



DAF FutureBeef

Website and Intranet EVALUATION REPORT

April 2016

Coutts J&R



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been made possible by the willingness of FutureBeef producers, industry representatives and extension providers to give the time to share their experiences and insights about the program. FutureBeef staff and partner organisations have provided strong support with access to documents and contact details of interviewees.

Dr Jeff Coutts
Liesel Rennie
Ben Coutts
Amy Samson

Coutts J&R
www.couttsjr.com.au

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

This report focuses on providing an evaluation of the **FutureBeef website** and **staff intranet**, to determine the level of user satisfaction; what impact/s these communication mediums have had, if any, on users' businesses; and specifically to determine whether use of these communication mediums has contributed to improved profitability and sustainability. It is one of a series of reports looking at the different communication platforms of the FutureBeef program.

Methods

The approach taken in this review was a combination of secondary data and communication platform analysis combined with engagement via discussion and a randomised survey with existing FutureBeef producer members, industry representatives and government extension providers.

Given the random selection process and the total frame of the producer population (those on the eBulletin subscriber list), there is a 95% certainty that the true mean responses to questions in the survey lie between plus or minus 8%. The results relate directly to those on the eBulletin list and must be viewed within this context.

Website and intranet key messages

A. The FutureBeef website is viewed as a useful and evolving resource keeping visitors updated.

Users generally rated the website as accessible and fairly easy to navigate particularly mentioning the search function and the option to refine results. Many indicated that they visited the site regularly (daily/weekly/monthly) and valued the relevant and helpful information. There were some suggestions that more regionally specific information, content aimed at smaller producers and industry news would be positive additions. As with all online resources, internet accessibility issues limit some producers' ability to regularly view or download the information.

The content appears to be updated quite regularly although there were a small number of comments about outdated information and links. FutureBeef staff seem to be responsive to feedback (including Google Analytics) when developing new information (e.g. video production in response to calf rearing page popularity) meaning the content is kept relevant.

B. The intranet is thought to be quite useful and a good source of information although a bit slow.

Respondents commented that they tended to access the intranet for contacts and when looking for specific templates. Some said they rarely accessed the site as they were *too busy* or were put off by its slowness. While generally found to be easy to use and access, there were a couple of comments (March 2016) about the navigation not always being *intuitive* meaning information could be hard to find.

C. The FutureBeef website was cited as a specific resource prompting or informing change.

Along with being a part of the mix of information sources provided by FutureBeef, the website was specifically noted by a number of respondents as being influential. In particular, producers mentioned the improved access to advice and knowledge available and the ability to look up particular subjects as required (e.g. feeding in the drought, grazing nutrition management). Extension providers particularly commented on the technical information available to pass on to clients when making decisions (e.g. to sell or feed cattle). Being able to keep up to date with events in the area was also noted by producers as a support to improving business.

Overall key messages

The following key messages are common across all the linked FutureBeef communication evaluation reports and focus on the overall program.

D. Stakeholders had a reasonably strong awareness of the FutureBeef program.

Most stakeholders had a reasonable level of awareness of the program and its varied communication channels, although a more varied awareness of the program structure and partner organisations. While some did have a good understanding of the program and all its partners, others related more to the departments or organisation they connected with regularly, including MLA and DAF Queensland. Very few were aware of NTDPIF and DAFWA's involvement in the program.

E. There is a relatively high level of satisfaction with the usefulness, delivery and extension of FutureBeef information.

More than half of 2016 survey respondents agreed that FutureBeef's current delivery and extension of information offers users the opportunity to *pick* their preferred communication channels. The mix of FutureBeef information resources was described as *providing variety; fantastic overall; accessible;* and offering *something for everyone*. The content and information being provided across different communication channels (both print and online) was noted to be valuable, containing *practical advice* with most *relevant topics* covered. There was some suggestion that more regionally relevant content would be well received including case studies.

F. Internet issues have a significant impact on communication channels accessed by stakeholders.

While many stakeholders appreciate and prefer email updates and other online resources, internet and mobile coverage along with download limits impacted on access. Stakeholders were *frustrated* by these limitations, preventing many from consistent access of online resources.

G. There are indications that FutureBeef information is positively impacting knowledge and understanding as well as productivity and improving advice being given.

The majority (68%) of survey respondents (March 2016) indicated that FutureBeef information had (37%) or might have (31%) stimulated or supported decisions and changes made to their enterprises (producers) or their advisory and extension services. As a result of better informed business decisions, producers said that they have achieved *clearer* and more *efficient farming* practices leading to improved production (breeding healthier stock), environmental (e.g. improved land management) and technical improvements and increased profitability (e.g. achieving increased prices for healthier cows). Those who had made no specific changes (12%) suggested that they were able to remain informed and up to date with what is happening in the industry.

Next users (extension providers and industry representatives/advisors/suppliers) said that their business was *more sustainable* and with their own improved knowledge and skills were able to provide better technical advice.

Recommendations

1. While the website is an important source of information, internet accessibility issues in rural Australia limits the interaction of some producers with the online resources. Maintaining relevant hardcopy resources (or easily printable for next users to distribute) should be an ongoing endeavour for the FutureBeef team. Opt in text messaging could be considered as an information channel for events and news flashes.
2. There is an opportunity for extension providers to provide further training on accessing and using online resources for those producers who are unsure about how to best do this. Flash drives could also be considered as a means for distributing updated information (potentially seasonally) for producers to access resources unavailable due to download limits and issues (e.g. webinars, printable fact sheets etc).
3. The FutureBeef website team should be acknowledged for their efforts in keeping the FutureBeef website up to date with relevant information. Keeping on top of Google Analytics as one of the means to developing new content will continue to be important as is listening and acting on feedback about topics from surveys. Additionally, regular audits of links and historical information as well as considering improvements to site layout and readability will help keep information current and easily accessible.
4. There is an opportunity to increase use of the intranet. While it is being used by some and found to be useful particularly for templates and contact details, survey feedback shows that attention should be paid to site navigation and speed issues. A short online staff survey/workshop could help identify more specific areas to focus on for intranet improvement and useability. Regular updates from the intranet could be included in staff newsletters, highlighting available resources/new information.
5. It is apparent that Google Analytics are being well used to keep up with site traffic and visitor behaviour. It would be useful to develop a dashboard of metrics tied in with overall FutureBeef objectives to use for ongoing monitoring and reporting. Objective dependent, these could focus around time spent on promoted content on site, drivers of site traffic (e.g. percentage split between eBulletin, social media, direct site visits), and mapping site visits against events/newspaper stories particularly if the website is promoted heavily.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the **FutureBeef website** and **staff intranet**. The aims of this review are:

1. To determine the level of user satisfaction with each of these communication mediums and what impact/s these communication mediums have had, if any, on users' businesses; and whether use of these communications mediums has contributed to improved profitability and sustainability; and
2. To recommend improvements to the FutureBeef website and staff intranet (if needed) to maximise their effectiveness based on user perceptions.

It is one of a series of reports looking at the different communication platforms of the FutureBeef program.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The FutureBeef Program

The **FutureBeef Program for Northern Australia** is a collaborative extension program involving the following partners:

- Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)
- Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries (DPIF)
- Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA)
- Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA)

The aim of the FutureBeef program is to provide the northern beef industry with a 24/7 one-stop-shop for beef information. The program aims to reduce any associated difficulties and inefficiencies that would present if each organisation were to create and maintain beef related information on their own websites, as well as the management of online engagement with industry members. In addition, the program will save the four partner organisations from having to re-invent the wheel themselves and inadvertently providing a confusing array of overlapping information.

The agreed priorities of the FutureBeef Program for Northern Australia are:

1. Weaner management
2. Improving breeder performance
3. Business management
4. Grazing land management
5. Breeder management

This project aims to ensure each of these priorities are delivered effectively to a wider audience, using online technologies¹.

¹ Request for Quotation PID1620 (a). Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

FutureBeef market segments

The FutureBeef Program target population is northern Australia beef producers and beef extension staff in Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Kimberley-Pilbara regions of Western Australia. The other key stakeholder is the FutureBeef Program Committee and the organisations it represents (i.e. MLA, DAFWA, DPIF and DAF). The following tables provide indicative estimates of key FutureBeef Program target market segments².

FutureBeef Update eBulletin subscribers

Description of eBulletin subscribers (2014–15 MailChimp system):

- 23% industry members
- 6% private sector service providers
- 8% public sector service providers
- 6% 'other'
- 58% did not nominate a category.

Non-corporate specialist beef producers

Non-corporate specialist beef producers are those producers with more than 200 head of cattle who derive the majority of their income from beef production (Northern beef report 2013).

Region	Population	Average herd size (AE)	Average ha managed
1. Qld Southern coastal	1,422	1,132	4,445
2. Qld Northern coastal	295	1,741	10,702
3. Qld Eastern downs	416	716	3,717
4. Qld Southern inland and central	1,954	1,535	8,531
5. Qld Cape and Carpentaria	67	6,183	121,159
6. Qld West and south-west	175	4,460	105,911
7. Qld Central north	514	3,863	38,591
8. Qld Central west	462	2,188	21,852
9. NT Alice Springs	49	6,062	376,307
10. NT Barkly Tablelands	13	12,682	417,691
11. NT VRD and Katherine	44	10,331	161,829
12. NT Darwin and Top-End	25	4,482	67,866
13. WA Kimberley	30	9,108	236,167
14. WA Pilbara	25	8,214	239,842
Total	5,493		

Corporate beef businesses (Northern beef report 2013)

Corporate beef businesses are those not owned, operated or managed by related individuals (Northern beef report 2013).

Region	Population	Average herd size (AE)	Average ha managed
Northern Australia	183	17,542	349,600

² Request for Quotation PID1620 (a). Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The total number of MLA members with grass-fed cattle (pers comm. Fox 2014)

Region	Population
1. Queensland	10,441
2. Northern Territory	143
3. Western Australia: Kimberley/Pilbara and Broome	57
Total	10,641

Beef extension staff (FutureBeef strategic plan 2014-16)

Region	Population
1. Queensland: Far North and North West	4
2. Queensland: North	8
3. Queensland: Central	10
4. Queensland: West	2
5. Queensland: Southern and South East	6
6. Northern Territory: Alice Springs, Barkly, Katherine and Darwin	3
7. Western Australia: Kimberley/Pilbara and Broome	2
Total	35

FutureBeef and FutureBeef eExtension

The eExtension team, within FutureBeef, is responsible for developing and managing the FutureBeef website, FutureBeef staff intranet, webinars, eBulletins and newsletters, social media (working closely with NTDPIF colleagues) and multimedia. The primary aim of all these activities is to support and enhance FutureBeef and other industry on-ground activities delivered by staff and industry partners³.

FutureBeef website

The FutureBeef website (www.futurebeef.com.au) was launched 9 May 2012. The website aim is for FutureBeef staff (DAF, DPIF, DAFWA and MLA) to *provide timely, relevant and accurate information to the northern beef industry*. At the time of reporting, there were 2,900+ website/eBulletin subscribers⁴.

The FutureBeef website consists of 448 pages of which approximately 45% are related to industry information and resources (contacts, tools, services and publications). Project-related pages (Producer Demonstration Site projects) account for 20%, eBulletin-related pages 20% and news posts 15%⁵.

FutureBeef staff intranet

A private **FutureBeef staff intranet** (<http://intranet.futurebeef.com.au/>) was created to allow staff from all four partner organisations to access and share relevant information including: a news section; a repository of technical information; a source of current promotional items; the latest versions of relevant document templates; and information on the different tools available to staff. The intranet also includes a forum where staff can discuss relevant topics, and a Wiki to store and collaboratively

³ eExtension Annual Report 2014-2015 (Attachment 4). FutureBeef.

⁴ Request for Quotation PID1620 (a). Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

⁵ eExtension Annual Report 2014-2015 (Attachment 4). FutureBeef.

work on various documents. At the time of reporting there were 81 staff intranet users comprised of: 9 DPIF, 59 DAF and 8 DAFWA officers.

The desired outcomes of the intranet were identified as being:

- Improved delivery of information through a website and webinar series that provide timely, relevant and accurate information to the northern Australian beef industry.
- Improved service delivery and cost-effectiveness for the FutureBeef Program⁶.

Methodology

Secondary data sources

FutureBeef provided the following existing monitoring and evaluation material to inform the evaluation:

1. Subscriber evaluation of the FutureBeef website March 2013
2. Staff evaluation of the FutureBeef website March 2013
3. 2014-2015 annual report

Telephone interviews

Sampling and confidence

A randomised telephone survey was undertaken as part of this evaluation. The survey frame used for sampling was the list of subscribers to the FutureBeef eBulletin (2,900). In the first instance, a subsample was randomly generated. This list consisted of 400 producers and 45 advisors/industry/staff.

This list was then further refined based on the availability of phone numbers, comprising of the following categories:

- Producers - 133
- Industry members - 22
- No category - 8
- Other - 4
- DAF, NT DPI and DAFWA FutureBeef staff - 45

Those selected were contacted and advised of the survey and its purpose. This provided the opportunity for people to remove themselves from the contact list. Three producers and three service providers/staff were subsequently removed in addition to five further contacts due to email bounces.

A further randomly selected 132 subscribers (with contact details) were added bringing the potential contact list to 265. Attempts were made to contact all those listed with 150 successfully contacted and completing the survey.

Given the random selection process and the total frame of the producer population (those on the eBulletin subscriber list), there is a 95% certainty that the true mean responses to questions in the

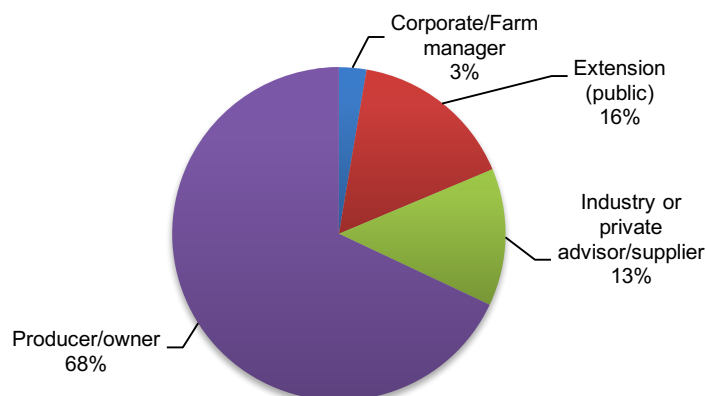
⁶ Request for Quotation PID1620 (a). Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

survey lie between plus or minus 8%. The results relate directly to those on the eBulletin list and must be viewed within this context.

Survey respondents

During February and March 2016, responses were collected from 102 producers, 24 extension providers, 20 industry representatives/advisors/suppliers and 4 corporate/farm managers. Of the 98 producers who responded, 89% noted they were MLA members (87), the remaining 11% were non-members. Of the 102 producers, 88 provided details about **herd size** with responses ranging from 3 to 5000 (average herd size: 895).

Figure 1: Respondent roles (n=150)



Understanding of FutureBeef Program

Respondents were asked to indicate their awareness of FutureBeef as the name of the program. With an average rating of 6.7/10, most had quite a good awareness. Respondents also commented on their awareness of the involvement of FutureBeef partners in the program. This awareness was varied, however there was overall a very limited awareness of NTDPIF and DAFWA involvement across all respondent groups (average rating 2.6 and 1.8 respectively).

The following table shows a breakdown of these findings.

	Not at all aware										Very aware		TOTAL	Average
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
MLA	13	0	2	5	3	8	6	24	39	13	37	150	7.2	
DAF	19	2	8	4	1	3	6	18	25	13	49	148	6.9	
NTDPIF	100	0	3	1	3	4	1	2	3	2	27	146	2.6	
DAFWA	108	1	4	1	1	5	2	2	4	2	15	145	1.8	

Some **extension providers** were part of the FutureBeef program or part of the network and had a better understanding of all partner organisations. Others were based in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, part of NTDPIF or DAFWA. Comments were that they *thought it was a Queensland program; don't see much from DAFWA and were not sure of DAFWA involvements*. There were some who noted they were aware MLA was funding FutureBeef but *unaware of [its] input into the development and hadn't seen any evidence that MLA was involved*.

This perspective was similar amongst **industry representatives/advisors/suppliers** with some commenting that *DAFWA was a bit more off the radar*. Some had worked in partnership with DAF and MLA and were well aware of their involvement. One was based in NT and aware of NTDPIF involvement. Another commented that they were aware of the partners but not of *the structure*.

Some **producers** had a very good understanding of the partners involved in FutureBeef. One explained that they *export cattle overseas and have dealings with Thailand so we are aware of all aspects*, while another worked for DAF in NT and WA and someone else said that *it is part of my job to know this*. Many noted their connections to either MLA (via Feedback, magazines, booklets and emails) and DAF (working on farm projects, participation in courses and workshops, facilities available, extension support, field days and other resources) as contributing to their knowledge of these organisations' involvement. Many producers indicated that they were not aware of NTDPIF and DAFWA involvement.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Communication channels

More than half of survey respondents (59%) mentioned accessing the FutureBeef website. All of the extension providers said they had used the website and most (71%) had accessed the intranet. Most of the industry/private adviser/suppliers (90%) had used the website although less than half of producers (46%) said they had visited the site.

FutureBeef newspaper features (85%) and the *FutureBeef Update* eBulletin (83%) were the most commonly mentioned communication channels (March 2016) although social media channels (YouTube 23%; Facebook 23%; Twitter 9%) were less prevalent overall. Over half of respondents had accessed the webinars (52%). The below table provides an overall breakdown of respondent use of FutureBeef communication channels:

	Extension (public) (n=24)	Industry/private adviser/supplier (n=20)	Producer/ owner (n=102)	Corporate/Farm manager (n=4)	TOTAL
FutureBeef newspaper features	20	12	92	4	128
<i>FutureBeef Update</i> eBulletin	22	18	81	3	124
FutureBeef Website	24	18	47		89
FutureBeef Webinars	22	13	42	1	78
FutureBeef on YouTube	13	3	19		35
FutureBeef on Facebook	11	4	19		34
FutureBeef Intranet	17				17
FutureBeef on Twitter	5	6	2		13

FutureBeef website

Website statistics

According to the 2014-2015 eExtension Annual Report, the FutureBeef website received 103,875 visits (19% increase from 2013-14) from 75,139 unique visitors (23% increase) who viewed 197,416 pages (9% increase). At the time of reporting, 152 beef industry RD&E project snapshots were available on the website (253% increase) and summaries for 107 completed projects (5% increase). Visits, unique visitors and page views varied over the year, overall decreasing from the first to fourth quarter of 2014-15 by 1%. Pages per visit increased by 1%, average visit duration decreased by 3% and percent new visits remained unchanged⁷. The following tables from the eExtension Annual Report (2014-2015) provide detailed metrics for the FutureBeef website:

Yearly FutureBeef site metrics for 2012–13, 2013–14, 2014–15 and lifetime

Metric	Lifetime	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Visits	255,247	103,875	87,109	55,673
% change from previous period	—	+19%	+56%	—

⁷ eExtension Annual Report 2014-2015 (Attachment 4). FutureBeef.

Unique visitors	173,196	75,139	61,134	37,513
% change from previous period	—	+23%	+63%	—
Pageviews	551,398	197,416	180,602	134,550
% change from previous period	—	+9%	+34%	—
Pages per visit	2.16	1.90	2.07	2.42
% change from previous period	—	-8%	-14%	—
Avg. visit duration	2.24 min	1.58 min	2.17 min	2.41 min
% change from previous period	—	-27%	-10%	—
% new visits	67.85%	69.82	67.93	66.51
% change from previous period	—	+3%	+2%	—

Source: Google Analytics

Monthly FutureBeef website metrics for 2014–15

Metric	2014-15	Apr-Jun 2015	Jan-Mar 2015	Oct-Dec 2014	Jul-Sep 2014
Visits	103,875	25,222	27,263	26,016	25,542
% change from previous period	—	-7%	+5%	+2%	+4%
Unique visitors	75,139	18,963	21,011	21,022	19,187
% change from previous period	—	-10%	+5%	+10%	+3%
Pageviews	197,416	49,427	51,928	46,829	49,696
% change from previous period	—	-5%	+11%	-6%	+1%
Pages per visit	1.90	1.96	1.90	1.80	1.95
% change from previous period	—	+3%	+6%	-8%	-3%
Avg. visit duration	1.58 min	2.01 min	1.54 min	1.50 min	2.07 min
% change from previous period	—	+31%	+3%	-28%	-3%
% new visits	69.82%	68.45%	71.75%	70.45%	68.42%
% change from previous period	—	-5%	+2%	+3%	-2%

Source: Google Analytics

Statistics showed that Australian-based site visits were primarily from Queensland (48%), New South Wales (25%) and Victoria (13%). New visitors to the site accounted for 70% of all visits and returning visitors accounted for 30%. This is similar to 2013-14 where 68% of visitors to the site were new and 32% were returning. The majority of visitors stayed for 10 seconds, approximately one-third of visitors remained on the site for 10 to 20 minutes, indicating that they are finding information of value⁸.

Top 10 locations by region 2014–15

	Region	Visits	% of total visits	Pages / visit	Avg. visit duration	% new visits
1	Queensland	33,256	48%	2.67	3.16 min	53%
2	New South Wales	17,446	25%	1.71	1.38 min	69%
3	Victoria	8,752	13%	1.57	1.21 min	73%
4	Western Australia	4,276	6%	1.77	1.46 min	68%
5	South Australia	3,476	5%	1.73	1.35 min	72%
6	Northern Territory	930	1%	3.13	4.10 min	44%
7	Australian Capital Territory	799	1%	2.96	2.09 min	70%
8	Tasmania	475	1%	1.41	1.16 min	75%
9	(not set)	72	0%	1.75	2.57 min	53%
10	(not set)	72	0%	1.88	1.07 min	71%

Information accessed

Outlined in the eExtension Annual Report (2014-2015), the top 10 pages by number of views for 2014-15 were similar to 2013-14. *Calf rearing* remained in the top three (as a result FutureBeef is noted to be developing a video with producers and DAF staff to complement existing site information). *Crossbreeding* remained in the top four (based on the Tim Schatz (NTDPIF) crossbreeding webinar statistics from June). The increased popularity of the molasses supplementation and water

⁸ eExtension Annual Report 2014-2015 (Attachment 4). FutureBeef.

requirements for cattle pages reflected ongoing drought conditions across the majority of Queensland⁹.

Top 10 pages by number of views 2014-15

	Page title	Pageviews	Unique pageviews	Avg. time on page
1	FutureBeef	8354	6585	1.40 minutes
2	FutureBeef Calf rearing	7741	7152	5.10 minutes
3	FutureBeef Crossbreeding systems for beef cattle	5329	4475	5.14 minutes
4	FutureBeef Event	4702	2697	0.32 minutes
5	FutureBeef Molasses supplementation	4398	4033	5.44 minutes
6	FutureBeef FutureBeef	3063	2166	1.38 minutes
7	FutureBeef Water requirements for cattle	2966	2752	4.25 minutes
8	FutureBeef Aging cattle by their teeth	2802	2504	3.17 minutes
9	Calf rearing – FutureBeef	2284	2066	5.17 minutes
10	FutureBeef Land types of Queensland	2241	1148	0.40 minutes

Source: Google Analytics

Top 10 search terms for 2014-15

	Search term	Views
1	future beef	266
2	futurebeef	119
3	calf rearing	52
4	compensatory growth	37
5	www.futurebeef.com.au	30
6	molasses for cattle	26
7	futurebeef.com.au	25
8	cross breeding	23
9	stringhalt in cattle	22
10	how much water does a cow drink	20

Source: WordPress

2013 evaluation

During March 2013, an online survey of 433 FutureBeef website subscribers was conducted using SurveyMonkey. Respondents to the survey included producers (25%), consultants (19%) and agribusiness (22%). Government, natural resource management and hobby farmers each accounted for 9%. Education and livestock agents each accounted for 3%. The majority of respondents were from/based in Australia and within Queensland (approximately 70%)¹⁰.

The evaluation also included responses from 27 FutureBeef staff: DAFFQ (69.2%), DAFWA (15.3%), DPIF (11.5%) and MLA (3.8%). Extension was the primary work role for 73.1% of respondents, 19.2% research and 7.7% other. Other being: 'Extension and research' and 'Information and communication'¹¹. The following is a summary of findings and feedback collected during these evaluations:

Website visits: At the time of the survey, findings showed that the main reasons subscribers visited the FutureBeef website were for *information updates and to stay informed*. People also visited the site to find out about events and industry trends. Over 81% of subscribers visited the site on a weekly or monthly basis, 13% visited it daily and 8% noted they did not visit it at all.

⁹ eExtension Annual Report 2014-2015 (Attachment 4). FutureBeef.

¹⁰ Subscriber evaluation of FutureBeef website (Attachment 2). March 2013. FutureBeef.

¹¹ Staff Evaluation of the FutureBeef website (Attachment 3). March 2013. FutureBeef.

Findings showed that FutureBeef staff visited the website weekly to monthly with 'Upcoming events/Event calendar' and 'Regions – Queensland' being the most popular areas of the site which staff referred to or used (66.7% of 9 respondents).

Website usability: On average, subscribers rated the website and its components (content, layout, effectiveness, feedback process and registration process) as 7 out of 10. Some respondent comments included *a preference for hardcopy versus digital medium*. Respondents particularly liked the information on the site and that it was accessible and easy to access/navigate.

Overall staff rated the website highly. The majority of respondents rated website content, layout, effectiveness, feedback process and registration process at 8 out of 10 or higher. Respondents particularly liked that the website was a *'one stop shop' for information, accessible and relatively easy to navigate*.

Suggested improvements: website subscribers noted the following comments and suggestions to improve the FutureBeef website: *hard to sort out the most relevant information in a category; like to use it more! Time poor. Maybe an app?; would be good if you could import the events calendar into Outlook; the problems relate to access from my location in Papua New Guinea; how about teaching novices how to use?; Greater commercial industry involvement; not updated regularly enough; and bit hard to follow*.

Topics that subscribers noted they would like more access to via the website included:

- *Past reports from key grazing trials, early editions of Beeftalk magazine*
- *Carbon farming*
- *Crossbreeding – first cross gains, not necessarily composite breeds*
- *Review of commercially available products, e.g. Agrimaster, Agworld, Cashbooks Plus, Phoenix Gateway, etc.*
- *Grazing economics, weed management integrated with grazing/pasture competition. Current website is still DAFF-centric rather than whole of grazing enterprise focused.*
- *Horses, cattle, anything rural.*
- *Maybe current work or advances in research, funding achieved, by who, etc*
- *Business management and marketing*
- *Updates on the progress/development of Grazing BMP¹².*

Aspects of the website that FutureBeef staff liked the least included: *it can be time consuming trying to find information as it is sometimes not where you'd expect it to be; lots of information but still gaps; information a little outdated and resorts back to old DPI; another website; more cross referencing of associated information with links – some don't seem to work; very long lists of items – layout differently; YouTube clips take too long to load; remembering to go there – maybe there should be an interesting tip now and then; and a fairly busy layout*.

Topics that staff would like to see included on the website: *factsheets to be used as handouts; education resources; dealing with adverse conditions; people management; economics; live export industry updates. While information can be expanded, it is important to keep what is there practical and relevant to northern producers and up to date¹³.*

¹² Subscriber evaluation of FutureBeef website (Attachment 2). March 2013. FutureBeef.

¹³ Staff Evaluation of the FutureBeef website (Attachment 3). March 2013. FutureBeef.

2016 evaluation

The 89 respondents (59%) indicating they had accessed the FutureBeef website rated the website as being *quite* useful (average rating 6.2/10).

Respondents commented on the type of information available on the FutureBeef website and those areas they found to be most useful. Extension providers discussed the availability of technical resources and information, access to past reports, information regarding animal nutrition, grazing land management as well the availability of webinars and contact details. Industry representatives/ advisors/ suppliers commented on the event updates, while producers commented on the training resources and programs available. Comments regarding the website included:

Rated website high as you can access it when you want and there is a fair bit of detail on that website –
Extension Provider

The Internet is the way to go and if farmers are not using it they are falling behind in all the new innovations -
Producer

The web site has been very helpful with quick information through the dry season -
Producer

Have googled articles but have to be careful as information is not always truthful, need to only go to sites that are reputable organisations -
Producer

Overall respondents found the information available on the FutureBeef website to be useful (44 mentions) and discussed the website as being a valuable resource, providing an *advantage*. One producer commented that, *FutureBeef is an ever evolving website and always keeps me updated and I am happy with that, think it could be hard to improve.*

Some respondents also commented on the ease of use and navigation through the site (10 mentions). Many producers noted that although they have seen or accessed the website in the past, their use of the website is only occasional (24 mentions). Some note they felt the website and information available was more relevant to larger producers. Others explained the difficulties they experienced due to limited broadband and internet services and the impact this had in terms of accessing online services.

The main reason I haven't used some of these things [is because] we have such slow internet where we are we can't download anything really as we would use up so much of our allocated amount for the month -
Producer

Several producers commented on *Feedback* and the cattle calculators available on the MLA website as being particularly useful as well as commenting on the value of BeefTalk being available online.

Some suggestions for improvement (13 mentions) included the need for more/improved industry news, more information specific to the Northern Territory and a format more specific to scientists researching scientific papers. One producer commented that they *preferred it when FutureBeef had the pocket book.*

FutureBeef staff intranet

The FutureBeef staff intranet includes corporate plans, strategy documents and reports, branding and promotional material, and resources relevant to staff (including information on extension tools, archived publications, and additional topic information). At the time of reporting there were 76 published pages, 18 news items (posts) and 427 (359 previously) attached media files (incl. pdf, images, templates, etc) on the site. There were 81 registered users spread across all FutureBeef partner agencies: DAF (61), DAFWA (8), DPIF (9) and MLA (0)¹⁴.

Intranet usage

Since its inception the site has had a total of 7,456 views (as of 1 July 2015). The site achieved a daily best of 161 views on 30 July 2012 (unchanged). The most popular pages outlined in the eExtension Annual Report (2014-2015) were 'Welcome, 'Resources', 'Templates', 'Workshop and field day materials' and 'Newsletter editors and authors'. The Annual Report noted there was *opportunity to further improve the usefulness of the intranet to staff*¹⁵.

Top 10 intranet pages from 1 July 2014 to 1 July 2015

	Page	Views
1	Welcome!	336
2	Resources	214
3	Templates	112
4	Workshop and field day materials	74
5	Newsletter editors and authors	66
6	Monitoring and evaluation	47
7	Help	36
8	Plans and strategy documents	34
9	Style guide	32
10	Promotional material	32

2013 evaluation

During March 2013, an online survey of 27 FutureBeef staff showed that most staff members accessed the intranet monthly (38.5%) or never (23.1%). The top five intranet locations visited by staff included: 'Client database (Qld only)'; 'News'; 'Contacts'; 'Grazing land management' (from Survey 1). Staff who used the intranet found it *easy to access, use and navigate*. Aspects of the intranet, which respondents liked least, and suggestions for improvement included: *lack of use by other staff; time consuming; not always intuitive to navigate around; sooooo slow*.

Staff identified additional topics to be included on the intranet: *up-to-date information as it comes through; Animal Health/Biosecurity issues, e.g. disease surveillance; new online software, e.g. useful for time management, goal setting or keeping passwords; and maybe making it my homepage*¹⁶.

2016 evaluation

Seventeen of the 24 extension providers (71%) contacted during 2016 indicated they have accessed and/or viewed the FutureBeef intranet. Overall, respondents rated the FutureBeef intranet as being

¹⁴ eExtension Annual Report 2014-2015 (Attachment 4). FutureBeef.

¹⁵ eExtension Annual Report 2014-2015 (Attachment 4). FutureBeef.

¹⁶ Staff Evaluation of the FutureBeef website (Attachment 3). March 2013. FutureBeef.

quite useful (average rating 6.4/10). Respondents noted accessing the FutureBeef intranet when looking for specific templates (3 mentions). Several mentioned using the intranet to access staff contacts and details on the individual profiles of staff members (2 mentions). Although several note it is a *good source of information* (3 mentions) others commented that they *rarely used it* (5 mentions) *[I'm] so busy I don't have much time to be looking at all this other stuff*. Some commented that the site is a bit slow: *you could be there all day when inputting data* and another noted they had experienced difficulties in locating information on the site.

One extension provider commented:

The FutureBeef website and intranet is the only place we can go to [get all information] in the one place. Extremely important for extension staff to do their job – Extension Provider

Overall program: satisfaction with FutureBeef communication

Information channels

Respondents were generally *quite* satisfied with the mix of information sources that FutureBeef is using to provide information to the industry (average rating 7.4/10). More than half of the respondents agreed that FutureBeef's current delivery and extension of information offers users the opportunity to *pick* their preferred communication channels (80 mentions). Its mix of information resources were described as providing *variety; fantastic overall; accessible; and offering something for everyone*. FutureBeef was commended for delivering information across a range of geographic areas, covering a range of information and for being *adaptable and not stuck on one thing*. Respondents commented that *you will be sure to get the information you are looking for; and if people want the information, there is plenty if they go looking*. One noted that *given today's technology...they are going the right way*. One producer expressed the view that current information available is *better than it ever has been in my life!*

Producers discussed their use of FutureBeef's **online resources** including the availability of webinars, emails and newsletter updates. Several extension providers commented on the need for more links to *scientific information*, other websites and the possibility of a virtual library. Another respondent commented on the availability of old fact sheets relating to management options, which are no longer available online, suggesting an issue with website storage capabilities.

FutureBeef's **social media strategies** were discussed by an extension provider as providing a *good platform to extend messages to clients that we don't get to see* and another suggested the potential to use resources to link to other news topics and information rather than housing it all in the eBulletin. From a producer perspective, Facebook was noted as *leading the way*, particularly when producers cannot make it to workshops and forums. Facebook allows access to local events and other farmer experiences.

Some respondents commented on the need for more **workshops, field days and general face-to-face** interactions (10 mentions). It was explained they missed the opportunity to talk with extension providers (particular mention of DAF) and the fact that *most farmers actually like speaking to someone*. The need for regular interaction, field days, demonstration sites and a scope for more extension was highlighted, with one respondent commenting that *information sinks in better than emails* when producers attend seminars and workshops.

Several commented on the availability of FutureBeef **printed materials**. Extension providers suggested the potential for more mail outs and flyers. Several producers commented on their preference for printed communications, the option to *file it away and read it again* at a later date, with several making specific mention of MLA publications, which were noted as being more relevant to larger properties.

Overall respondents were satisfied that FutureBeef is providing access to range of information, while several extension providers noted that there is always the potential to do more to get information out to producers, but *it comes down to money and people to do it*. One extension provider commented that they are *still running into beef producers who have never heard of Futurebeef*.

FutureBeef content

Respondents were satisfied with the content of information and resources being provided by FutureBeef (average rating 7.5/10). Overall it was thought that FutureBeef was providing useful content in a range of formats (print and online) and covering a variety of topics (48 mentions). FutureBeef was noted to be providing *practical advice* on general farm management and that *over a period of time, most relevant topics are being covered*.

In terms of preferred communications, many commented on FutureBeefs' online content and resources (27 mentions). In particular, respondents mentioned the FutureBeef webinars, emails and newsletters, as well as the value of the FutureBeef website in providing information on upcoming events, workshops, contact details and other notifications.

Respondents appreciated any content specific to **cattle and sheep management** including best practice herd management, stock control, breeding, fertility, mother and calf welfare, health and genetics (17 mentions). Respondents also discussed the value of information regarding **animal nutrition**: grazing, dry season feeding and supplementary feeding (10 mentions); as well as information **about land management** practices: land types, pasture management and legumes (9 mentions).

Market updates, reports and projections as well as **general business management** topics and research including productivity, profitability, environment, government and economics were mentioned as being useful FutureBeef content (14 and 12 mentions).

Some respondents commented on their preference to received **published information** and reports including: reports of an academic nature; documented examples with facts and figures; new innovations and research; fact sheets; and the MLA book (11 mentions).

Others discussed their preference for FutureBeef's training and extension activities including workshops, field days, presentations and seminars (8 mentions).

Some producers expressed the view that FutureBeef information is not useful and that there is sometimes too much information (7 mentions).

Suggestions for additional content

Many respondents could not suggest any areas where FutureBeef could improve their communications or topics areas they felt were lacking (66 mentions). Others suggested specific areas where they felt additional information could be provided. These included:

- **Regionally specific information** including the unique requirements of central Australia, Central Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, climate and weather impacts, drought management and biosecurity issues.
- **Pasture management** information including soils, legumes, forage crops, cropping conditions, feed lotting, organic farming.
- **Land management** information including fencing and forestry.
- **Herd management** topics including more information relating to genetics, supplements and nutrition.
- **General farm and business management** issues including market information, business improvement and innovation, management and leadership, economics, marketing and branding, different entitlements and schemes available to farmers, exporting information, succession planning.

Respondents suggested some improvement to FutureBeef online resources including the need for more YouTube clips with regional relevance, lists of publications and additional website links, and an events and workshop calendar. One extension provider suggested the possibility of using text messages to update members and several producers took the opportunity to suggest the need for improved internet coverage to allow producers to access more of FutureBeef's online resources. Some respondents commented on the ease of use of the website with particular mention of the search function and the option to refine results.

Case studies were suggested by some extension providers and producers as being a worthwhile means of sharing information with producers (8 mentions), which are regionally relevant and presented by other producers *because producers relate better to other producers*. Several respondents commented on the need to ensure enough information is targeted towards smaller producers, with some expressing the view that a large portion of existing information is *aimed at the bigger producer*.

Other comments made regarding the extension of FutureBeef information included:

It is important that they get all of the research that is going on in the industry. It is a lacking there –
Extension Provider

More educational topics on business improvement and innovation and we will share it amongst our clients –
Industry representatives/advisors/suppliers

We need more information on how to access and use webinars and hopefully spread them out to more areas. Also I don't have a clue what all the abbreviations e.g. BMP stands for, I am sure I am not the only farmer and it's frustrating -
Producer

I deal with rural people all over the country but FutureBeef comes through with things that are handy to know and would like to see a lot more farmers utilise –
Industry representatives/advisors/suppliers

Impact of FutureBeef communications

Use of FutureBeef information and resources

Fifty-one respondents indicated that they had used information and resources provided via FutureBeef communication channels to stimulate or support decisions and changes made to their

enterprises (in the case of producers) or their advisory and extension services. A further 17 suggested that although they had not made any specific changes as a result of information gained, they were able to remain informed and up to date with what is happening in the industry. Others noted they had *maybe* used information to stimulate and/or support change, but were not in a position to provide specific details (43 respondents).

	Extension (public)	Industry representatives/advisors/suppliers	Corporate/Farm manager	Producer/owner	TOTAL
Yes	9	3	0	39	51
No specific changes	0	3	1	13	17
Maybe	3	7	1	32	43
No	8	5	1	13	27
No answer	4	2	1	5	12
				TOTAL	150

The table below shows the types of changes that were motivated or informed by FutureBeef. Seventy eight (78) of the 94 respondents who indicated *Yes they had made a change* as a result of FutureBeef information and resources or *Maybe (but cannot think of a specific example)*, provided details regarding the type of changes they had made.

	Yes	No specific changes but keeps me informed of what is available/happening in the industry	Maybe (but can't think of specific example)	No	TOTAL
Business improvement	8	1	3	0	12
Environmental improvement	9	1	1	0	11
Improvement to advice being given	20	3	12	0	35
Technical improvement	9	0	2	0	11
Other	4	3	10	4	21

Details of changes made

Business improvements and changes

Industry representatives/advisors/suppliers discussed the use of FutureBeef information in terms of assisting their clients, making their businesses *more sustainable* and *imparting knowledge* to be used in their business case studies.

Business improvements made by producers included making more informed decisions based on the market and beef prices. Some producers decided to hold onto more females based on demand, to buy hay rather than sell and to keep more calves on the ground. The release of research by FutureBeef and related information was noted as having some influence over decisions.

Specific resources mentioned by respondents as assisting in supporting and informing these changes included:

- A **workshop** at Gin Gin - *changed our enterprise to not selling weaners as we used too as we were not getting enough money for them. Now we sell the yearlings at 3 to 4 to the meat works yet we still have the same amount of cattle on the property but not so many breeders.*
- **Newspaper features:** MLA magazine, MLA EDGE newsletter, DPI BeefTalk, publications on livestock handling weeds and managing southern speargrass managing native pasture.

- **FutureBeef website:** updates about events in area

Environmental improvements and changes

One extension provider commented on the use of land type information sheets and forage reports to assist in *determining land conditions*. Producers used information to support decisions regarding land and soil management mentioning improvements and changes made to *phosphorous efficiency*; identifying and controlling weeds and pastures; and improvements to pastures and different mixes of legumes and grass seeds. In terms of herd management, producers noted improvements made to *general herd management; conditioning scoring; and cattle worming and spraying*. Producers have also used FutureBeef information and resources in planning for and assisting with drought; climate range forecasting and climate change.

Specific resources mentioned by respondents as assisting in supporting and informing these changes:

- **Newspaper features:** magazine articles
- **FutureBeef website:** including MLA and FarmSafe

Technical improvements and changes

Technical improvements were mostly mentioned by extension providers, who noted using technical information including nutrition advice, feeding schedules and pasture management, to help provide informed advice to graziers. One respondent commented that they have been able to use webinars for extension purposes, *sending clips [and links] out to clients* and using the technical notes for their own purposes.

Specific resources mentioned by respondents as assisting in supporting and informing these changes included:

- **eNews:** and supporting website information
- **FutureBeef website:** *able to pass on information to a client to make a decision to sell or feed cattle*
- **Newspaper features:** information sheets and newspapers
- **Radio:** such as Country hour
- **Webinars:** most detailed information is on the webinar

Improvements to advice given and received

Several extension providers noted their use of the FutureBeef website, to *hone* their own skills, to access information (*land type sheets; HOF webinars; and grazing management*) as well as referring producers to the website.

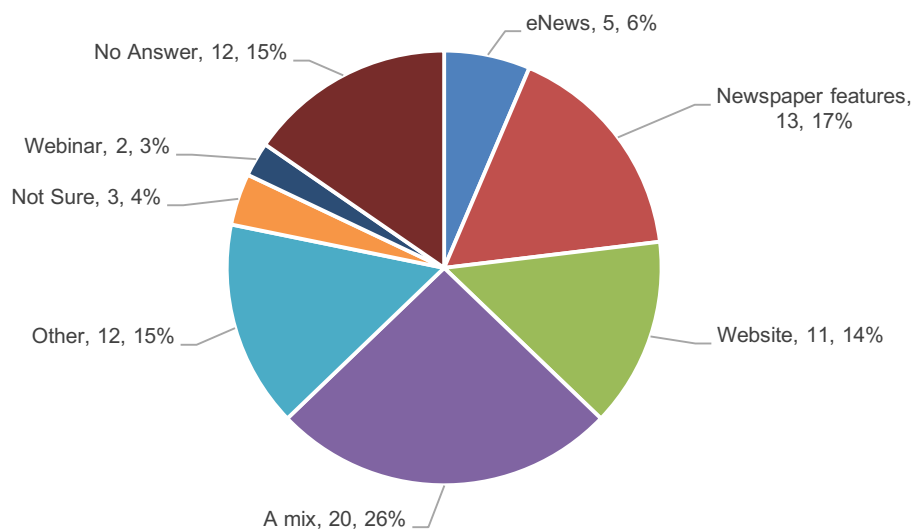
Producers discussed the improved access to knowledge within the industry. Specific areas where producers benefited from access to improved advice and information include breeding management, fertility and animal husbandry. Other areas included nutrition and supplementary feeding (particularly drought feeding); herd management (specific mention of how to manage pestivirus, buffalo fly control, tick and worm control as well as cattle weighing and ear tagging); grazing management (rotation strategies, improving pastures and grazing systems); as well as improvements to general knowledge, *reinforcing* current strategies as well as general business management. Specific resources mentioned by respondents as assisting in supporting and informing these changes:

- **FutureBeef website:** Grazing nutrition management, *looked up how to feed in the drought*, MLA Feedback information, YouTube and webinars
- **Newspaper features:** Beef Central, BeefTalk, a course with DAF, MLA book/ MLA FutureBeef. Improvement in pastures
- **Field days and workshops:** MLA beef forums, field days, speaker from a workshop, DAF seminar
- **Face-to-face:** DAF, other cattle producers

Sources of information informing changes

Seventy eight (78) of the 94 respondents who indicated *Yes* they had made a change as a result of FutureBeef information and resources or *Maybe* (but cannot think of a specific example), identified the source of information that had assisted in supporting and informing changes. These are shown in the chart below and included a mix of resources (20), newspaper features (13) other sources (12) and the FutureBeef website (11).

Figure 2: Sources of information informing change (n= 78)



	Business improvement	Environmental improvement	Improvement to advice being given	Technical improvement	Other	TOTAL
eNews	2		1	2		5
Newspaper features	3	2	6	2		13
Website	1	2	4	3	1	11
A mix	2	3	10	3	2	20
Other	2	2	7		1	12
Not sure	1		1		1	3
Webinar			1	1		2
No answer		1	2		9	12
TOTAL	11	10	32	11	14	78

Benefits of changes made

One of the main benefits resulting from change or which producers hope to achieve as a result of changes and improvements was noted to be productivity improvements (20 mentions), particularly in terms of producing more and better breeding stock, healthier cattle and an overall improved understanding of stock control. Closely aligned, producers hoped to improve their farm profitability, achieving increased prices for healthier cows (18 mentions). Producers hoped that by having *clearer plans* they can improve income, make cost savings and improve their bottom line. One respondent commented, as a result of improved understanding, *we control when we sell and how much we get for them at the meat works*.

Producers discussed the overall benefits to general farm and business management strategies (16 mentions) noting they: have *clearer plans*; *an outlook on what can be done*; *are hoping to achieving more efficient farming*; *are improving staff procedures*; and *making savings of time and thinking outside of the square*. One respondent summed up that they now have *less stress running [the] business and a bit of direction*. Producers also commented on the improvements made and hoped to be achieved in terms of land management, including improved pastures, ground cover, weed control and fencing.

Extension providers and industry representatives/advisors/suppliers discussed benefits associated with gaining access to information via FutureBeef. Several commented on having improved their own knowledge and skills, impacting on the services and technical knowledge being passed on to clients. In addition, extension providers commented that they are able to refer producers to FutureBeef resources. One respondent commented that this is *part of the process of giving information to people and enabling them to make decisions on what they are going to change or not*.

FutureBeef website: Respondents indicating the program website as their main information source discussed its use in helping to inform and educate their own clients about *sustainability and profitability*; passing information on to others, *enabling them to make decisions*; and helping others to make decisions about whether to *sell or feed cattle, and which is the better option*. Other benefits included *improvement in grasses*; greater awareness of urgent land conditions; profitability and cost savings; and updating staff procedures.

Summary comments

Overall, respondents commended FutureBeef for *working extremely well and doing a great job!* Most were satisfied with the variety of resources available with several commenting on its role as a *space for users to find good information in the grazing industry* and for those looking for *information as a starting point*. One industry representatives/advisors/suppliers commented that FutureBeef information is useful to their members and they have *a lot of opportunity to share the events*.

Extension of FutureBeef resources

In terms of sharing and extension of FutureBeef resources, one extension provider expressed the view that there is potential for more promotion of FutureBeef services: *it has reached a level as a good supporting tool but the industry has to bring itself up to speed to where the tools are*. Another mentioned FutureBeef should be *careful to target all producers*, suggesting the importance of finding a way to reach those producers *who don't engage with the internet or have bad internet connections*. One extension provider advised FutureBeef noting, they *would be hesitant [to] step too far away from printed media in general*, suggesting the importance of ensuring all communications interact and support producer needs effectively...*internet connection aside some people like technology and some*

don't if you can take a printed copy it is more effective. It was also suggested that some producers are unsure on how to access online resources and there is the opportunity to help and show producers how to access the internet and webinar courses.

Internet in rural Australia

Although not the realm of FutureBeef's responsibility, many respondents commented on the impact of internet connections and poor mobile coverage in rural regions. Many praised the efforts of FutureBeef in providing a range of communication resources, however were frustrated and disappointed in not being able to access the full range of articles, information and knowledge offered to them via FutureBeef. This sentiment summed up by one producer: *lots of farmers can't get Internet in their area so through no fault of their own they miss out considerably.*

Where mobile coverage and internet service is available, producers acknowledged FutureBeef emails and updates as being very valuable, with comments including *emails are good as they seem to prompt me in looking sites up.* However, many noted that if there are too many downloads or images, their data would be quickly depleted resulting in them not access the information at all. One producer suggested: *maybe some form of simplification of web based information so it is more downloadable, if I get an email that I can't download pictures I don't bother.*

Several producers took the opportunity to comment on the overall impact of internet issues in rural regions, suggesting that unless internet issues were *dramatically improved* younger generation farmers may be lost to other industries. Comments included:

*I know lots of farmers that can't get service for the Internet and it's hard enough for them but our children need those sort of things to get an education, as they have fresh ideas and the energy to make them work. We have to look after the next generation and if the facilities aren't there, it might be put into the too hard basket and they might pursue other careers, so where will that leave the farming industry years from now - **Producer***

*If communication doesn't improve our next generation will lean more towards different trades and where will Australia will be without farmers? - **Producer***

Some producers expressed a view that government should be more accountable for helping farmers, commenting that *without proper communication and knowledge we lose out, having the Internet would make it so much easier on cattle prices* and another that *government doesn't subsidise us what so ever, more is done overseas and that's very disappointing.*