

fact sheet

PEOPLE



Attracting and retaining staff in the northern beef industry

Northern beef industry profile

Based on the findings of a national workforce survey of the pastoral livestock industry¹, the key features of the northern beef pastoral livestock industry are:

- High proportion of large employers with multiple properties.
- Younger workforce with more than half under 30 years of age.
- Significant numbers of females employed in larger enterprises (41%).
- Possibility of losing employees to the mining industry.

Figure 1 shows that nearly half of the survey participants worked in large enterprises and Figure 2 indicates that more than half were under 30 years of age.

Figure 1 – Percentage of survey participants by enterprise size

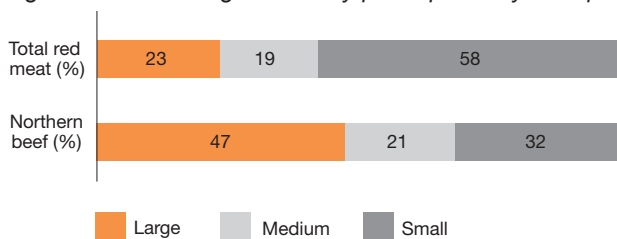
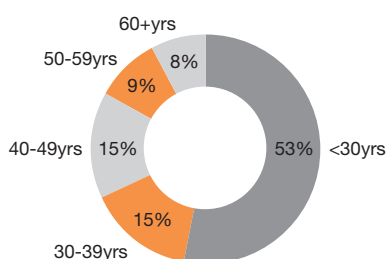


Figure 2 – Age profile



¹ The 2007 Workforce Survey had a total sample of 842 individuals, comprising 136 owners, 155 managers and 551 employees.

Key points

- The northern beef industry has a high proportion of large employers employing younger staff.
- The key attractions to the industry are a family farming background, lifestyle, working with animals and the outdoors.
- When seeking employment workers consider the reputation of the employer, career opportunities and pay and benefits.
- Employees' considerations differ depending on enterprise size (based on employee numbers).
- Long-term financial security is key; pay by itself does not attract or retain staff.
- Managers play a key part in engaging and retaining their current workforce.



Attracting employees

Key attractions to the pastoral livestock industry

A family farming background, lifestyle, working with animals and working in the outdoors are the top attractions to the northern beef industry. This is highlighted in the following comments:

“I enjoy the challenges of my workplace, as well as the lifestyle I get to live.”

“To work with quality cattle, quality people and a well run property make for an excellent work environment. It makes you want to excel.”

Survey participants who had worked in the mining industry, returned to the northern beef industry because of the unsuitable lifestyle, social isolation and issues with management practices.

Employer attributes

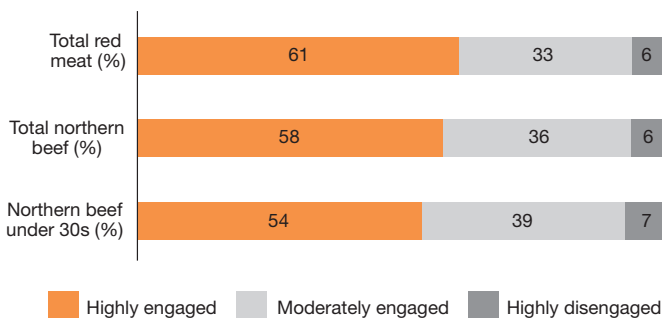
When seeking employment workers considerations differ depending on the size of the employer’s enterprise:

- Small enterprises (less than five employees) – job variety and working independently are key attractions.
- Medium enterprises (6-14 employees) – quality of the operation, company reputation and career opportunities are key attractions.
- Large enterprises (15 or more employees) – career opportunities, company reputation, pay and benefits are key attractions.

Engaging employees

Employees in the northern beef industry are highly engaged. They are satisfied with their job, committed, loyal, proud of working for their farm, have good morale, feel trusted and valued, go the extra mile and believe they have a future with their employer. Figure 3 highlights that 58% of employees are highly engaged in the northern beef industry. This figure is only slightly less (54%) for those under 30 years of age. These results compare favourably with the overall Australian average of 21% of Australian employees who are engaged.²

Figure 3 – Level of engagement



² Gallup Australian Engagement Study, 2006.



Photo courtesy of MDH Pty Ltd

Meet employee expectations

The key to engaging employees is meeting their expectations. The top five expectations in order of importance are:

1. Being trusted and valued as a person.
2. Understanding what is expected at work.
3. Developing and improving their skills and knowledge.
4. Good quality accommodation.
5. Effective communication between managers and staff.

Communication is critical

The key area for improvement is communication between managers and staff. Poor communication diminishes feelings of trust, value and pride in their farm/station or company. It is well summarised in these comments from young respondents:

“Working in a family business is very difficult. They have higher expectations and I find that a lack of communication is the main cause of major stress and arguments between employees and the boss. Senior management do not explain situations or their expectations clearly and fully, and then don’t understand why a job wasn’t done how they expected/wanted.”

“Communication is very important and knowing what is going on is always good to know.”



Retaining employees

The key reasons employees leave are:

- uncertain future
- poor leadership and communication
- uncompetitive wages
- better career opportunities elsewhere

Different sized enterprises have specific retention challenges:

- Small enterprises – there is the potential of burnout for an ageing workforce due to long hours and more working weeks.
- Medium enterprises – long working hours are a challenge for retaining mature and younger workers.
- Large enterprises – unchallenging and boring jobs demotivate younger workers.

Financial security and certainty are basic needs

Financial security and certainty are key motivators for retention. Pay, by itself, is not sufficient to provide financial security where individuals are working in an uncertain environment. Addressing an employee's sense of certainty of long-term employment will assist with their retention.

Managers are key in engaging and retaining their current workforce

An approachable, consultative and supportive management style is required for all employees, particularly for the younger employees under

30 years of age (Generation Y). To provide this environment managers should:

1. Provide a clear vision of the employees' future and career with their employer.
2. Communicate the total remuneration package including the lifestyle benefits.
3. Ensure employment conditions are applied fairly and consistently.
4. Assist employees with planning for their long-term financial security.
5. Provide job satisfaction through skills development, multi-skilling and efficient practices.
6. Listen to employees' ideas and involve employees in decision-making.
7. Provide regular feedback on their performance and recognise a job well done.
8. Foster teamwork, a sense of well-being and work-life balance.
9. Ensure there is a family or community atmosphere and honour traditions (birthdays, special days etc).
10. Promote the enterprise's reputation to build pride amongst employees.

Younger employees are ready to learn and are comfortable with working with managers of different ethnicity and opposite gender.

"These days, nobody wants to teach the young people. If we don't, the meat industry doesn't have much of a future," said a manager from the survey.



Photo courtesy of Don Menzies

Industry support is crucial

Industry-wide initiatives are required to facilitate career choices in the pastoral livestock industry.

Recommendations from the workforce survey included:

1. A campaign to improve the image of the industry, promoting the lifestyle benefits.
2. An industry review of remuneration to identify best practice approaches.
3. An on-line industry-wide hub for careers information, employment and training opportunities.
4. A portable skills portfolio for employees which documents their skills and acts as a passport as they move from farm to farm.
5. Professional development and mentoring programs for ongoing development of supervisors and managers.
6. A Gap Year, offering short-term and long-term career opportunities for school leavers and career changers, and linked to qualifications or statements of attainment.



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Further information

The following information on how the beef and pastoral industries can improve staff attraction and retention strategies based on the size of their workforce is available from the MLA web site at www.mla.com.au/publications (for fact sheets) or www.mla.com.au/research (for final reports):

- Final Report: *B.NBP.0370 Attracting and retaining staff in Australia's beef, sheep and pastoral wool industries*
- Fact sheet: *Attracting and retaining staff in the southern beef, sheepmeat and pastoral wool industries*
- Fact sheet: *Large-scale employers – attracting and retaining staff in the pastoral livestock industry*
- Fact sheet: *Medium-sized employers – attracting and retaining staff in the pastoral livestock industry*
- Fact sheet: *Small employers – attracting and retaining staff in the pastoral livestock industry*

For more information contact MLA phone: 1800 675 717, visit www.mla.com.au or email: publications@mla.com.au

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