatly appreciated so that it can be shared with the rest of the industry. Also, has anyone ever taken a photo of the condition?

There is still much to be learned about tail rot in cattle including causes, better treatment methods and prevention. With professional help and the continued support of *Northern Muster* readers, hopefully these jigsaw pieces will come together and we can all be better informed. I welcome any further comments or sharing of information regarding your experiences with tail rot in your herd.

Rebecca Matthews

DPI&F Beef Extension Officer, Kairi
Ph (07) 4091 9416

Plan now to battle three day sickness next season

Three-day sickness affected herds in the Bowen and Burdekin districts recently.

Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries beef extension officer Alan Laing said the water-logged conditions were perfect breeding grounds for biting insects that could spread the viral disease, also known as ephemeral fever.

Mr Laing said that animals that had been vaccinated in the lead up to the wet season would have the greatest chance of withstanding the disease.

'Animals in north Queensland should be vaccinated in September, so this is a timely reminder of what can happen and why vaccination is so important,' Mr Laing said.

Three-day sickness usually affects stock for about three days. It causes high fever and joint inflammation. Animals are reluctant to get on their feet and are visually stiff when they attempt to walk.

When cattle are down, provision of feed, water and shade is important for their recovery but a decision on euthanasia should be made early to avoid any suffering.

For animals aged 30 months or older, which are to be euthanised, stockowners should contact a DPI&F Biosecurity Queensland officer or private veterinarian to collect a brain sample. A payment of \$150 is available for brain samples which are collected for testing to verify Australia's freedom from Mad Cow Disease.

Valuable animals (for example, bulls and next years bullocks) should be considered for vaccination at the start of the three-day season. Losses without vaccination can be substantial.

Alan Laing

*Extension Officer (Beef) Ayr DPI&F
Ph (07) 4720 5115*

BVDV Technical Advisory Group announce high cost of Pestivirus disease

It can cost an Australian cattle producer \$60,000 and take 8 years to get over the 'first hit' of infection with Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Virus (BVDV, or Bovine Pestivirus). This may happen if your herd has no immunity to BVDV, and becomes exposed from an outside source.

These figures represent the economic impact of a BVDV outbreak in a 250 cow, self replacing beef herd in southern Australia, and amounts to an average annual loss of \$30 per cow.

'At least one in ten beef herds maybe at risk of experiencing this high level of loss,' says Prof. Michael McGowan, Chair of the BVDV Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and Professor of Livestock Medicine in the School of Veterinary Science, University of Queensland.

The new data comes from the BVDV TAG, a group of leading veterinary researchers and practising veterinarians who provide services to dairy and beef herds and feedlots across Australia, and Dr Phil Holmes, a research veterinarian with a special interest in disease modelling.

'Estimating the economic impact of an outbreak

of BVDV in an immunologically naïve beef herd is the first of many scenarios using dynamic system modelling,' says Prof McGowan.

'What's good about this system is that it's 'fluid' and allows current cattle practices, and different herd set ups to be modelled', explained Phil Holmes. Our next step is to assess the economic impact of this disease in herds where

- BVDV is endemic
- chronic infection is present
- BVDV herd status is unknown
- And for both the beef and dairy industry in different regions throughout Australia.

Determining herd status, or the level of BVDV infection in a herd using serological profiling is becoming more common. This is being encouraged as a first step in a management program for BVDV.

The BVDV serology testing campaign, a Pfizer Australia-wide initiative for producers, coordinated by Dr Lee Taylor (PAH veterinarian) has found that from the 100 beef and dairy herds tested so far, 80% of herds have active BVDV infection and this is more likely to be in younger cattle (1-2 year olds). The Pfizer program aims to determine if a herd is likely to be infected with BVDV based on targeted testing of small number of animals from specific age groups of heifers and cows.

'We expected this high level of infection - it agrees

with what has been found in earlier surveys for BVDV, says Dr Peter Kirkland. Dr Kirkland is a TAG member and Principal Research Scientist, Virology Laboratory, Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, NSW.

Despite this apparently high level of infection, there are still herds that can be easily identified which appear free of BVDV infection. This means they are susceptible to BVDV infection from outside sources. In 10% of all herds tested, all sampled animals were negative, that is, no evidence of previous exposure to BVDV and thus susceptible to infection.

More herds are due to be tested, comments Peter Kirkland. Together with herd histories, this will help us get an insight into the extent of the problem and the best options for control of BVDV.

Guidance for sampling and testing protocols, and control measures are outlined in the Australian guidelines for the investigation and control of BVDV in beef and dairy herds, and feedlots. These were developed by the BVDV TAG.

The BVDV TAG is also actively involved in a number of ongoing research projects and field trials, aimed at effectively managing this disease. These include the Pestigard® heifer vaccination trial (Professor Michael McGowan, Dr John Morton and Dr Nancy Phillips), the MLA funded Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) project (Dr John Morton and Prof Michael McGowan) and the impact of persistently infected (PI) animals in feedlots (Dr Enoch Bergman).

For more information please contact

Pfizer Technical Services on 1800 814 883 or
Email: australia.animalhealth@pfizer.com

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Australian Rangeland Society 15th Biennial Conference

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'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands'

The Australian Rangeland Society will host its next Conference in Charters Towers from Sunday 28 September to Thursday 2 October 2008.

The conference is an opportunity for managers, carers and users of the Rangelands to get the latest technical information from some of Australia's best researchers and rangeland managers. The conference will cover the areas of:

- natural resource management
- conservation and biodiversity
- environmental risk management
- multiple land use
- tourism and mining in the rangelands
- sustainability indicators
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- stewardship
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- land restoration.

On line registration will available on the site from March 2008.

<http://www.austrangesoc.com.au/conferences.asp>



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