

Drought and climate adaptation program

GrazingFutures Narrative

Skills development and cross collaboration in Cloncurry

In early December 2020, our beef extension staff, along with regular GrazingFutures delivery partners QRIDA and Southern Gulf NRM, organised a Breedcow-Dynama herd modelling workshop. The aims of the workshop were to upskill extension staff and relevant industry professionals to use the Breedcow package, and in doing so, consider strategies to extend key messages from the recent DCAP (DAF 6) report *“Northern Downs Beef production systems, preparing for, responding to and recovering from, drought”*. The Northwest Beef Extension team supported the development and helped construct base production parameters and strategies for the DCAP report, and this training marked the beginning of extension of drought management options to industry professionals in the region.

The workshop was delivered by Ag-Economist, Fred Chudleigh (DAF Toowoomba). Once participants were familiar with Bullocks and CowTrade tools (designed to support short term feed and sell decision making), a herd model was constructed in Breedcow and imported to Dynama to look at long term business options and profitability. Given the variability of the rainfall and pasture production in this region, there was much debate in the development of this report about what constitutes a reasonable annual liveweight gain averaged over 30 years (including destocking due to drought years). The workshop allowed the team and collaborators to experiment with a lower average annualised liveweight gain figure than was cited in the report (130kg/AE/year vs. 140kg/AE/year). Aside from lowering overall profitability, as would be expected, the ranking of various strategies to improve profitability was largely unaffected. A steer trading operation was still more profitable (payback period 7 years and internal rate of return 18%) and adaptable to seasonal conditions than keeping breeders although blending a core breeder herd with a steer turnoff operation was a viable option. Individual properties all differ, and the report provides a general guideline for identifying positive drought strategies for a regional beef business, while highlighting areas that are generally unprofitable unless specific niche skills and equipment were available on site.

One of the key GrazingFutures objectives is to *“Improve the capabilities of grazing industry support officers to facilitate improvement in business resilience, drought recovery and future drought preparedness”*. Our collaborators rated the day very highly, with an average of 9 and 9.5 out of 10 for value and satisfaction respectively. All participants said they learned a new skill and intended to *“incorporate the excel sheets and modelling into [their] existing services to beef producers”*. The online version of Breedcow-Dynama was generally deemed more user friendly than the old spreadsheets.

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The GrazingFutures project continues to provide a flexible framework where industry professionals across the livestock sector can access technical training and development to improve their capacity to service and support producers. Integrating other Drought and Climate Adaptation Program (DCAP) products into the extension services is becoming ever more accessible as tools from the R&D strands of DCAP come on-line. The Breedcow-Dynama workshop marked the end of what turned out to be a very busy and productive year for the NW Beef Extension team and partners. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the furnace of Cloncurry!

The Northern Downs report is available at <https://futurebeef.com.au/projects/improving-profitability-and-resilience-of-beef-and-sheep-businesses-in-queensland-preparing-for-responding-to-and-recovering-from-drought/#northerndowns>



Breedcow-Dynama, workshop participants, Lindsey Perry (DAF Cloncurry), Megan Munchenberg (DAF Gregory), Kieran Smith (DAF Richmond), Anne Alison (Southern Gulf Catchments), Fred Chudleigh (DAF Toowoomba), Pip Gilmore (QRIDA) and Eloise Moir (DAF Cloncurry).

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Date: 18/12/2020

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