

ISSUE 48 AUTUMN 2017



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BEEF TALK

Taking stock of your future

Forage oat variety guide 2017

Available for download now

Lessons from the north

And other tips on staying resilient



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Welcome to Beeftalk 48

Severe Tropical Cyclone Debbie has impacted many Queensland grazing businesses, parts of the supply chain and vital infrastructure. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is committed to assisting industry recovery. Key contacts for information and funding assistance are DAF – www.daf.qld.gov.au or 13 25 23, QRAA on www.qraa.qld.gov.au or Freecall 1 800 623 946. The website www.farmerdisastersupport.org.au is a listing of all support agencies assisting the recovery effort.


In other parts our readership area, producers have started taking action in response to the below average conditions. 'Tactics for tough times' and 'Heavy stocking leaves you short' gives us some insights into lessons from north Queensland.

Opportunities for business training also exist with the 'Beef Business Mentoring Program'. Read 'The business of beef' to find out more. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is extending free counselling to support people living and working in drought impacted areas.

With the high risk associated with quad bike accidents, we invite parents with a child between 3 and 16 years of age to participate in a 20 minute survey to explore quad bike use for children. To take part in the study email Kim Vuong at kim.vuong@hdr.qut.edu.au. Even if your child does not ride a quad bike, Kim would still like your input and there are vouchers to be won for study contributors.

We would also appreciate your feedback on Beeftalk and suggestions for future articles. Please email us at info@futurebeef.com.au or visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/beeftalk48

Happy reading,

The **Beeftalk team.** 

Forage oat variety guide 2017

Download the *Forage Oat Variety Guide 2017* from www.daf.qld.gov.au/plants/field-crops-and-pastures/broadacre-field-crops/oats/forage-oat-variety-guide.

The guide summarises the latest practices and developments in the management of forage oat varieties.

It includes information on 'Wizard' the new high-yield, disease resistant forage oat variety released in 2016. It was developed by DAF plant breeders at the Leslie Research Facility in Toowoomba. Wizard is the pinnacle of seven years research by the Department's scientists to develop a variety resistant to all known strains of leaf rust.

during winter. The forage oats breeding project is funded jointly by the Queensland Government and its commercial partner, Heritage Seeds, which will market Wizard.

Alternative winter forage crops may also suit your fodder needs. Things to consider when choosing which variety include:


- adaptation/suitability to your region – rainfall and temperature
- sowing time
- feed quality and quantity required and when – maturity type, height, relative dry matter production, grain yield
- response to grazing
- disease resistance
- seed quality/germination rate.



'Hercules' the Square Meater bull enjoys some Wizard forage oats. Photo courtesy: Bruce Winter, DAF, Toowoomba.

Over four years of trials, Wizard has achieved a nine per cent improvement in total forage yield compared to Aladdin and Genie which have been the benchmark varieties for growers in the northern regions.

Wizard produces vigorous growth early in the season, and recovers quickly from grazing to produce high forage yield for fattening cattle

Ask your local seed supplier for more information about the forage crop varieties they sell and specific establishment and management guidelines for each. 

Tick fever vaccine – new packaging, same vaccine

Tick fever vaccine is the most reliable and practical tool for long-term control of tick fever.

You will notice some changes to tick fever vaccine this year – new label, new leaflet, new style of draw-off tubes. The vaccine, however, remains the same.

Tick fever is caused by infection with *Babesia* and *Anaplasma* organisms transmitted by the cattle tick. All cattle in tick infested areas are at risk of developing tick fever. The single biggest risk for infection with tick fever is in cattle which are introduced from outside the cattle tick areas. However, even cattle born and raised within the tick area are not guaranteed to have developed immunity by the time age-related resistance wanes at nine to 10 months of age.

Cattle of any age can be vaccinated, but it is best to vaccinate animals between three to nine months of age when there is little risk of reactions to the vaccine. Many producers find it convenient to vaccinate at weaning.

It takes about three to four weeks after vaccination for immunity to develop to babesiosis and up to two months for immunity to develop to anaplasmosis.

When introducing cattle, keep in mind the time taken for immunity to develop after vaccination. Ideally, vaccination occurs well before introduction. One dose of vaccine is sufficient in most cases for lifetime immunity; but an argument can be made for a second dose in introduced cattle.

Tick Fever Centre was established in 1966 and has been producing vaccine now for over 50 years.

You can order the tick fever vaccine through your rural supplier, veterinarian or direct from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' Tick Fever Centre on 07 3898 9655 or call the Customer Service Centre on 13 25 23.

More information is available online at www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/agriculture/livestock/cattle/tick-fever-vaccines. 



Tick fever vaccine – new labels and leaflets

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Principles for using vaccines

Vaccinations are cheap insurance against stock losses. Pestivirus, tick fever, botulism, vibrio and other clostridial diseases (in descending order) are in the top 15 livestock diseases of economic importance in Australia. It is highly recommended that all cattle receive 5-in-1 or 7-in-1 and all bulls receive vibrio annually.

Vaccinate against pestivirus if your herd is at risk. If you are unsure of the best vaccination program for your herd contact your veterinary practitioner. Always follow manufacturer's instructions when vaccinating. All injections should be given under the skin in the neck, not in the muscle.

Live and killed vaccines

Killed vaccines are a mix of dead pathogens (e.g. minced up virus particles or bacteria) and compounds called adjuvants which stimulate the development of immunity. Water-soluble adjuvants are preferred, but sometimes oily adjuvants are used to get enough stimulation. This extra stimulation can cause prolonged site reactions if you don't inject properly.

Live vaccines have altered organisms to cause immunity but not disease. They do not generally have adjuvants.

Primers and boosters

To be effective **killed vaccines** usually require two initial injections, the first primer injection followed by the booster given at least four weeks apart. If the second shot (booster) is not given, there is every chance that no protection will be provided. If the booster is delayed for up to four months after the primer, it is likely that some animals will receive protection, though not at the same level as they would have if they had been given the booster at the recommended time. However, some killed vaccines (for example, two of the available botulism vaccines) require only one initial shot.

Most live vaccines require one initial shot but there are exceptions; for example, the bovine ephemeral fever (BEF or three-day sickness) vaccine requires the same protocol as for killed vaccines.

After the initial shots, annual booster shots are required for most live and killed vaccines to sustain protective immunity.

Vaccinate at the right time

Vaccinate animals before they are likely to be exposed to the disease but as close as possible to the likely period of transmission. For example, vaccinate bulls for vibrio at least 10 weeks before mating and vaccinate heifers about six weeks before mating.

It is difficult to vaccinate calves, but they do require protection. They can get this from antibodies in the colostrum immediately after birth. Maximise the levels of antibodies in the colostrum by giving breeders their annual vaccinations before calving. Diseases like pestivirus can spread during mating and vaccination before calving is strongly recommended in herds where this disease is a problem.

Avoid vaccinating cattle with wet coats as this increases the chance of infection at the injection site.

Giving multiple vaccines

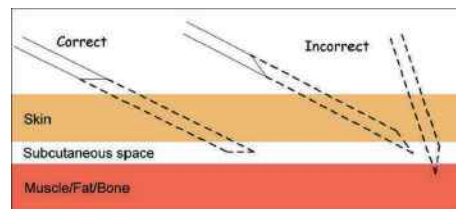
Some vaccines can interfere with the development of immunity from other vaccines if they are given at the same time. For example, avoid giving tick fever (blood) at the same time as any initial (priming) injections; however this vaccine can be given at the same time as boosters.

Vaccines based on gram negative bacteria (this includes most of the bacterial vaccines) can cause toxicity problems (endotoxins) in some cattle if given with multiple vaccines. Avoid giving more than two bacterial vaccines at the same time.

Hit the right spot, gently

Even when given properly, all vaccines can cause significant reactions and pain, to the point of lameness in some animals, for up to a week. A swelling will be seen on most animals at the injection site in the days after injection.

Most vaccines for cattle should be given under the skin, especially oil-based vaccines. Severe reactions can occur if you inject the vaccine into muscle. The preferred site is above the backbone in the neck area forward of the hump. Injecting here minimises the potential for carcase damage.



Vaccinating under the skin, NOT in the muscle

Your needle should be sharp and clean and be inserted as gently as possible. The best needles are capped but these are only available in ¾ inch; ½ inch needles would be ideal if they were available.

The anal fold is an UNACCEPTABLE site for vaccination; there are too many nerves, blood vessels and opportunities for infection, and this site is next to several valuable meat cuts.

Avoid injecting more than one vaccine into the same site. Before vaccinating a group of cattle, determine where you'll inject each vaccine, for example either side, forward or back of the neck area.

Handle vaccines for effectiveness and safety

Vaccines should be treated like milk. Vaccines exposed to freezing, heat or light can break down and become ineffective. The sterile packaging means vaccines can have a much longer shelf-life than milk, but they must be kept refrigerated. Once a pack is open, its sterility is lost. Opened vaccines that are kept chilled and clean can still be used within a week. Refrigeration must be maintained crush-side during vaccination.

Use clean gear. Disassemble, clean, sterilise and reassemble re-usable guns between each use. Replace disposable guns after use.

Don't miss the animal and get yourself. A 16 gauge needle hurts. If you inject yourself with vaccine it can cause nasty prolonged reactions. It is VERY important that you do not accidentally inject anyone with an oil-based vaccine as it can cause very serious reactions requiring surgery and cause significant permanent damage.

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New beef videos now online

FutureBeef recently created a series of YouTube videos featuring some of the state's leading graziers talking about their businesses.


The suite of short videos covers a range of topics and profile the management practices these beef business leaders have implemented to improve their returns. The videos can be viewed by going to www.youtube.com and searching for 'FutureBeefAu'.

The videos offer insight into the sheer scope of how a grazing business operates and the many elements that a business manager must consider.

Topics covered include land management techniques such as grass cover, strategic use of watering points and tackling soil erosion to beef breeding and genetics, workplace health and safety, biosecurity and record keeping.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' FutureBeef team managed the production of the videos and ensured they covered topics that were important to Queensland's grazing industry.

FutureBeef aims to use new and traditional extension methods to ensure graziers can access the latest science and technology. The team is committed to making the industry a world-leader in grazing best practice and this YouTube video series is another great example of that.

FutureBeef is a collaboration between Meat & Livestock Australia and the governments of Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. 

Editorial committee

Roger Sneath, Damien O'Sullivan, Felicity McIntosh, Rebecca Farrell, Megan Gurnett, Tracy Longhurst (DAF) and Carli McConnel representing the South East Queensland Regional Beef Research Committee.

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Lessons from the north

Tactics for tough times

‘Find the balance between what your land can produce, degrading your country and what you can earn.’ — Glen and Cheryl Connolly, Blanncourt, Georgetown

Operating a successful beef business in the dry tropics is challenging and comes with many production, financial, market and family constraints. Production cycles are long, with the time from conception to store turnoff exceeding three years across the northern forest country.

Rainfall, or seasonal variability, is another challenge that can significantly influence these long production cycles. After a run of tough years in the north and north-west of Queensland, now is a good time to record how some producers have tried to minimise the financial and personal strain of low rainfall years and poor seasons.

Glen and Cheryl Connolly, who own and operate Blanncourt (Georgetown) and Elwell (Prairie), have some rules of thumb to better prepare for the inevitable run of dry years.

Blanncourt rules of thumb

Match cattle numbers to available pasture

Total cattle numbers on Blanncourt don't vary much; however, cattle numbers per paddock are adjusted depending on rainfall and feed supply.

Stocking rates should be set so your business can handle a dry year without stress and emergency destocking. Maintain safe stocking rates in the good years to avoid running out of grass. Safe stocking will maintain good ground cover and residual pasture to make use of the first storms.

Don't get trapped by the common misconception that 'more cattle mean more money'.

Wet season spell

Aim to lock up 25 per cent of your property every wet season. Each paddock on Blanncourt receives a wet season spell every two to four years. Weaner paddocks are spelled annually.



Glen and Cheryl Connolly discussing grazing management and improved pasture options with local Gulf producers.

Identify paddocks in poor condition and wet season spell these every year until pasture condition turns around. Land in poor condition due to historic overgrazing and set stocking won't improve overnight. Adjusting stocking rates and introducing a systematic wet season spelling system requires patience. It took 10 years to really see the value of spelling and reducing numbers on Blanncourt.

Offload non-performers

Cull non-performing breeders and you will end up with performers and grass in the paddock, and cash in the bank. Learning to foetal age can be difficult unless pregnancy testing large numbers. Having enough pregnancy testing ability to identify 'empties' or 'in calf' is sufficient.

Wet-dry breeder segregation

Wet-dry breeder segregation is simple but effective. In dry years, if you need to decrease numbers, start with dry cows. Focus on what your dry cows are doing—if they come in dry a second time, sell them. *(Editor's note, in more productive environments dry cows can usually be sold first time).*

Marketing

Decisions must be driven by what grass is in the paddock. Have critical dates and if it hasn't rained by then, start by selling cull cows. Always consider the SOI and seasonal forecasting. If there is talk of a dry year or El Niño, and cattle prices are good, it pays to sell.

Have a variety of market options and if you need to sell, sell early. Use agistment if needed to reduce stocking rates and implement wet season spelling.

Infrastructure

Ideally, have bores and troughs rather than relying on dams.

Finances

Based on accountant's advice, put money away in Farm Management Deposits or self-managed super funds. Manage debt pressure to allow for sensible property development to improve land and herd management options.

Glen and Cheryl Connolly
Blanncourt Station, Georgetown

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Heavy stocking leaves you short

The Wambiana trial began in 1997 to investigate how different grazing strategies cope with rainfall variability. The strategies are:

- **heavy stocking** (HSR) at 4 hectares (ha) per animal equivalent (AE = 450 kg beast)
- **moderate stocking** (MSR) at the long term carrying capacity of 8 ha/AE
- **rotational wet season spelling** (R/Spell) in a 3-paddock system (8 ha/AE)
- **flexible stocking** (Flex) – stocking rates varied based on available forage and climate forecasts
- **flexible stocking with spelling** (Flex+Spell).

The previous 2014/15 season was the fourth driest year in 105 years with only 246 mm of rain recorded. The drought was so severe that many large Ironbark trees died as did many grass tussocks.

Drought feeding (M8U + copra) was started in all paddocks to prevent further loss of condition in remaining animals. This is the first time in 18 years that stock withdrawal or drought feeding had to be implemented in any treatment other than the HSR.

Given these tough conditions, the HSR paddocks had to be destocked in November 2015. While animals in other strategies like the MSR and Flex+Spell were in better condition, some poorer animals had to be withdrawn from these paddocks also.

After rain in January 2016, drought feeding ceased and the withdrawn animals returned to trial paddocks. Although total rainfall for 2015/16 (397 mm) was higher than 2014/15, it was still well below the long term average (650 mm). Pasture yields in all paddocks were very low with lots of annuals.

In 2015/16 animal liveweight gain per head was highest in the HSR with these steers also performing relatively well at the meatworks

(Table 1). This is in sharp contrast to previous years where the HSR animals performed worst.

The good liveweight gains in the HSR in 2015/16 were due to strong compensatory gain after these steers lost weight together with the extremely low stocking rate applied (Table 1). Without significant drought or substitute feeding, HSR animals would have died in the 2015 dry season.

Unlike previous years, liveweight gain per hectare was highest in the MSR and R/Spell but lowest in the HSR. Gross margins per hectare were also far lower in the HSR (-\$1.17/ha) than in the other treatments (Table 1). This was because of the very low liveweight gains per hectare and the large amount of drought feeding required in the HSR relative to the other treatments. Consequently, the HSR ran at a net loss for the third year in a row.



By April 2015 the HSR paddocks were completely bare and the remaining steers were fed hay and M8U + copra meal to survive, and the paddocks were completely destocked by November.

Averaged over the 18 years of the trial, the HSR gross margin is far lower (\$4/ha/yr) than that for the other treatments (\$12–13/ha/yr).

When converted to accumulated gross margin for a 25 000 ha property, stocking around long term carrying capacity and/or flexible stocking would make about \$3.75 million more compared to heavy stocking over the same 18 year period. These results once again emphasise that matching stocking rates to carrying capacity either through moderate or flexible stocking is essential for long term profitability.

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Table 1: Stocking rate and total liveweight gain per head, total liveweight gain per hectare, carcase value and gross margin per hectare for the 2015/16 season.
Note: Liveweight gains exclude weight gained while steers were withdrawn from paddock and drought fed.

Treatment	Stocking rate (ha/AE)	Liveweight gain total (kg/hd/yr)	Liveweight gain per hectare (kg/ha)	Carcase value (\$)	Gross margin (\$/ha)
R/Spell	8	88	12	\$1,196	\$5.39
Flexible	14	97	8	\$1,221	\$4.47
Flex+Spell	13	93	8	\$1,277	\$4.01
Moderate	8	97	13	\$1,164	\$3.85
Heavy	27*	158	6	\$1,220	-\$1.17

* Partially destocked: usual stocking rate = 4 ha/AE



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 **BEEFTALK** *Taking stock of your future*



Plans for dry times

Has your summer rainfall and pasture growth been below average? Do you have written plans in place for action? Drought plans - they should be as common as farm budgets, yet often this vital element of farm planning is neglected.

Having a good plan reduces some of the stress in making big decisions in response to below average seasons. An important part of a drought plan is having “trigger points” or key decision dates. For example, if you do not get enough grass growing rain by the end of February, then a decision will be made on whether to sell some stock.

Knowing how much feed and water you have in front of you helps to estimate how many animals you can carry until next summer while keeping a good cover of ‘rain ready’ grass. If you need to remove stock (for example, sell, agist, production feed), then the sooner they go, the greater the pasture sparing benefit for those remaining.

Having cash and pasture is a far better scenario than having too many animals and not enough grass. The Stocktake Plus app can help you calculate short-term forage budgets and assess land condition and long term carrying capacity.

For breeder herds, tailoring calving to start 6–8 weeks before your green date can save significant supplementation time and costs during droughts. Your green date is when there

is a 70 per cent chance of having 50 ml of rain over 3 days (earlier on the coast, later in the west). CliMate and Rainman Streamflow are free internet programs which provide historic rainfall data and probabilities.

Controlled mating and pregnancy tests make it easy to identify empty (and late calving) cows for sale, leaving more feed for remaining pregnant cows. If you are moving into control mating you can use a pregnancy test in April/May to draft cows into three management groups:


1. Cows calving at the desired time
2. Cows calving earlier than desired – they may need extra supplementation
3. Cows calving later than desired – they may need early weaning to maintain or improve breeder condition.

Drafting cows into management groups can also lower supplement costs as you only feed the group that needs help to maintain condition. For good re-conception rates cows must be in store to forward store condition (BCS 3–4) before calving.

In a drought it is cheaper to feed the calf than to feed the cow. Weaning calves before the cow slips in condition means the cow will cycle earlier after calving and you may not have to crisis feed at the end of the dry season. Weaning saves 10–15 kg of breeder

body weight per month in the early-mid dry season and 5–10 kg per month in the late dry season. The difference in body condition score from 3 to 2 is 30–50 kg of liveweight. Weaning is the most effective tool for managing breeder condition as it has twice the impact of dry season urea supplementation on cow liveweight. Weaning is also important in a good season, cows need to have plenty of condition on their backs in case the next year is a late break and they have to get through an extended dry time with a calf at foot.

If you are considering production feeding, to turn stock off earlier or get them off pastures, have a look at the ‘Cattle-feeding-margin-calculator’ to test the economics. You can download a free copy from www.futurebeef.com.au/knowledge-centre/business-management/beef-business-tools.

Another crucial aspect to your drought plan is reviewing how it went. An objective debrief process allows you to reflect on the decisions you made, the outcomes of these decisions and the modifications for future plans. It can be as simple as having three columns on a page headed: What worked well? What didn't work well? What will I do differently next time? It is best done as soon as possible to update your drought plan to make future decisions easier. 

Drought Wellbeing Service

Resilience and determination are a natural part of rural life. However there may be times when ongoing hurdles like drought make it that bit harder to ‘get back on the horse’.

Difficult climatic conditions, financial and emotional stress, combined with the hard work and long hours put into running a family-owned business can place enormous pressures on farming families. These pressures can impact your mental health and wellbeing, leading to symptoms of anxiety, depression and other health-related issues.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) Drought Wellbeing Service offers free counselling and support to people living and working in areas impacted by drought. The program has clinical counsellors specifically trained to help people with a range of issues including:


- sleep difficulties
- physical effects such as headaches and muscle tension
- anxiety and depression
- stress management
- grief and loss
- relationships
- self esteem
- work related issues
- alcohol and
- gambling
- building resilience through change

If you, a friend or loved one would like to chat with one of the RFDS Drought Wellbeing Service counsellors, please call (07) 3852 7544 or contact your local officer below.

Townsville Region
Cath Walker (07) 4775 3111

Mount Isa Region
Georgina Woods (07) 4743 2800
Rita McInnes (07) 4743 2800

Darling Downs and South West
Jackie Stewart (07) 3852 7531
Liz Hill 0428 259 299
Trish McKenzie (07) 4655 4911

Cairns and Longreach RFDS bases also have social and emotional wellbeing teams who offer mental health assistance. 



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BEEFTALK *Taking stock of your future*


Making sense of the business side of beef

Most beef producers, and others in the beef value chain, feel comfortable managing the production side of their beef enterprises. However, research tells us that most beef business owners and managers feel far less comfortable with the “business” aspects of enterprise management. This may be holding their businesses back.

These aspects include: connecting with customers; managing people; making strategic decisions about succession; engaging with business investors (including banks); communicating internally or externally; expanding or fine-tuning the business; and strategic financial management.

Opportunity knocks in today's marketplace! It seems the whole world wants to be part of the Australian beef industry – in fact the Australian food and fibre sector as a whole.

So how can beef businesses prepare for and capitalise on this opportunity?

To prepare to capitalise on this opportunity, owners and managers need to be increasingly professional and business savvy. You need to understand and listen to the marketplace and your customer, assess the risk of the changing market conditions, and plan for how your business can respond in a way that meets your needs, now and into the future.

This means asking yourself questions like: Where do I want to take this business? Does it need to change? If it does – does this suit me, our current operations and our people (including family)? Do we have the necessary skills? If not, where do we get them? How will we fund these changes? How much risk is acceptable? Do we need ‘new blood’ in the business – and if so how? Inevitably these questions and their answers will lead to other questions.

Making change

Making changes can be challenging and confronting. Human nature lends itself to

avoiding change. However, to take advantage of opportunities, it is critical to examine the need to change and to grow. The big question is: ‘How to get started in an orderly fashion without getting overwhelmed?’

How to get started with the least effort

To help those who want to review and potentially change their business, a group of industry partners, namely the Agri-Business Development Institute (ABDI), the MLA Donor Company, DAF, AgForce and Crowe Horwath are supporting delivery of the ‘Beef Business Mentoring Program’ for business owners and managers. The program is delivered by ABDI, a group of agricultural business specialists who understand what it's like to be at the pointy end.

The program is focussed on meeting the needs of beef producers, and others in the value chain, to help them manage their own business issues.


The main component is a 12-month CEO mentoring program. It involves getting together with a group of like-minded business owners, working through ‘doing business’ topics including: engaging your customer, golden rules of a high performing agribusiness, attracting investors, managing people and financial fundamentals. Then making changes in your own business with the support of a personal mentor. A free webinar program on these topics is also available.

The aim is to expose you to new ideas, decide what is personally relevant, and what changes you need to make and get started on making them in bite sized chunks.

For more information, contact Gordon Stone on (07) 4615 2255 or email info@abdi.com.au.

Gordon Stone

Director, ABDI

Toowoomba 



Beef producers participating in the Beef Business Mentoring program

Preventing lead poisoning and residues in cattle

Lead poisoning in cattle happens when animals eat or lick lead batteries, lead flashing and solder, or lead painted surfaces and tins.

The reason they find these products so attractive is because lead compounds have a sweet taste. However, if animals eat lead or even lick lead surfaces, they can absorb enough to accumulate lead residues in their body and get lead poisoning.

While high levels of lead can cause significant livestock deaths, within 24 to 48 hours of exposure, animals with low level exposure may not show any signs of poisoning.

This is concerning as unacceptable lead residues may be in the meat, liver, kidney, or milk products of exposed animals making them unsuitable for human consumption.

You can protect your cattle and the human food chain from lead contamination by:

- checking paddocks and sheds for vehicle batteries, building materials (lead flashing and solder) and flaking lead paint
- removing old batteries and vehicles
- fencing off active and old dump sites

If you suspect your animals have, or are at risk of having, lead poisoning or high levels of lead residue in their tissues, do not send them to slaughter and notify Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 immediately. Biosecurity officers will advise you on how to manage any biosecurity risks.

Signs of lead poisoning

A combination of gastro-intestinal (either constipation or diarrhoea) and nervous signs may occur.

Acute poisoning can include stock found dead or displaying combinations of several signs for a few hours before death, including:

- colic
- staggering gait
- rolling eyes
- slobbering
- muscle spasms
- blindness
- uncoordinated attempts to climb obstacles
- excessive response to external stimuli
- head pressing
- convulsions

Subacute poisoning signs can include dullness, appetite loss, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, blindness and incoordination.

Chronic poisoning signs include weight loss, appetite loss, anaemia, constipation, recumbency and breathing difficulty. Also, embryo toxicity and poor semen quality may contribute to infertility. Sometimes acute attacks happen during the course of chronic poisoning, resulting in paralysis and death.


Lead contamination of food-producing animals is a serious risk to human health and trade in agricultural commodities. For more information contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit www.daf.qld.gov.au. 

People in Agriculture: a one-stop-shop for employers and employees

The new People in Agriculture website (www.peopleinag.com.au) is the go-to place for guidance and inspiration on employment in Australian agriculture. The site offers compliance support for employers, promotes agriculture as a career choice and provides a platform for employment information sharing.

For employers, the site includes information and support about compliance and information on wages, leave entitlements, and employee

contracts. Employees can also use the site to check their wages and entitlements and discover how they could develop a career in agriculture.

The website was developed with support from several Rural Research and Development Corporations covering cotton, pork, dairy, grains and red meat, along with project partner Food and Agribusiness Solutions. 

*Information sourced from Meat & Livestock Australia.

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FLOCK TALK



Leading Sheep

— keep ahead with beneficial technology

One of Leading Sheep's objectives is to promote beneficial technology to sheep producers. So this edition of Flock talk also has a technology focus.

The first article proves that age is no barrier to technology as webinars become more user-friendly and improve the accessibility to information and experts. This producer encourages others to take the time to learn how simple it is to join these interactive, online sessions.

While the second article is a case study from a producer on the Queensland/New South Wales border who has introduced some sheep handling equipment to minimise the physicality of working with sheep.

Leading Sheep is also planning a number of sessions across the state in June focusing on remote monitoring of water and stock — so watch out for the details on www.leadingsheep.com.au. Alternatively join the Leading Sheep mailing list to make sure you are kept up to date with what is happening in your area, visit www.leadingsheep.com.au, click on the 'members' tab and enter your details.

Nicole Sallur, Flock talk Editor
Leading Sheep project manager &
senior extension officer

Age no barrier to sheep producers saving time with online learning

At 75 years of age, John Ford has mastered the technology of Leading Sheep webinars and is urging others to take the time to discover how simple it is to join in their interactive, online sessions.

Mr Ford regularly connects to the webinars from his property at Mungallala, west of Mitchell in South West Queensland, on topics ranging from ewe nutrition to sheep diseases.

"Technology is becoming increasingly user-friendly and webinars make information much more accessible than in the past when I would drive three or four hours to attend a seminar," he said.

"I'm able to engage with the experts that I would otherwise not have had the chance to meet, and I can join a session while I'm inside having my lunch."

Having an open mind and taking advantage of the resources available to you are two of the key aspects of moving forward with livestock production, according to Mr Ford.

"If we are going to stay in business we simply have to keep up with technology," he said.

"There are some incredible things available to us at just the click of a button and I would encourage anyone who is interested to connect to a webinar — you might be surprised what you could learn."

Mr Ford accesses webinars on his PC with a satellite Activ8 internet connection which is able to support watching the webinar, listening in to the commentary and joining question time by typing his questions, to which the speaker then responds to the whole group.

"I like to compare it to reading a magazine, where if you have a burning question about the content, you can't ask someone that knows the answer right then and there, whereas in the webinars, question time allows me to get the answer from an expert on the spot."

In previous webinars, Mr Ford has obtained valuable information to improve his operation, ranging from breeding programs to nutritional

needs during pregnancy and lambing.

"This kind of information is particularly useful for us in Queensland at this time, since we are suffering from this drought," Mr Ford said.

For more information on Leading Sheep webinars go to www.leadingsheep.com.au. If you have any questions or need assistance joining the next webinar, call Nicole Sallur on 07 4530 1270.

What is a webinar and how does it work?

A webinar is a seminar in which you can participate without leaving home. You can hear from expert speakers from across Australia while sitting at your desk using your computer or mobile device such as an iPhone or iPad. You can listen to the presentation either via your computer through VOIP or by dialling in on your phone. You can also ask questions during the webinar either by typing them into your computer or raising your virtual hand to ask a question verbally.

All Leading Sheep webinars are recorded and loaded onto www.leadingsheep.com.au in case you can't make the live event, you can go back and listen at any time.

How do I register to receive invites for webinars?

To receive email notifications about upcoming webinars, join the Leading Sheep mailing list at www.leadingsheep.com.au. Register for the webinar via the link in the invitation email. Keep your registration confirmation email as it has your link to join the webinar on day it is being broadcast.



John Ford regularly connects to webinars from his property and urges others to take the time to discover how simple it is to join in the interactive, online sessions.

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CS6576 03/17



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FLOCK TALK



Embracing innovation to make sheep handling easier on-property

Mungindi prime lamb producers Ranald and Noela Warby believe those in agriculture need to embrace innovation and technology, especially if it saves labour costs and reduces the physicality of on-property work.

The couple run a Dohne prime lamb operation on their 4000ha property, Barrakee, on the Queensland/New South Wales border. They introduced Dohne rams from Roseville Park, Dubbo to their Merino flock 12 years ago, with the aim of turning off prime lambs and maintaining an average of 19-20 micron wool.

The flock has been pure Dohne for the past seven years and Mr Warby has now introduced rams from the Pye family's Calga stud at Coonamble.

In a good season they turn off prime lambs, but a run of dry years has forced them to shift focus and sell stores into local and interstate feedlots, including an operation at Murray Bridge in South Australia.

Like many family operations in regional Australia, the couple handled the bulk of the daily work on the property themselves, only bringing in contractors as necessary for jobs, like crutching.

But the couple are staunch advocates of innovation and new technology and Mr Warby credits Leading Sheep with helping producers, like him, keep up with advances in handling equipment and on-property practices that ultimately make his operation more efficient.

"Leading Sheep offers practical advice, knowledgeable speakers and good demonstrations, and it's good to get out and meet up with other producers and have time off the property while still gaining knowledge," he said.

Last year they put this commitment to embracing technology in action, purchasing an Arrow V-Express handler to reduce handling, save labour and offset some of the more physically taxing elements of sheep work.

The V-Express is a portable sheep handler that features hydraulic belts on either side that move the sheep along in single file, enabling



Ranald Warby is a staunch advocate of innovation and credits Leading Sheep with helping producers, like him, keep up with advances like the sheep handling equipment pictured here.

the producer or contractor to mouth, drench, vaccinate, tag and backline before tipping them on their backs to crutch, scan or trim their feet.

Today Mr Warby is a convert to the benefits of the machine saying it has allowed him to perform a number of tasks on his sheep in just one pass. Gone, too, are the days of fighting rams in a race when drenching and the usual tired back after a day of crutching lambs.

"In one afternoon I crutched, vaccinated and drenched 300 ewe weaners in the V-Express with one person helping, and it wasn't hard work at all. At the end of the day, I had three jobs accomplished," Mr Warby said.

"With the sheep up off the ground they're not fighting you, and you can also tip them onto their backs quite simply and easily and work on them at bench height."

Previously he would have crutched the sheep on the board as part of a job that would have included his entire 2000 head flock, with the contract help of two or three crutchers and a rouseabout.

Mr Warby bought his machine last year and set it to one side of an undercover drafting pen, ensuring that sheep flow smoothly through the drafting race and up a low 50cm ramp into

the V-Express, which measures approximately 90cm wide and 3m long.

It was his experience with a Harrington sheep handler many years ago that encouraged him to purchase the V-Express.

"A Harrington sales rep wanted a place to park his machine while he visited some clients so he left it here. I drenched 5000 ewes with it and found it to be very useful," Mr Warby said.

Over the past three years he has employed contractors with VE machines to pregnancy scan his ewes, because the contractor said he found it more efficient to have the ewes on their backs for scanning.

"The V-Express made that easy. As the ewes are coming along between the two belts, you place your hand on their chest and tip them over onto their backs without a struggle as the belts move them forward," Mr Warby said.

The V-Express is operated by a foot controller. The conveyor belts make a V shape that can be narrowed to contain shorn sheep or widened for woolly sheep, and the user has full control over the forwards and backwards motion.

"There are also hock restraints for crutching and when you're finished, you just reverse the

- Ranald and Noela Warby run 2000 Dohne sheep on their 4000ha property, Barrakee, at Mungindi.
- They generally turn off prime lambs, but recent dry seasons have seen them sell stores into local and interstate feedlots.
- Last year they introduced a V-Express handler to reduce handling, labour requirements and the physicality of regular sheep handling jobs.



Ranald Warby is a convert to the benefits of sheep handling equipment as it has allowed him to perform a number of tasks on his sheep in just one pass and has off-set some of the more physically taxing elements of sheep work.

belts slightly so the restraints release and the sheep are free to go," Mr Warby explained.

The machine is driven by a quiet hydraulic motor available in both electric and petrol versions and on 6m hoses, so it can be placed well away from the working area.

While Mr Warby says it is difficult to quantify how much money or how many hours of work the V-Express has saved, he believes the machine's major benefit has been enabling him to perform a multitude of tasks on a sheep at one time with minimum physical effort.

He says it's not accurate to estimate the cost of the V-Express verses hiring in contractors, because with the latter he would run through his entire mob of 2000 head and cost/per head rates come back the more stock numbers handled. In contrast the V-Express allows producers to tackle jobs with smaller mobs.

"The benefit is in the reduced physical effort on the bloke doing the job and the reduced stress on the sheep from using the conveyor belt, which are hard to quantify in dollar figures."

He says one benefit of the V-Express is the ability to do several jobs at once but he needs another person to keep the sheep coming through to him.

"It definitely makes the work easier. For example, our rams weigh up to 130kg fully grown, but when they're in the belts they don't fight at all. Then they are at bench height and we can tag, crutch, drench and put a backline over their heads to prevent flystrike, all in one go."



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