

Drought and climate adaptation program

GrazingFutures Narrative

Introductory Excel for Grazing Workshops

Microsoft Excel is a software program which has broad and valuable application for agricultural businesses, however graziers may not have had formal training or exposure to the program to confidently use it in their business management. In most instances, they have access to the software, but may not keep pace with system upgrades and explore options to utilise the program adequately. Consequently, they are reluctant to use decision support tools which are excel based.

'Introductory - Excel Spreadsheets for Grazing Enterprises' is a ¾ day hands-on workshop which fills this skill gap for graziers. It was originally developed by Bush Agribusiness but was acquired by ConnectAg in 2018. The workshop format uses relevant grazing business examples for the participants to work through, with familiar terms and context the audience can relate to.



The landholders

Landholders, managers, staff and contractors working with grazing businesses were the target audience for these workshops. Cattle and sheep grazing businesses tend to be the main participants, however mixed farming and other livestock enterprises and small business also attend.

Over the last three years, ConnectAg has delivered 18 workshops to 149 participants. The smallest sized group was 4 participants at Roma in 2019 and the largest was 16 at Winton in 2020. On average there were 8 participants per workshop. These workshops have been hosted in the following locations:

Year of workshop	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Workshop locations	Surat Mitchell Injune Roma	Hodgson Teelba Nindigully Dirranbandi St George	Injune Blackall Longreach Winton Tambo Talwood Morven Quilpie Mitchell
Total participants	29	37	83

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Interactions with GrazingFutures

The GrazingFutures project supplied a set of 10 laptops for use during the workshops. These laptops have a standard suite of Microsoft Office programs, although not the most recent versions. This ready access to computers enabled participation by producers which may not have otherwise occurred. Some attendees indicated they did not own a laptop, but rather had a desktop for their business and that access to a laptop was an important consideration in attending the training.

Participants were not actively encouraged to bring their own laptops unless the number of workshop participants was expected to exceed the number of laptops available. This was to prevent the need for potentially having to manage IT complications by the workshop deliverer who would be unfamiliar with the private device.

In many instances, these attendees were new to the GrazingFutures project. The running of the workshops has also seen direct enquiries received from areas outside the GrazingFutures project area, particularly in the Western downs and Goondiwindi areas, however enquiry from North Queensland through to New South Wales has also been fielded by ConnectAg.

What has changed as a result?

Feedback from all workshops was positive. Satisfaction/value ratings of 8 to 10 out of 10 and an indication they gained new knowledge and skills. This was also followed up by most indicating they intended to implement changes as a result of what they learned at the workshop.

Some of these planned changes included:

- Keep records of costing per animal
- Budgeting
- Feed costing
- Cattle performance
- Sorting and use of data
- Converting from paper to computer records
- Overall better record keeping.



Other benefits or costs

Workshop delivery costs were not always covered through DAF GrazingFutures (South and Central West regions) but were co-funded by other agencies such as Queensland Health through the TRAIC (Tackling Regional Adversity Through Integrated Care), Southern Queensland Landscapes, Leading Sheep and local community groups, such as Mitchell and District Landcare. In some instances, local government provided in-kind support through waiving venue hire. This collaboration has extended the reach of the GrazingFutures program and provided broader industry exposure to the program via these networks.

The workshops focus on improving producer confidence in using excel across their business, through hands on learning. Participants receive one-on-one support and grazing business templates so they can confidently use Excel in their livestock operation. The workshop also features a range of free decision support tools participants can use, as well as a list of useful Excel contacts and resources.

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Confidence and skill in the use of excel creates capacity for more complex decision support and data analysis training to be undertaken into the future. The current capacity to deliver this training is limited by the availability of trained presenters and access to laptops. Options to build extension officer capacity to deliver this training across organisations needs to be explored by ConnectAg and DAF in the future.



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