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# BEEF TALK

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## Welcome to Beeftalk: Issue 49

Queensland experiences some of the most variable rainfall in the world. After a hot, dry summer, Severe Tropical Cyclone Debbie brought relief rain and floods for some, however over 66 per cent of Queensland remains drought declared. In June, the Queensland Drought Mitigation Centre (QDMC) was officially launched. QDMC is a partnership between the Queensland Government and the University of Southern Queensland and is part of the Queensland Government's new Drought and Climate Adaption Program (DCAP).

The Queensland Government is providing \$17.5 million over the next five years to DCAP focused on improving drought preparedness and resilience for Queensland producers to benefit the long-term productivity of the agri-business sector and the Queensland economy. To learn more about DCAP and also view a fascinating chart representing nine extended wet and dry periods since 1889 visit [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au).

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries also welcomes three new FutureBeef extension staff contributing to DCAP, Jane Tincknell in Longreach and Andrea Wiles and Jed Sommerfield in Charleville.

In this issue of Beeftalk, Grazing Best Management Practice (BMP) program accredited producers Bill and Sue Roffey describe benefits they have gained from attending BMP workshops and becoming accredited. Grazing BMP promotes developing business plans which cover many areas of the business such as biosecurity, animal welfare and risk. Certainly biosecurity plans are very topical with the new requirements for Johne's disease and Livestock Production Assurance. The 'Biosecurity plans protect business' article outlines the general biosecurity obligation of all livestock owners and where to get more information to develop a plan.

We also want your feedback to improve the Grazing BMP project. We are interested in the views of all graziers, whether or not you have been involved. Give your views via a short anonymous survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/GrazingBMP](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GrazingBMP).

**Beeftalk team.**

# Be on the lookout for fireweed

A dry summer followed by winter rain is ideal for fireweed infestations in South East Queensland.

Fireweed is a threat to producers because it is invasive, poisonous and can spread quickly by wind, stock, vehicles and in stockfeed. Although fireweed is generally unpalatable to cattle, poisoning is most likely to occur where infestation is dense, stock cannot selectively graze, there is not much pasture and if young stock – or stock not previously exposed to fireweed – are introduced to fireweed infested paddocks. Poisoning reduces livestock growth and in severe cases may cause death.


Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*) is an annual or short-lived perennial herb which competes strongly with pasture. In dry conditions it may be less than 20cm tall with narrow leaves, no branching and few flowers. However in ideal conditions it can grow to 50–

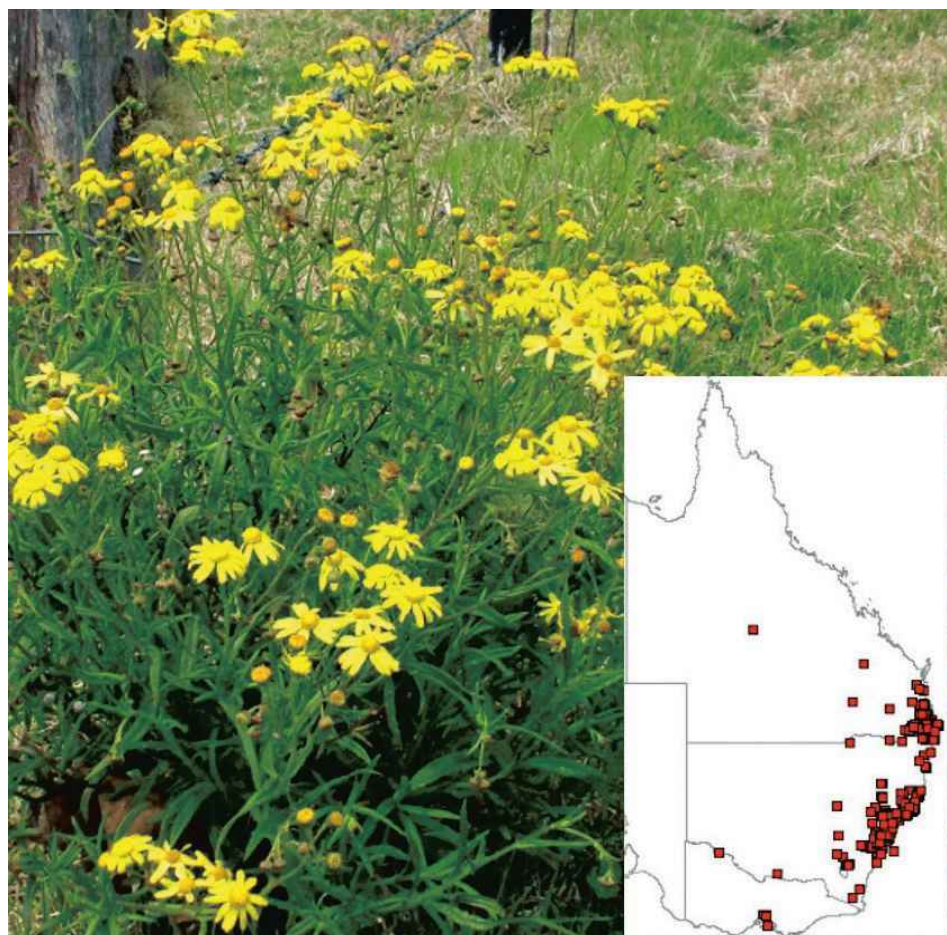
60cm tall with multiple branches, long, wide leaves and numerous flowers. It has canary yellow, daisy-like flower heads, most with 13 petals. Leaves alternate along the stems, their shape is mostly narrow with slightly curved and finely toothed edges leading to a pointed tip. Seedling leaves may be red underneath and green on top.

It is a restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. This means you have a general biosecurity obligation to take practical steps to control it. Integrated management strategies work best, such as using herbicides and mechanical methods in addition to maintaining strong permanent pastures that can compete with fireweed seedlings.

Early detection and removal is vital to prevent fireweed from establishing on your property. Where you have small infestations the key is to act immediately, pull out all plants using gloves and if flowering place in a sealed bag and destroy. Aim to restrict seedling emergence, control seedlings early and prevent seed set and spread. The key is to identify fireweed when it is young so you can remove and control plants before they flower and set seed.

Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*) is similar to a range of native *Senecio* species. The 13 petals on the flower head, the lance shaped leaves and narrow, vertical green bracts on the head of the plant are key features to distinguish it from most native *Senecio*. If unsure contact your local biosecurity officer and have them identify a sample. More information about how to identify fireweed is available at [www.business.qld.gov.au](http://www.business.qld.gov.au). Search 'fireweed'.

For more information contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23. 



Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*).

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# Grazing BMP fits the 'Bill' at Gaeta View

**Bill and Sue Roffey live on Gaeta View, a beef cattle property 50km north-west of Gin Gin in the North Burnett. Bill is respectfully following in the footsteps of his father, grandfather and great grandfather as the fourth generation of Roffeys to raise cattle on Gaeta View.**

Gaeta View is 5500 hectares of blue gum creek flats, spotted gum and iron bark ridges, with improved pastures consisting of Callide Rhodes grass, bisset blue grass, signal grass, wynn cassia, stylos and siratro.

The Roffeys run around 1000 mainly straight Brahman breeders on Gaeta View. While most of their bulls are straight Brahman, they also run a few black Brangus bulls to produce the flat-backed crosses preferred by the market. They also lease an adjoining 6500 hectares of forested country from the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

Gaeta View is a breeding and fattening operation where the Roffeys aim to sell two year old bullocks dressing 280kg and surplus heifers and cull cows which dress at 220kg.

They fill a double decker each month direct to the meat works at Rockhampton or Biloela.

The Roffeys are very happy living on Gaeta View and strive to find improvements to their property and cattle they produce. In keeping with their search for new ideas to continually improve their business, they completed the two-day Grazing Best Management Practice (BMP) course last year in Gin Gin.

As a result of completing Grazing BMP and successfully navigating a voluntary Grazing BMP audit for accreditation, the Roffeys have learnt the importance of record keeping that's required to repeat their certification every three years. This experience has also helped them with their annual certification for the Pasturefed Cattle Assurance System (PCAS).

Another subject studied for Grazing BMP was soil health and Bill undertook some soil tests for the first time. The Roffeys had assumed that soils on the property would be deficient in some elements and had been applying fertilisers for many years. Soil test results showed no elements lacking, so now fertilising is one less costly and time consuming activity that is no longer needed. Additionally, the

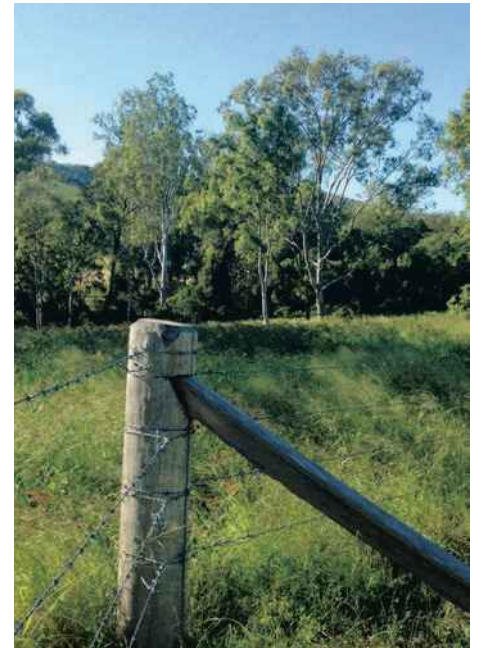


Sue and Bill Roffey.

environment has benefited with less nitrogen and phosphorus entering waterways and ending up in rivers and the coastal marine ecosystem.

Environmental benefits have also arisen from putting in more troughs for stock water. The Grazing BMP course alerted the Roffeys to grants that were available for fencing off waterways and piping water to troughs. A surprise was that the cattle prefer the bore water in the troughs and no longer drink water from the creeks and gullies.

Some gullies on the property had become eroded from concentrations of cattle over many years. These have been fenced off, pasture has been established and erosion controlled so now there is little sediment leaving the property and polluting downstream waterways. Even the neighbours have remarked on just how successful the restoration has been. While the grants for fencing and waters were only provided for their Dallarnil property in the



Creek fenced off. To control erosion the area was cleaned up, burnt, ploughed and sown to improved pasture. The paddock is lightly grazed in winter.

Mary River catchment, the Roffeys were so impressed by the results of this that they have expanded this to Gaeta View using only their own funds.

Overall, the Roffeys are very pleased they did the Grazing BMP course. Yes, they do spend a bit more time each week planning and recording, and they have spent some money on signage, oil spill kits and fire extinguishers, but they believe this has all been well worth the effort as they look to the future with a sustainable business model and a healthy land management plan.

## Establishing pastures with cover crops...or smother crops?

**Each summer graziers plan to renovate old pastures, sow new ones or establish a legume into existing pasture to boost long term productivity. A common question is whether to use a cover crop with pasture, and if so what the cover crop should be.**

The short answer is cover crops generally provide too much competition for the pasture, resulting in poor pasture establishment with lower plant numbers and significantly lower pasture yield. Cover crops can provide some quick feed, but these pastures commonly have to be grazed lightly in the first couple of years for the pasture to thicken up, which markedly reduces the return on the pasture investment.

Cover crops are more successful when planting a summer growing pasture with a winter crop; that is sowing generally occurs in autumn and the cover crop is either a winter growing annual forage or grain crop. The cover crop can provide protection from frosts and early income while the pasture is establishing. The other benefit is that another planting operation is not needed to get the pasture seed into the paddock. However this technique is *only* successful if there is a full soil moisture profile at sowing (generated from a full summer fallow), if there is adequate in-crop rainfall, and if the cover crop is planted at half or less than the normal seeding rate (to reduce soil water competition). Pasture establishment failures can still occur if competition from the

winter crop is too great, frosts are severe (for summer growing pastures) or the spring and early summer period is dry.

Pastures sown with summer growing cover crops, for example silk sorghum or millet, are generally unsuccessful. This is because of high competition for soil moisture from the cover crop due to its high biomass growth, which can kill the young pasture plants especially if hot and dry conditions follow planting. Cover crops place a very high demand on soil moisture and fertility, and significantly increase the period to full establishment or at worst increase the risk of a complete pasture establishment failure. A far more reliable option is to fallow the paddock to conserve moisture then sow the appropriate

pasture species (grass and legume) without a cover crop at the right time of the year.

Including a cover crop with the pasture seed to provide early feed is tempting, however consider that a return on the investment in pasture seed will only be generated when the pasture is in full production, and anything that slows establishment will significantly decrease this investment return. Happy pasturing!

More information on pasture establishment is available at [www.daf.qld.gov.au](http://www.daf.qld.gov.au) and [www.futurebeef.com.au](http://www.futurebeef.com.au).

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## Biosecurity plans protect business

**Every day, beef producers around Queensland are following good farm management practices on their properties to improve their livelihood. Many of these actions are also part of good biosecurity planning.**

So the news that beef producers need a biosecurity plan to meet the new Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) and John's Beef Assurance Score (J-BAS) industry initiatives is no need for alarm. A biosecurity plan is about documenting what you already do to protect your business. It's about putting all of those things in your head down on paper as a plan.

For instance, when introducing new cattle to your property do you think about the risks of introducing disease? Or introducing worms or new weeds? So you put the cattle in isolation separating them from the rest of the herd. Deciding to vaccinate and waiting until any seeds pass through their system are reasonable and appropriate biosecurity actions. Do you have a wash down area for farm machinery to stop introducing weed seeds?

The best defence against pests and diseases is to implement sound biosecurity practices on your farm. Quick and simple measures built into everyday practice that will help protect your farm and your future. These are the types of things you need to document in your plan.

A biosecurity action plan will help you identify and prioritise the biosecurity practices relevant to your property and then it is a matter of adopting them on an ongoing basis.

There are many benefits to farm management by engaging in best practice biosecurity planning. For example, a grazing enterprise can attain a high degree of assurance that biosecurity risks such as diseases, plant poisonings and stress-handling will be avoided and the risk of transmission of diseases or pests between operations will be minimised.

Biosecurity planning and implementation reduces your risks and provides greater security for your animals and property and provides assurance that Queensland beef is produced under best practice conditions.

Under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, which commenced on 1 July 2016, all Queenslanders have a general biosecurity obligation. This means everyone is responsible for

managing biosecurity risks that are under their control and that they know or should reasonably be expected to know about. If you are a livestock owner, you are expected to stay informed about pests and diseases that could affect or be carried by your animals, as well as weeds and pest animals that could be on your property. You are also expected to manage them appropriately.

Developing a biosecurity plan for your farm gives you a living document of the actions you follow on your property. If asked if you have a biosecurity plan you can simply hand them the document.

Industry is constantly moving forward and increasingly industry programs are requiring producers to have a biosecurity plan in place. The new approach to management of John's disease in Australia is an example of this.

Producers now have the opportunity and obligation to do what is reasonable and practical to reduce the likelihood and impacts of John's disease in ways that suit their business and market preferences best. Producers should learn about John's disease and include steps in their property biosecurity plan to prevent or minimise its occurrence.

More information on the new framework and available tools can be found at [www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/jd-cattle-tools](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/jd-cattle-tools).

Upcoming changes to LPA accreditation focus on a producer having a biosecurity plan. It is recognised that the integrity system that underpins our red meat industry must continue to be strengthened in order for livestock producers to stand by what they sell. A series of initiatives are underway to achieve this including on-farm biosecurity and animal welfare practices being included in the LPA program. More information on LPA can be found at [www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au).

Now is the time to get with the plan and develop a biosecurity plan for your place. There is plenty of support out there to help you. It is your business, plan to protect it.

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## Getting started with BREEDPLAN

**What is BREEDPLAN? A genetic evaluation system for beef cattle, providing estimated breeding values (EBVs) for a range of economically important traits (i.e. fertility, weight and carcass).**

What is an EBV? An EBV describes the genetics of an animal independent of the environment, so it's a measure of genetic merit for each trait. EBVs are calculated using pedigree and performance data supplied by beef producers using BREEDPLAN technology. EBVs are expressed as the difference between an individual animal's genetics compared to a historic benchmark group of animals (the base). EBVs can only be compared **within a breed**, as each breed is genetically evaluated separately and each evaluation compares animals to a separate base.

EBVs are reported in the actual units in which the measurements are taken (e.g. kilograms for weight). The current BREEDPLAN EBVs available are:

- Fertility and calving traits – scrotal size, days to calving, gestation length and calving ease
- Weight traits – birth weight, 200 day milk, 200 / 400 / 600 day growth and mature cow weight
- Carcass traits – eye muscle area, rib and rump fat depth, intramuscular fat, carcass weight and retail beef yield
- Other traits – docility, flight time, structural soundness and net feed intake.

BREEDPLAN evaluations are conducted by 27 Australian breed societies. However not all EBV traits are available for every breed, so check with your breed society on the EBVs they have available.

To performance record your animals with BREEDPLAN you must be a member of a breed society, the society must be running BREEDPLAN analysis and the calves you wish to submit for performance information must be registered with your breed society. As a new member you will also need to record all of your sires and dams. Membership costs for BREEDPLAN vary for each breed society. You should also consider the additional costs of performance recording your animals (e.g. labour and equipment) depending on the performance traits you wish to record.

Producers commonly ask which performance traits they should record. This is up to you and is best guided by what is important to your breeding and marketing program. There are no minimum or maximum requirements. However, to receive

an EBV an animal must have either its own performance data or the performance data of its progeny recorded with BREEDPLAN.

**So why join BREEDPLAN? Some potential benefits include:**

- Make accurate genetic selection decisions for your herd, by the following ways:
  - EBVs adjust for non-genetic effects that can mask your ability to see an animal's genotype (genetics).
  - EBVs provide an indication of genetics for traits such as fertility which you cannot see just by looking at an animal
  - EBVs take into account the trait heritability and correlations between traits. Heritability is the extent to which the trait can be passed onto offspring. Correlation describes the interaction between traits (e.g. high growth is correlated with high birth weights, therefore 600 day weight EBVs feed back into birth weight EBVs based on their correlation. Traits can be positively or negatively correlated).
- EBVs allow you to directly compare animals in different herds and environments
- Access EBVs on all of your animals once performance data is submitted
- Benchmark the genetics of your animals against the entire breed
- Assess the genetic improvement being made in your herd over time for each economically important production trait
- Provide a marketing tool for your business by using EBVs.

For detailed information on BREEDPLAN and performance recording go to <http://breedplan.une.edu.au>. A helpful booklet to download is *BREEDPLAN: A guide to getting started*.

Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) <http://tbts.une.edu.au> provide free advice and have webinars explaining BREEDPLAN on YouTube. Visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search for 'sbtstbts'.

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# Not a lot of **bull** in this story

**Doug, Zoe and Ingrid O'Neill of Mt Oweenee Station north of Charters Towers dramatically reduced their bull numbers to achieve large savings in bull costs with no reduction in conception rates.**

During a recent Producer Demonstration Site project, jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), ovarian ultrasound at Mt Oweenee found only 50 per cent of heifers were cycling going into mating. This is fairly common on northern forest properties. The O'Neills applied the principle of one bull per 40 cycling females, instead of per 40 females, and cut the 12 bulls (3.5 per cent) they would normally mate to 334 two-year-old heifers to just four bulls (1 per cent). This alone reduced the year's bull-buying budget by \$24,000 and halved the bull cost per calf.

Only bulls that had passed an Australian Cattle Veterinarians' BULLCHECK® assessment (scrotum, physical, semen and morphology)

were used. Mr O'Neill considers this very cheap insurance when it has such a large impact on the business's bottom line.

Mt Oweenee heifer pregnancy rates have been around 70 per cent for many years, and this did not change when fewer BULLCHECK approved ('vetted') bulls were used. Ultrasound examinations showed all cycling heifers conceived.

Mr O'Neill initially had great trepidation about using the much lower mating ratio. But there is no way the family is going back to the old ways. Ingrid O'Neill is applying this approach across the cow herd which is now mated at no more than one vetted bull to 50 females. One bonus Mr O'Neill noted was that bull problems are almost eliminated during mustering.

Dr Geoffry Fordyce from The University of Queensland, based in Charters Towers, said this wasn't a new story. "The Bull Power research project 20 years ago made these recommendations," Dr Fordyce said.



BULLCHECK bulls save money.

"It is gratifying to see producers applying them now and reaping incredible value."

The Bull Power project debunked a lot of bull myths. A classic is, 'You can tell by his backward condition how hard he's been working', when the reality was that he'd simply been fighting and getting very few calves.

The Bull Power research showed that no matter what producers did, just two per cent bulls sired the majority of calves (i.e. two bulls with 100 cows).

Clermont cattle vet, Dr Alan Guilfoyle, said simple mathematics shows that even in a situation where two bulls are joined to 100 females and 80 per cent cycle over a 100-day mating, each bull is probably only mating an average of twice daily, which is several times below their capacity.

A large number of excuses for grossly-excessive bull numbers are used such as hills, rivers, wet

weather, big paddocks, and the list goes on. But the research under testing conditions clearly showed none of these excuses counted for anything as the bulls and females simply found each other in the middle of the night whenever they needed to, the 'nightclub' effect.

Dr Guilfoyle strongly encourages all his clients to use fewer and better bulls, enabling them to make very large business savings at almost no risk.

"Buy bulls with BULLCHECK ticks for all categories including morphology. Once they are settled and retested to ensure they are suited to their new environment, they'll only ever need minor reassessment till they finish their working life. And mate at one per 40 cycling females."

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## Teat and udder visual assessment tools to help cull breeding females

Teat and udder soundness of breeding females is an important factor that is often overlooked in favour of other positive breeding traits. However, poor teat and udder quality reduces calf survival and weaner weights and impacts on your enterprise profitability.

Research shows a genetic component to teat and udder size which is moderate to highly heritable. Teat and udder scores are both positively correlated with weaning weight and calf deaths prior to weaning. Therefore breeding females identified with teat and udder problems should be recorded and culled from your breeding herd. Female offspring from these breeders should also be culled and male progeny should not be kept as bulls. When selecting sires from outside of your herd, diligence needs to be given to the udder and teats of the sire's dam. Using these selection and culling practices will improve your herd's genetic merit.



Cull cows with poor teats.

Adopting a consistent scoring system to assess teat and udder quality is good practice. Assessments are best done as close to calving as possible, ideally before the calf sucks, although this is not often possible so within two days post calving is good. This lets you see udder and teat size before ongoing calf suckling, as once the calf has been suckling for some time the size of problem teats and udders reduces and therefore is not an accurate assessment of udder and teat quality.

Teat assessment evaluates all teats on size and shape, taking into account both length and width. Udder assessment enables you

to evaluate size, suspension, attachment and evenness, all important factors in the integrity of udder soundness and longevity, calf performance and survival.

Big udders don't always mean higher milk yield. While some breeders with large udders and teats may be able to raise a calf with no issues, it usually depends on calf size, strength and persistence at birth. Bigger and stronger calves may be able to attach and suck after a day or two and nurse by themselves, where smaller, weaker calves usually can't persist in attempting to suckle and die. Additionally colostrum intake is delayed or lowered the longer the calf takes to suckle which could result in decreased effectiveness of passive immunity.

Annually assessing teats and udders in the breeding herd is a valuable management tool to identify potential calf rearing issues and will assist in culling decisions of females with problem udders and teats, before further calf losses or reduction in weaner performance occurs.

There are a number of udder and teat scoring standardisations available which can be modified to suit your requirements. The golden rule is to keep the scoring system simple and practical. There is no perfect score, it is a subjective measurement therefore consistency is important to make progress.

Some useful articles and sites which may help you compile a teat and udder scoring system suited to your enterprise are:

- Desirable and undesirable udders, Australian Brahman Breeders' Association [www.brahman.com.au](http://www.brahman.com.au)
- A guide to udder and teat scoring beef cows, University of Nebraska-Lincoln <http://beef.unl.edu>
- Udder scoring fact sheet, American Hereford Association [www.hereford.org](http://www.hereford.org)
- Practical udder scoring, Beef Magazine [www.beefmagazine.com](http://www.beefmagazine.com)

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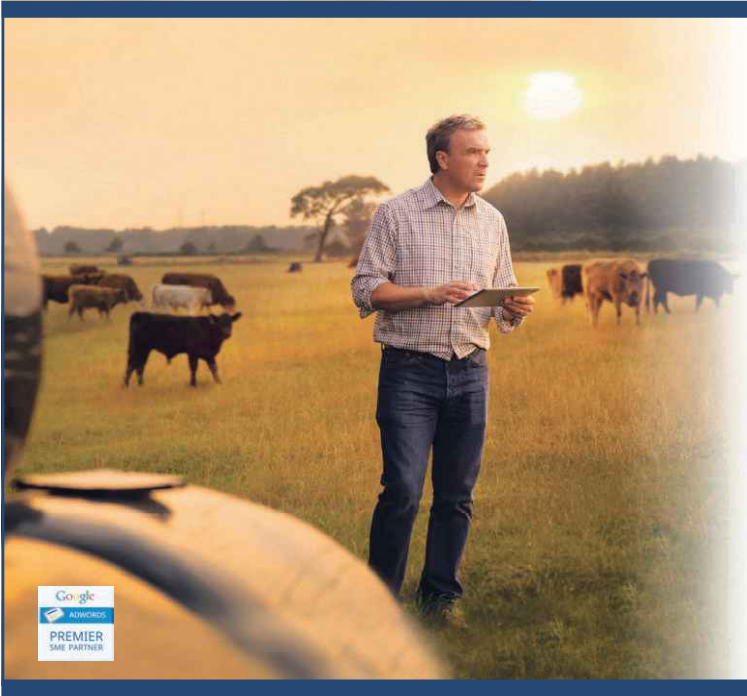
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**BEEFTALK** Taking stock of your future



# Timing is everything in a beef business

**Your beef business will perform better and be easier to run if you time important management operations correctly.**

A written plan can be the difference between the best of intentions and activities happening when they should. To help you get started we have included an example plan for a breeder herd for you to adapt to your situation.

In a control mated herd it is important for calves to drop at the right time of year as the system depends on cows having enough body condition to get pregnant when the bulls go in.

For good re-conception rates cows need to be in store to forward store condition (body condition score 3-4) near the end of the dry season when they calve. This means they must already be in good condition coming out of autumn. It is critical not to have cows calving too early in the dry season as they can lose too much condition before the start of the wet season. This problem is particularly serious in years with tough dry seasons and or a late seasonal break such as in 2009, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Weaning is the most effective tool for managing breeder body condition. It has twice the impact of dry season urea supplementation on cow liveweight. It is cheaper to feed the calf than to feed the cow. Weaning calves before cows slip in condition will save on crisis feeding at the end of the dry season. Weaning saves 10-15kg of breeder body weight per month in the early-mid dry season and 5-10kg per month in the late dry season. The difference between a body condition score of two and three can be in the order of 30 to 50kg liveweight.

Remember that a cow's average gestation period is around 290 days, depending on breed. The time between calving and her first cycle is approximately 42 days leaving 33 days or 1.5 cycles for her to get back into calf if she is going to have a calf every year. The timing of mating is a balance between calves arriving too soon and avoiding late calves as these become small weaners or have to be weaned later.

Bulls should be vaccinated at least two months before joining. Annual vibriosis vaccination is critical for bulls and a leptospirosis vaccination is recommended for breeding females. It also reduces the risk of humans contracting leptospirosis. Bull Breeding Soundness Evaluations BULLCHECK® (VBBSE) should also be performed annually two months before joining as stress will have a short-term effect on bull fertility.

Aim to have the bulk of calves arriving 6-8 weeks before your green date. Your green date is the date at which there is a 70 per cent chance of having 50mm of rain over three days. You can check your green date in CliMate or Rainman Streamflow and analyse rainfall patterns in your area.

It is important to have a good stocktake of the condition of your pasture and your cattle and do a pasture budget in autumn when pasture growth has slowed significantly. Knowing how much feed you have in front of you helps you

An example breeder herd operations calendar.

Herd Management Calendar (Example for herd selling steers and cull heifers as yearlings)

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Feed status	Good protein & energy	Highest protein & energy	Good protein & energy	Fair protein & energy	Declining protein & energy	Declining protein & energy	Declining protein & energy	Low protein & energy	Low protein & energy	Low protein & energy	Low protein & energy Chance of rain	Low protein & energy Seasonal break expected late
Cow status	Wet	Wet	Wet and Pregnant	Wet to Dry pregnant	Dry pregnant	Dry pregnant	Dry pregnant	Dry pregnant	Calving begins late Sep	Calving & wet	Calving & wet	Calving & wet
Management activity	Brand	Bulls out 13 Mar (12 wks) Mop up branding			Weaning Pregnancy testing				Bull Breeding Soundness Examinations (BBSE) Bull buying	Bull buying		Bulls in 20 Dec
Movements		Draft off cows that failed to calve			Draft cull cows for sale & fattening							
Marketing		Empty cows retained previous year for finishing Cows that failed to calve Previous year's steers & cull heifers					Fat cows culled at pregnancy diagnosis					
<b>Health Treatments</b>												
<b>Calves/Weaners</b>												
5 in 1 vaccine	X	X			X							
Botulism vaccine					X							
Tick fever vaccine					X							
<b>Yearling heifers<sup>1</sup></b>												
Bivalent botulism vaccine						X						
Lepto vaccine						X	X					
Pestivirus vaccine						X	X					
<b>Breeders<sup>2</sup></b>												
Bivalent botulism vaccine					X							
Lepto vaccine					X							
Pestivirus vaccine					X							
<b>Steers</b>												
<b>Bulls<sup>3</sup></b>												
Bivalent botulism vaccine						X						
BEF vaccine (3day)										X		
Lepto vaccine						X						
Pestivirus vaccine						X						
Vibrio vaccine										X		

1. Heifers selected for mating 2. Retained breeders receive vaccinations 3. New bulls will require 2 initial doses of vaccine if not vaccinated by breeder



A breeder in body condition score two.



A breeder in body condition score three.

may be wasted on an animal turned off in the new year after the benefit of the wet season and compensatory gain.

make informed and timely decisions on stock numbers and marketing. The aim is to have a good cover of rain ready pasture at the end of the year to keep valuable top soil in place, increase rainfall infiltration and pasture growth. Also plan to wet season spell some paddocks every year to maintain or build the resilience of preferred perennial grasses in the pasture.

Pregnancy testing early in the dry season (same muster as weaning) will identify animals that you can sell, leaving more feed over the dry season for the remaining pregnant cows.

Having a plan for turning off dry animals will help you make important management decisions. An animal turned off late in the year before Christmas may benefit from supplementation, whereas supplementation

Understanding the cattle tick life cycle and strategically timing tick treatments to manage the spring rise in tick numbers will save chemical and labour. The life span of larvae ranges from two or three weeks in hot dry seasons to five or six months over some winters. Therefore strategic spelling of pastures is also important in tick management.

If you are interested in training in breeding and genetics, pasture management, nutrition or business then look up the EDGenetwork® workshops at [www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au) or [www.futurebeef.com.au](http://www.futurebeef.com.au). The Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) provide free technical support in beef genetics and have a wealth of genetics information at [tbts.une.edu.au](http://tbts.une.edu.au).

For more information contact the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries on 13 25 23.

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# FLOCK TALK



## Leading Sheep

### What ewe need to know

The Leading Sheep program recently held a series of successful remote monitoring days across Queensland. Around 150 producers attended the events in St George, Morven, Isisford and Longreach.

In other news, two extension officers recently joined Leading Sheep. Kiri Broad is based in Longreach, while Jed Sommerfield is based in Charleville. Kiri and Jed will be managing events and activities to engage and support sheep and wool producers. Welcome Kiri and Jed!

This edition of *Flock Talk* is all about promoting wool and encouraging producers to get more involved in the sheep industry. In this edition, a central west wool producer explains how they run their enterprise and shares their experience building a successful business. Also in this edition, if you're considering getting into wool sheep or have been out of the industry for a while, be sure to check out the top tips from an experienced agent on how to make the most out of sheep and wool.

You can connect with Leading Sheep on Facebook and join our mailing list at [www.leadingsheep.com.au](http://www.leadingsheep.com.au).

*Nicole Sallur, editor, Leading Sheep project manager and senior extension officer, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries*

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# Time is right for wool industry

### Top tips from Blackall wool producer

- Buy the best rams you can afford
- Use genetic data and visual appraisal to aid selection
- Use contractors, but be prepared to learn skills and do a lot of the work yourself
- Join groups, like Leading Sheep, to build your knowledge.

After 23 years as a wool producer, Alison Krieg believes there's no better time for newcomers to join the industry, and offers some sage advice for those contemplating a move into Merino sheep.

"Buy the best rams you can afford, learn as much as you can about producing wool, and don't follow fads or you'll go backwards," Ms Krieg said.

With the Eastern Market Indicator setting new records of more than 1500c/kg, she said optimism in the wool industry was at an all-time high, and only the lack of feed on the ground in much of western Queensland was delaying a move back into sheep.

"The timing is exquisite. Wool and carcase prices are excellent and the potential with wild dog exclusion fences is huge," Ms Krieg said.

"I grew up on a sheep property at Blackall and I believe you can always make money out of sheep.

"There's never been a time when it cost more to run them than I've earned."

Ms Krieg admits that her 7300 hectare property Benalla, 85km west of Blackall, is better suited to sheep than cattle, with its mix of country.

In a normal season she runs about 4200 sheep comprising 1800 ewes and their progeny and about 1200 wethers, which cut on average 7.6kg of sub-19 micron wool.



Blackall sheep and wool producer Alison Krieg with her kelpie offshoots.

According to Ms Krieg, wool growing is not rocket science, but relies mainly on good nutrition and genetics. The better you feed your sheep, the more wool, lambs and meat they will produce.

"Genetics are a no brainer – you buy the best you can afford," she said.

She pays an average of \$1800 for her rams and said it was important to look at measurements and match the information with visual appraisal to buy the best you can.

"The best cattle producers don't breed their own bulls and the best wool growers don't buy C-grade rams," she said.

"Rams are sold with figures available for fibre diameter, body weight, fleece weights etc. and your agent should be able to assist in ram selection."

Ms Krieg is a passionate advocate of learning, whether from her peers, at Leading Sheep forums or through reading Australian Wool Innovation's *Beyond the Bale*.

"Groups such as Leading Sheep are constantly holding information days and forums, so you can choose what you go to, and most wool growers are only too happy to impart knowledge," she said.

Ms Krieg saw her first wild dog on Benalla in 2005 and new lambs started to gradually disappear. She started building a dog proof

fence in 2009 and in the following years her two neighbours joined in.

The exclusion fence was finished this year and encloses the three properties in a cluster covering about 52,000 hectares. Lambs are dropping now and she's confident she'll mark about 80 per cent, which is a massive turnaround.


"The difference is palpable," she said.

"I can go out now confident that I won't see sheep which have been attacked by wild dogs.

"It's still a work in progress. We have a dog trapper inside the fence who caught three in the past week and we are continually shooting and baiting to hopefully get the remaining seven or so, but these exclusion fences will save the wool industry."

Despite predicting this purple patch in the wool industry would eventuate quite a few years earlier, she said she'd confidently recommend entering the industry now.

"We bought Benalla in 1994 when the memory of the collapse of the wool market was still pretty fresh and I remember saying to my then husband that I thought the wool industry was just on the verge of a major rebound," she recalled.

"I was wrong then but I think I might be on the money this time when I make the same prediction." 

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## FLOCK TALK



# Wool: Get the basics right and reap the rewards

### Top tips for newcomers to wool

- Choose the right sheep type to suit your country and assess potential returns
- Communicate effectively with your staff, especially the shearing team
- Work out how to share infrastructure, like shearing sheds and yards, rather than build new ones
- Continue to learn through programs like Leading Sheep.

Having worked in the wool industry for 30 years as a shearer, wool classer and broker, Bruce Lines has two pieces of advice for those who want to make the most of today's exceptional sheep and wool prices – get the basics right and plan for the next 50 years.

That applies to the long-term producers, who have ridden out the lulls in the wool market, as well as newcomers looking to make a profit in Merinos.

As the Queensland wool manager for Rodwells, Mr Lines is confident there is plenty of upside for both types of operators in a market that's breaking records.

According to Mr Lines the basics include: finding the right type of sheep to suit your country and cover your costs, communicating with your staff – especially those in the shearing shed, and working out ways to share infrastructure rather than building new yards and sheds.

"It is evident in the tough times some wool producers changed enterprises to cattle and more farming, and this upswing in prices will give them the security to bring sheep back," he said.

"Others who've been in sheep for the long haul have been prepared to pay for exclusion fences, and trapping and baiting to control wild dogs, as well as feeding sheep through the drought, and now they're making some great returns.

"People just need to be sure they're getting into a business that's financially sound for the long term."

The key to starting out is to find the right animal to suit your conditions, said Mr Lines, and that comes through education, logistics and assessing what's worked in the past.

"How many kilos of wool do you need, how many kilos of meat, how much feed are the sheep taking in to get that? Assess the risks and have a viable option that presents profitable returns before you start," he advised.

"A lot of people got into shedding breeds to get away from shearing and employing staff, but moving from a Merino enterprise to a solely meat sheep enterprise presents different management issues that many had not planned for.

"These include the feed intake, growth rate and carrying capacity of shedding breeds, and many of them still need shearing, so in some cases if they aren't getting better returns they may as well have stayed with Merinos."



Top tip from Bruce Lines is to find the right sort of sheep for your country.



Bruce Lines believes producers need to keep a close check on fleece quality.

He believes wethers are a strategic way to get back into sheep, producing both meat and wool.

"Producers in the west and north of the state could also turn off forward store animals for the feedlots and southern wool growers.

"If the purchaser is paying \$60-\$70 and feeds the sheep for a viable length of time and gets \$100, everyone's happy."

One factor that can make a big difference to the quality of the wool and meat produced is the relationship between the grower and the workforce, especially in the shearing shed.

Mr Lines is concerned that there's not enough communication between producers and their workers, whether they're shearing contractors, wool harvesting staff or station employees, such as jackaroos.

"It is vital people are clear on what their role involves, especially in the shearing shed, because if their job isn't done properly it can affect the whole wool clip and the return," he said.

"A lot more emphasis is needed on duty roles, especially the classer and wool handlers, and the grower and contractor.

"Talk to the contractor and get them on-property before shearing. Don't expect them to turn up and know how you want things done. Take them to the yards, explain the job required, what sheep will be shorn first – lambs, ewes, rams – and find out their expectations of the job."

The same advice applies when deciding whether to build yards or a shearing shed. Mr Lines recommends talking to your neighbours.

"It's a fairly big cost outlay to build new infrastructure and properties are much smaller

now, so it might be just a case of asking your neighbor if you can use their shed or yards," he said.

"There are contract shearing boards and portable yards that can be utilised too."


Mr Lines is passionate about the fact that Merinos helped build communities and towns across the state and would like to see improved awareness of the employment and financial benefits that can be generated by the industry.


According to him, one of the keys is bringing growers together to form networks and continue learning through programs such as Leading Sheep.




"The best advice comes from peer group conversations about issues of interest or common to all producers. How much wool are their sheep cutting? How many lambs are on the ground? What are you feeding your sheep? How are you controlling predators?"

"It's a little bit scary that people don't think they have the time, because when it comes to Leading Sheep forums and field days the industry is paying, so growers should be involved to get something in return.

"And in this sense, growers always have the chance to ask what they want, too. They can fill out a survey or ask organisers saying 'We want to talk about how much wool is on a sheep' or 'What's a viable option for us - to run wethers or breed lambs?' for example."

Mr Lines is confident that Queensland's Merino numbers can build from 1.8 million sheep to three or four million, which will help regenerate business in the small towns that have traditionally relied on the sector. 



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