



BEEFTALK
Taking stock of your future

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How to best manage a reproductive disease

ROUTINE vaccination against common diseases can be one of the simplest and easiest ways to ensure your herd's productivity and profitability is maintained, or in most cases, improved.

One such disease that can have a significant impact on the productivity and profitability of beef businesses is vibriosis.

Signs, symptoms and diagnosis

Vibriosis, caused by the *Campylobacter fetus* bacterium, is a common venereal disease that lives in the reproductive tract. Bulls can harbour the infection in their sheath after mating with an infected cow.

As bulls age, the lining of their sheath develops folds, which can better harbour the vibrio bacterium. Therefore, older bulls are more likely to pass on vibriosis to naive cows and heifers.

Infected bulls will show no sign of infection as they are just the carriers and transmitters of the bacterium.

Cows also may show no obvious signs of infection. However, females that cycle constantly and regularly but do not fall pregnant, or females that have been pregnancy tested in calf but do not present a calf at branding, may be affected by vibriosis.

Vibriosis can be detected by collecting vaginal mucus of heifers or cows to be sent away for testing. Bulls can be tested for the presence of vibriosis by taking sheath swabs.

Tissue samples from



Bulls carrying vibriosis will show no sign of infection as they are just the carriers and transmitters of the bacterium.

VIBRIOSIS

- Vibriosis, or Campylobacteriosis, is a venereal disease of cattle caused by a bacterium which lives in the lining of the reproductive tract.
- Vibrio can cause problems in both dairy and beef herds.

aborted foetuses can also be taken and tested.

Economic impact

Vibriosis causes significant reproductive wastage in infected herds and can represent an extreme economic loss for producers, particularly in the first year of infection within a naive



Prevention of vibriosis within your herd can be achieved with a vaccination program.

herd. Gross margins can be reduced by as much as 65 per cent in the first year of infection.

When vibriosis becomes established in a herd, gross margins can be reduced by up 36pc when compared to

a vibriosis-free herd (Dr Steven Hum, 2007).

Control, prevention and eradication

Prevention of vibriosis within your herd can be achieved with a vaccination

program. The most cost-effective strategy is to vaccinate all bulls and maiden heifers annually.

Other prevention and risk minimisation strategies include culling older bulls and barren cows who may be harbouring the bacterium and acting as a source of infection. Eradication of vibriosis from an infected herd involves the vaccination of all breeding animals and treating infected bulls with antibiotics as directed by a veterinarian.

For assistance, contact your local beef extension officer (13 25 23) or local veterinarian. They can help you with the identification, control, eradication or prevention of vibriosis.

Young Beef Producers' Forum

THE Young Beef Producers' Forum will be held in Roma on November 18 and 19.

The two-day conference provides educational, networking and capacity-building opportunities for people under 40 who have an interest in the beef industry.

The inspiring, engaging and life-changing forum aims to help young beef producers make a difference in all aspects of their lives. The Future Farmers Network is coordinating the forum with guidance from a steering committee and this year's theme - Managing Milestones - has been developed for young producers, by young producers.

Register at ybpf.com.au.

Prepare for drought in the Mulga

A REPORT analysing the economic implications of management decisions to prepare for drought in the Mulga Lands of Queensland is now available.

The report uses property-level, regionally-specific livestock and business models to assess a range of different beef production strategies.

These production strategies include: converting from breeding to steer trading, supplementation; age of steer turnoff, reduced stocking rate, pasture improvement, rangeland goat production, and carbon farming.

You can access a copy of the report online at futurebeef.com.au.



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Betting on your books

RECORD keeping is a job most of us dislike, dodge and don't know if we're doing well. However, good records are critical to managing a grazing business, especially in variable seasons.

To help graziers improve their skills in this area, the Queensland government's GrazingFutures program recently engaged Rachel Nixon Bookkeeping to deliver three workshops in south-west Queensland.

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries extension officer Caitlyn Frazer said 31 people attended the workshops, which were designed to help producers streamline their office practices and get their books on the straight and narrow.

"The workshops focused on the importance of good tax and GST records in meeting legal obligations and guiding business decisions," Ms Frazer said.

"Streamlining business activity statements (BAS), establishing manual and/or cloud filing systems, choosing the correct accounting software and organising your chart of accounts were also discussed."

Ms Frazer said GrazingFutures was planning more business literacy workshops in south-west Queensland.

"Support from GrazingFutures with these business literacy workshops is critical in building drought-ready livestock operations in south-west Queensland," she said.

You can find information about upcoming workshops and other events on the calendar at futurebeef.com.au.

Establishing basic office efficiency

Quick tips:

- Create an enjoyable office space free from distraction
- Establish a routine (e.g. set a consistent office day each week)
- Invest in a second monitor.

Ms Frazer said establishing a consistent office routine was worthwhile, with some workshop attendees saying a dedicated office day each week had improved their efficiency drastically.

"The time of day you choose to complete office work should also be considered," Ms Frazer said.

"Some people find they are most productive in the morning; others at night when the kids are asleep.

"Office routines are not one size fits all: find something that works best for you and your business."

Office set-up was also an important consideration, Ms Frazer said.

"Having an office space where you feel comfortable and focused is essential to productivity," she said.

"Other than having an organised and dedicated workspace, many of the workshop attendees agreed that investing in a second screen would make their time in the office easier.

"The ability to extend your display onto another monitor avoids flicking back and forth from one document to another, which is particularly useful when completing data entry and results in less errors.

"The second screen ultimately saves time when completing tasks and can reduce or eliminate printing, further improving office efficiency."



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Structuring your chart of accounts

Quick tips:

- Create ground rules to aid when categorising transactions
 - Keep it as simple as functionally possible and remain consistent
 - Investing in professional help may be useful when setting up or refining a chart of accounts
 - Having a correctly structured chart of accounts and using it consistently is crucial for business management and office efficiency.
- "A chart of accounts groups together transactions

of a similar type, which is not only important for your bookkeeper and accountant but also allows you to drill down on costs from specific areas of your business-for example, money spent on supplementation," Ms Frazer said.

"Consistent use of your chart of accounts can be tricky, especially when there are multiple people involved in allocating transactions.

"It was suggested during the workshop that creating and writing down ground rules for costing different types of transactions - especially uncommon ones - can be useful.

"These rules will form a point of reference for all those involved in the business, making for consistent categorising in future and saving your bookkeeper or accountant from having to rearrange transactions - therefore potentially saving you professional fees."

Ms Frazer said it was important to weigh up the cost versus benefit of having more categories than functionally necessary.

"If those extra categories create more work, are they providing you with more meaningful reporting outputs or is it just costing you time, thus money?" she said.

"Investing in professional help to set up a new chart of accounts or refine an existing one may be beneficial to ensure your chart of accounts is functioning as efficiently as possible."

Employee or a contractor?

Quick tips:

- Knowing the difference between an employee and a contractor is important for tax and superannuation reasons
- It's your legal obligation as an employer to ensure the working arrangement is correct
- To determine the difference, it's important to review the entire working arrangement
- Help is available if you are unsure.

If you hire workers, it's important to know whether they are considered an employee or a contractor for tax and super purposes.

Ms Frazer said the way your worker was categorised determined your tax and super obligations as an employer.

"Depending on this you may have to withhold tax from their wages, pay super and fringe benefits tax and report this information to the Australian Taxation Office," she said.

"Penalties and charges may apply if you get this wrong.

"There are many factors that need to be considered when determining whether your worker is an employee or contractor, such as the worker's ability to subcontract or delegate tasks, the basis of payment, level of control over the work completed and more."

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Make the most of silage

Take advantage of the excellent seasonal conditions and 'future proof' your livestock enterprise.

EXCELLENT seasonal conditions in many regions of Australia this winter means many farmers have an opportunity to replenish their stocks of homegrown silage.

Lallemand Animal Nutrition technical services manager, Jordan Minniecon, said silage could help "future proof" any livestock enterprise.

"Many livestock producers only think about hay when it comes to conserved forage, but cereal silage is a very real option for anyone who has crops in the ground," he said.

"Any cereal crop, including wheat, barley, triticale or oats, can be ensiled with good management.

"Cereal crops to be cut for silage are managed the same as if they are being grown for grain - it's just a different harvesting and storage process.

"It's relatively easy to produce quality silage that can be stored for a considerable number of years with good planning and preparation.

"Silage gives you control of your feeding program - you've got the resource locked in at a fixed price, ready for when you need it.

"By comparison, buying in feed during dry times means you are competing for a resource that is increasing in price and decreasing in quantity and quality."

Jordan said ongoing improvements to harvesting technology and the

introduction of strain-specific inoculants and oxygen barrier sealing systems had revolutionised silage production over the past two decades.

"The principles of producing silage haven't changed much, but our knowledge of how to control each step of the process has increased enormously," he said.

"One of the biggest things is how to control the fermentation process and to prevent oxygen from entering the silage mass. Ideally, the crop should be harvested at 30 to 35 per cent dry matter but crops with higher dry matter can be successfully managed with the use of suitable strain-specific bacterial silage inoculants.

"Cereals have hollow stems by this stage, so achieving a chop length of 10 to 15 millimetres is vital to ensure a packing rate of about 250 kilograms of dry matter per cubic metre.

Jordan said it was essential to use a scientifically-proven, strain-specific inoculant to reduce wastage caused by the growth of undesirable yeasts and moulds.

"Cereal crops contain high levels of fermentable carbohydrates, which help to drive fermentation but can leave residual sugars in the silage," he said.

"These sugars can become food sources for aerobic yeasts that cause loss of nutrients and spoilage during storage and feeding out.



Lallemand Animal Nutrition technical services manager, Jordan Minniecon, says cereal crops to be cut for silage are managed the same as if they are being grown for grain.

“Silage gives you control of your feeding program - you've got the resource locked in at a fixed price, ready for when you need it. By comparison, buying in feed during dry times means you are competing for a resource that is increasing in price and decreasing in quantity and quality.

"This is compounded by the fact that cereal crops

often carry a higher load of native yeasts and moulds

if harvested at a later stage of growth.

"The combination of a readily-available food source and oxygen can cause stability and spoilage problems during storage and feeding out."

The 'best' storage method is usually determined by the anticipated length of storage, according to Jordan.

"Dedicated concrete bunkers are definitely a great option for producers who use silage in their nutrition program every year," he said.

"Above-ground stacks sealed with a conventional polyethylene film and an oxygen barrier film are fine

for silage that is going to be stored for one or two years.

"The use of an oxygen barrier film and a heavy-duty woven UV cover is recommended for longer storage periods of say, three or four years."

He also said inground pits or walls are probably the best option for long-term storage, although they require a bit more planning and machinery to prepare.

"Drainage is very important," Jordan said.

"Walls should be slightly angled to allow better packing and earthen walls should be lined with plastic film to prevent the entry of undesirable bacteria, air and water into the silage, all of which can increase spoilage.

"If covering with soil, the silage should be covered with an extra heavy-duty film first to prevent moisture or vegetation penetrating the silage.

"The extra cost of the film is minimal when you consider the long-term benefits of keeping water from leaching spoilage compounds down into the silage and degrading its feed value and quantity.

"There is no 'one size fits all' solution when it comes to silage.

"It often takes a bit of sound planning to figure out how to best incorporate silage into your nutrition program.

"We often see producers that start with silage as part of a future-proofing strategy end up incorporating it into their nutrition program every year."

For more information, contact Lallemand Animal Nutrition on (07) 5451 0125 or email LAN-Aus@lallemand.com



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Gross margin budgeting

Understanding the profitability of your livestock operation.

CHALLENGING market and seasonal conditions are a reality for many Queensland sheep and wool producers, but effective planning and evaluation strategies can help mitigate the business risks they pose.

Gross margin budgeting can help producers enhance profitability and maximise financial returns within their business, regardless of the season.

With many Queensland sheep producers operating multiple livestock or production activities, gross margin budgets can track how each activity contributes to overall profitability.

By assessing the income and variable costs associated with each activity, owners and farm managers can better understand which activity contributes the most to covering their overheads and which may need to be improved, removed or replaced.

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and Leading Sheep extension officer Phillipa Gilmore, who is based in Longreach, said it was important for Queensland sheep producers to consistently evaluate the profitability of their businesses.

"Many Queensland livestock businesses have two or more livestock activities operating concurrently, for example, self-replacing Merino ewes complemented by a wether flock or self-replac-

ing Merinos and cropping activities," Ms Gilmore said.

"Just like a ewe needs to earn her place in the flock, each activity needs to earn its place in your business, and gross margin budgets can help producers better understand that."

Gross margin budgets are simple tools that can become the cornerstone of business planning.

They enable producers to compare different activities and understand sensitivity to risks such as price fluctuations and reduced lambing rates.

"Gross margin budgets are easy to prepare," Ms Gilmore said.

"There are many templates out there that cover a diverse range of sheep-based enterprises, as well as other livestock classes and activities."

Variable costs depend on the number of stock run, for example, freight, selling costs, shearing, husbandry costs and supplement or feed costs. For this reason, they are fairly standard from business to business, which makes gross margins easy to prepare.

"Taking away variable costs from expected income provides you with a net gross margin, which can then be used to produce gross margin per dry sheep equivalent, per hectare or per livestock unit, and this is where you really see what's pulling its weight," Ms Gilmore said.



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Just like a ewe needs to earn her place in the flock, each activity needs to earn its place in your business, and gross margin budgets can help producers better understand that.

The ability to use gross margin budgets to benchmark against previous years and similar businesses in other regions enables producers to better identify where productivity and

profitability gains can or have been made.

"As well as helping identify improvement and growth opportunities in mixed enterprise businesses, benchmarking allows for

evaluation of key management decisions," Ms Gilmore said.

"With many producers looking to restock following decent rains across parts of Queensland and strong lamb prices, it is an important time to be evaluating the profitability and growth potential of an enterprise before undertaking a significant capital outlay.

"Gross margin budgeting and benchmarking are useful tools to do just that."

By maximising efficiencies and profitability across farming operations, producers will be able to implement strategies to help ensure a

more sustainable business.

"If you don't understand the financial impact your various farming activities are having in your overall business, developing a gross margin budget for each is a good place to start," Ms Gilmore said.

"While they are an incredibly beneficial tool, gross margin budgets should not be the sole determinant of enterprise mix.

"Ultimately, the type of country, infrastructure, machinery and available labour inputs need to be considered as well.

"The good news is there is a wealth of resources available to help you get started and make sure you're covering all your bases."

DAF recently published the 'Rangelands of central-western Queensland: Building resilient and diverse livestock production systems' report, which assesses livestock enterprises for profitability and resilience. The report is available online at futurebeef.com.au.

A number of other state government agricultural departments provide gross margin budgets, including NSW Department of Primary Industries and Primary Industries and Regions SA. Go to dpi.nsw.gov.au and pir.sa.gov.au and search for 'sheep gross margin'.

Queensland producers who would like one-on-one support to compile gross margin budgets are encouraged to contact Ms Gilmore by emailing phillipa.gilmore@daf.qld.gov.au or calling 0428 102 841.

Leading Sheep is a partnership between DAF and Australian Wool Innovation, supported by AgForce.

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