

Drought and climate adaptation program

GrazingFutures Case Study

Elements of a successful paddock walk

Paddock walks can be fun, interactive ways of bringing producers together to discuss all topics relevant to their enterprise management, particularly pasture and nutrition. In early 2021, Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) E-Beef officer, Kate Paterson, and Leanne Hardwick, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) organised two paddock walk days through the E-Beef and GrazingFutures projects. GrazingFutures is a long-term extension project educating and supporting producers to run resilient grazing businesses in preparation for future drought and business challenges. The days included 'A paddock walk in the gidgee' with DAF grazing land extension officer, Jenny Milson at 'Gydia Park', Isisford and 'Nutting out nutrition: taking control' with livestock nutrition expert Désirée Jackson (Désirée Jackson Livestock Management) at 'Hillview', Muttaborra. These days were run in response to producer interest following the October 2020 pasture and nutrition focused paddock walk day with Jenny Milson and Désirée Jackson at 'Silverwood', and feedback from the E-Beef producer group topics of interest.

Designed as a 'neighbour day', paddock walks are a great way to bring together producers on similar land types and introduce new producers to established landholders in a district. Being a relaxed, less formal way of getting together paddock walks encourage producers to share their experiences with pasture management, production and other issues they may be encountering. These events also provide DAF staff with an overview of producer issues and observations in the district.



Figure 1. Désirée Jackson at Hillview

The 'paddock walk' agenda includes:

1. Begin with a cuppa and discussion of current issues and expectations (Table 1) for the day
2. Run through the basic principles of the day's topics and discuss any questions e.g:
 - a. Pasture days - go over pasture identification and relevant grazing issues
 - b. Nutrition days - explain basic nutrition
3. Go for a 'walk' in the paddock
 - a. Producers can pick out plants they are unsure of, ask questions around identification and discuss palatability and toxicities etc.
 - b. On pasture focussed days have discussions on land condition, grazing management and forage budgeting.

Drought and climate adaptation program

- c. On nutrition focussed days have 'how to' demonstrations on dung sampling for NIRS analysis and assessing pasture quality.

Table 1. Topics of interest listed by producers over a cuppa at the start of the day.

Expectations		
<u>Silverwood (Pastures and Nutrition)</u>	<u>Gydia Park (Pastures)</u>	<u>Hillview (Nutrition)</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hay production (timing and process) - grasshoppers and grubs - supplementation - land condition - Mitchell grass (seed viability/lifespan) - death/loss/lack of Mitchell grass response - caustic bush control - young whitewood toxicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - differences in Mitchell grass response - feed budgeting - toxic weeds - productivity on gidgee country - planting Mitchell grass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - botulism and nutrition - feeding phosphorus - best weight gains with cheapest products (feedlot ration vs. hay/grains) - feeding regimes for lambing ewes e.g. grains and loose licks - pasture seeding (seed dormancy, viability etc.) - lick supplement types (blocks vs. loose lick vs. water medication etc.) - supplements - costs: benefits

Each day has fostered positive management changes by producers. With the abundance of knowledge and questions that was created, there were some great discussions within each group (Figure 2).

The *Silverwood* paddock walk attracted 10 producers from as far as 80km away. Pasture discussions were the highlight of the day, with producers identifying many planned changes associated with pasture management (Table 2).



Figure 2: Désirée Jackson and producers at Silverwood, Longreach

Drought and climate adaptation program



Figure 3. Jenny Milson and producers at 'Gydia Park'

The 'Paddock Walk in the Gidgee' was a pasture focussed day with Jenny Milson and held at 'Gydia Park', a E-Beef Smart Farm. With a large attendance of 19 district producers, the day ran really well with a 'tour' around the property looking at different land types where producers were able to have discussions at each stop. The producers found the day beneficial with everyone able to learn from each other's management experiences.

The nutrition-focused day 'Nutting out nutrition: taking control' with Désirée Jackson (Figure 1) held at Tower Hill Racecourse on Hillview, north west of Muttaborra attracted 11 producers from around the region. The day began with some basic nutrition information followed by a walk in the paddock before further nutrition discussions were held back in the shed.

Table 2. Summary of planned management changes identified by producers at these events.

Silverwood	Gydia Park	Hillview
Spelling country - essential to give country a rest and time after beneficial rain and control stocking rates to protect pasture that's already there. Managing young Mitchell grass seedlings.	Awareness of grazing pressure and smaller paddocks. Try to let paddocks rest for longer periods of time	Phosphorus and using soil, water, pasture and dung analyses to help make decisions- P testing Take more dung samples to manage type of lick- tailoring lick
Reduce stocking rates to allow stock to reach their potential	Pasture management	Understanding your animals' needs
Think out hay making plans differently	Weed ID, forage budgeting, consider seeding Mitchell grass	Feeding earlier as we calve early. Make decisions earlier in year before it's too far gone
Seek advice on type of supplement tailored to production groups	Reinforces current practices	Possibly take proactive approach to feeding
Valuable pasture ID learnings for a newcomer to the region	Lots of very interesting information to consider	Would like Désirée to assist with feeding for growth

Drought and climate adaptation program

Feedback from producers who have attended paddock walks is overwhelmingly positive and valuable in assisting GrazingFutures and E-Beef teams design future events. (Table 3).

Table 3. Some of the producer feedback from our paddock walk days.

Silverwood	Gydia Park	Hillview
Feedback on the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well run - kept people interested - Great speakers - good range of expertise - Great to have nutrition advice from Désirée - Good discussion on pasture/plant species in relation to animal nutrition - Very informative, especially with input from producers 	Feedback on the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A really good number, everyone inclusive, everyone had a say - Participant driven topics and discussions - Ample opportunity for questions - Everyone sharing their knowledge and experiences - Seeing the different country types and the quicker response in grasses through more conservative grazing (Figure 4) - Ideas for maximising production for different land types - Loved the burr ID handout - Plant/weed/veg species ID and their production use - Everyone's sharing of ideas and experiences and observations of dead areas in Mitchell grass country and why this could be happening 	Feedback on the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pasture identification and assessment regarding protein and energy levels - Phosphorus supplementation - Dung samples to manage type of lick - Implications of phosphorus deficiency - Undertake water, soil, pasture and dung sampling to determine phosphorus supplementation requirements - All about phosphorus and rumen - Feeding breeding ewes for better lambing - Good speaker/presenter with hands on experience - Understanding animals needs
Future events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Great day - perhaps advertise as a full day - Keep a tighter time schedule - Would be interested in hosting a paddock walk 	Future events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More of these information days - Have some other speakers, have some experiments in process to revisit - Perhaps a bit more structure and suggestions and - Need more of these events in Longreach area 	Future events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Longer field days - More field days
Future topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on costs - strategic fencing and water locating - Grasshoppers and bugs - life cycle, how they are broken 	Future topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stocking different classes of animals for max production 	Future topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would like to attend one of Désirée's full courses (Nutrition EDGE)

Drought and climate adaptation program



Figure 4. Mitchell grass at Hillview

Although there were challenges with organising and implementing these Paddock Walks, their success can be attributed to:

- the events being held on property;
- having producer-identified topics related to pasture and nutrition;
- a neighbour focus so producers are from similar land types and production systems;
- the inclusiveness of knowledgeable presenters;
- providing opportunities for all to share their experiences - especially for newcomers to the region and;
- the structure of the days that allowed for producer input and discussions.

A big thank you to the hosts, attendees and everyone involved in organising the days. We plan to organise more of these events in future, tailoring the days to local districts and producer needs.

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