

Better Beef and Reef project

**Beef producer workshop report
Townsville: 16 - 17 July 2014.**



Compiled by:
Lester Pahl, John James, Peter Long, Brigid Nelson, Dave Smith,
Bob Shepherd and Mick Sullivan.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Queensland

Reef 2050 Design and Delivery
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This publication has been compiled by Lester Pahl of Animal Science, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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Short Summary

The economic and environmental performance of beef properties in the reef catchments of Queensland can be improved through the adoption of industry recommended practices.

To this end, beef producers from 14 cattle businesses in central and northern Queensland met in Townsville to identify the practices which were critical to the success of their businesses, and to recommend how more beef producers could be encouraged to adopt these.

Given the highly dynamic nature of the industry, running a successful beef business requires continual learning and improvement. There is an ongoing need to access inspiration and advice from networks of successful beef producers and other professional people, such as accountants, solicitors, bankers, consultants, agents and agency staff.

Beef enterprises should be run as businesses with clearly defined business and personal goals, and continually reviewed to ensure goals are met. This requires planning, record keeping, budgeting, use of performance indicators, benchmarking and quarterly economic analyses.

There is no one “silver bullet” management practice that makes a business successful. Instead, a number of business, livestock, herd and land management practices need to be implemented together in a timely way. These include regular vaccinations, continual supply of good quality water and forage, record keeping, knowing the carrying capacity of land, forage budgeting, controlled mating, cross-breeding and a structured annual program of stock management (calving, mustering, weaning, husbandry, culling and nutrition). Case studies of beef properties better communicate the holistic nature of implementing management practices, including when and how these occur, and how they impact the key drivers of herd productivity, being fertility, growth and survival.

Personal traits and personal relationships were by far the dominant reasons why the 14 producers at this workshop adopted critical management practices. Confidence, a desire for continuous improvement, vision, being open minded, being determined to succeed, wanting to leave a legacy and looking outside of their properties and business for inspiration often led to the adoption of new management practices. Operating within networks of successful peers and successful professional people and attending industry training and development courses also prompted adoption of critical practices. These were invaluable for showing that better performance was possible and how this could be achieved.

Similarly, personal relationships with trusted people, personal interactions with successful people, promotion by industry champions, and advice from respected professional people were most likely to motivate beef producers to adopt critical management practices. In addition to this, grants for on-ground works and subsidies for training courses encourage beef producers to open their minds to new practices and better outcomes.

Continual prompting by agency staff and other service providers of important practices and important decision times also often helped commence and continue new practices. However, it is critical that beef producers know and trust the service providers, and that the service providers have a very good understanding of the industry.



Extended Summary

The extensive beef industry of northern Australia faces a number of challenges. Return on investment and profit margins are low, it is struggling to maintain good land condition, and the quality of water flowing off some properties into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon is poor. The premise of this Better Beef and Reef project is that better cattle herd performance due to better management and better land condition are likely to improve both the profitability of cattle properties and the quality of water entering the reef lagoon.

The first major activity of this Better Beef and Reef project was for beef producers to identify the practices which were critical to the success of their businesses, and then recommend how more beef producers could be encouraged to adopt these. To this end, beef producers from 14 cattle businesses in central and northern Queensland met with agency staff in Townsville on 16 - 17 July 2014.


There was unanimous agreement that a beef enterprise must be run as a business. Too many beef producers regard themselves as producers of livestock only, and do not run their enterprise as businesses. To run the enterprise as a business it is important to clearly define your business and personal goals and continually review business performance to ensure these goals are being met. Planning, budgeting, use of performance indicators, benchmarking, quarterly economic analyses, and seeking professional business guidance were very important to the success of a business.

There was also unanimous agreement that beef producers should be continually seeking new ideas and advice from people within and external to their industry – continual learning and improvement. In this respect, it is important to network with successful beef and other businesses and be open minded to advice and opportunities. There is an ongoing need to access advice, information and planning support from a range of professional people, such as accountants, solicitors, bankers, consultants, agents and agency staff.

There is no one 'silver bullet' management practice that can make a business successful. Instead, there are a number of business, livestock, herd and land management practices that need to be implemented together as a system (holistic management). Key management practices include fundamental actions such as regular vaccinations, supply of an ample quality and quantity of water, record keeping, optimising stock access to pastures using fences and water point locations, education of stock, and knowing the carrying capacity of your land. Other critical management practices were forage budgeting, cattle and cash budgets, controlled mating, cross-breeding and a structured annual program of stock management (calving, mustering, weaning, husbandry, culling and nutrition). It is also critical to conduct quarterly economic analyses of the whole business, compare your performance with benchmarks for highest industry performance, identify weak areas that need to be improved, and then act on these in a timely manner.

Concern was expressed at the workshop that lists of key management practices did not adequately convey what was needed for a beef business to be successful. It was agreed that case studies of beef properties would better communicate the holistic nature of implementing the practices which were needed for beef businesses to be successful, including when and how these occur. Similarly, these critical management practices may be better understood or have more meaning for beef producers if it was shown how they impact the key drivers of herd productivity, being fertility, growth and survival.

Beef producers were then asked what had prompted them to adopt these critical management practices. Personal traits and personal relationships were by far the dominant reasons why the 14 producers at this workshop had adopted critical management practices. Confidence, a desire for continuous improvement personally and in their business, having



vision, being open-minded, being determined to succeed no matter what, being curious and looking outside of their properties and business for inspiration and ideas, enjoying a challenge, wanting to leave a legacy and having drive were important personality traits that led to the adoption of critical management practices. Personal relationships also played a big role in adoption of new practices. These producers surrounded themselves with successful peers and successful professional people, and they constantly sought information and advice from them.


Working in projects, having other people review their business, undertaking training courses, and employing consultants were important activities for these people. The majority of the 14 beef producers at this workshop had completed Resource Consulting Services (RCS) and Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Edge courses. Training courses were valuable for showing that better performance or outcomes were possible, and how this could be achieved.

Producers at the workshop were then asked if there were any other triggers that could encourage other beef producers to adopt critical management practices. It was again stressed that personal relationships with trusted people, personal interactions with successful people, personal invitations to events and promotion by industry champions, and advice from respected professional people were most likely to motivate beef producers to change their practices. A number of producers also placed considerable value on incentive payments for on-ground works or subsidies for training courses as mechanisms for encouraging beef producers to open their minds to other practices and to motivate them to improve their performance. It was concluded that more beef producers need to attend training courses and that subsidised training would increase rates of attendance.

Communication featured highly in the discussions of triggers that can prompt adoption of improved practices. There was considerable interest in using television, social media and country newspapers to promote better practices and advertise training courses. Continual prompting by agency staff and other service providers of important practices and important decision times also often helped commence and continue new practices.

The beef producers at the workshop were asked what organisations could do to encourage more producers to adopt critical management practices. Some of the key recommendations were:

- Keep good staff for longer. Staff turnover is a problem – producers do not get to know and trust staff, and new and less experienced staff may not have industry experience.
- Critical for field officers to have skills/background in industry to relate to producer.
- Consider funding five year rather than three year projects.
- Need more mentoring of new staff by old staff.
- The age distribution of staff (mostly young or old) is a problem.
- Incentives programs are useful, such as incentives for waters and wire.
- Need to get the balance right between training, incentives for on ground works, extension, and farm planning. Producers who apply for funds should first have a property plan and have undertaken some training.
- Bring back the Farm Ready program, and prioritise provision of training, as costs for training courses can be a barrier to entry.
- There needs to be equity across producers and regions regarding the subsidies that are provided for training.
- Increases in reef funding have led to more extension officers in reef catchments, but there is a problem with low numbers of staff in other regions.

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- Property visits, property demonstration sites and field days can have a powerful impact on beef producers and help build networks of people.



Introduction

Broad-acre cattle grazing is the dominant land use in both the Fitzroy and Burdekin regions. While the cattle industry provides vital economic and social benefits in these regions, it is also known to be a source of sediments and nutrients that damage the Great Barrier Reef. The premise of this Better Beef and Reef project is that improvements in the health of beef businesses will improve reef health via healthier grazing landscapes.

The Northern Beef Report 2013 (McLean *et al.* 2014) has assessed the economic performance of the northern beef industry over the past 12 years, from 2001 to 2012. This report concluded that the majority of northern beef businesses were not economically sustainable at present. Excluding land value changes, return on assets have averaged less than 1% across the industry.

There is considerable variation in performance between beef businesses within the industry. The top 25% of producers consistently outperform the average and have businesses more likely to be economically sustainable over the long term. This indicates there are successful business models for producing beef in northern Australia.

The superior performance of the top 25% of producers can be attributed to higher income through better herd productivity and lower operating expenses, with the latter largely due to better labour efficiency. Their higher income was due to higher cattle productivity that was driven by:

- higher reproductive rates
- lower mortality rates
- higher sale weights.

The Australian Government Departments of Environment and Agriculture have funded the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) to identify management practices that most improve the profitability and sustainability of beef businesses in reef catchments, and determine how more beef producers can be encouraged to adopt these.

The first major activity of this Better Beef and Reef project was for beef producers to identify the practices which were critical to the success of their businesses, and then recommend how more beef producers could be encouraged to adopt these.

To this end, beef producers from 14 cattle businesses in central and northern Queensland met with agency staff in Townsville on 16 -17 July 2014 (see Appendix 1). The agenda for this workshop is shown on the following pages.



Workshop Agenda

The purpose of the workshop is for beef producers to identify:

1. The key management practices that improve both profitability and land condition for beef enterprises.
2. How to achieve greater industry uptake of key practices.

Day 1 Wednesday, 16 July 2014

12 noon: Arrive for tea and coffee

12:30 pm: Lunch starts

1:15 pm: Workshop starts

1:15 pm: Introduction: Lester Pahl

Topic What are the key management practices for a beef business?

1. *What are the most critical management practices for the success of your business?
(Identify the most critical first, even if someone else has mentioned it)*

3:30 – 4 pm Afternoon tea

As a whole group, discuss in detail individual key practices.

- When did I start doing this, and why?
- How do I do it?
- What benefits do I get from it?

2. *Are there any other key practices?*

3. *Should key practices be done in any particular order on a property?*

5:30 pm Finish

7:00 pm Dinner


Day 2 Thursday, 17 July 2014

Topic How do we encourage more producers to adopt these key practices?

8:00 am: Workshop starts

Some beef producers adopt key practices while others do not.

2. *Why do some producers adopt key practices while others do not?*



3. *Are there any other reasons why some producers adopt key practices and others do not?*

10:00 – 10:30 am Morning Tea

4. *What should research and extension organisations e.g. DAF, industry organisations, consultants and Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups do or do better to get greater industry uptake.*

If time permits, recommend specific strategies for increasing uptake of key practices.

12:00 noon Evaluation – how do producers feel about the workshop?

Where to from here?

Thanking people

12:30 pm Finish and have lunch



Record of workshop responses

Day 1 Wednesday, 16 July 2014

Session 1 Day 1

Topic What are the key management practices for a beef business?

What are the most critical management practices for the success of your business?

The responses of beef producers to this question recorded during the workshop are listed in Table 1 under the topic headings of:


- breeder management
- business approach
- community
- grazing land management
- livestock management
- people.

There was unanimous agreement that a beef enterprise must be treated as a business. Too many beef producers regard themselves as producers of livestock only, and do not run their enterprise as a business.

To run the enterprise as a business it is important to:

- Clearly define what you want to achieve – need business and personal goals.
- Know your key performance indicators and focus on improving these.
- Measure and record factors related to key performance indicators. What you do not measure you cannot manage.
- Conduct quarterly economic analyses of the whole business, compare your performance with benchmarks for highest industry performance and identify weak areas that need to be improved. Then act on these in a timely manner. For example, know your return on assets managed, your debt to equity ratio, how many kg of beef were produced per hectare, the costs of producing a kg of beef, and the prices received for a kg of beef.
- Look at your business as would a person from outside your business. Ask the hard questions they would ask if they were considering investing in your business and wanted to know how well it is performing.
- Planning is critical. Plans should be based on business-case analyses for proposed changes in management practices or of new capital projects to ensure that financial returns will be greater than the costs. Spend capital on technologies and/or infrastructure/machinery that are labour saving.

There was also unanimous agreement that beef producers should be continually seeking new ideas and advice from people within and external to their industry – continual learning and improvement. It is important to network with successful beef and other businesses and be open-minded to advice and opportunities. Beef producers should access advice, information and planning support from a range of professional people, such as accountants, solicitors, bankers, consultants, agents and agency staff.




There is no one “silver bullet” management practice that can make a business successful. Instead, there are a number of livestock, herd and land management practices that need to be implemented together as a system (holistic management). Key management practices include:

- Ensure all cattle are in good health and free from disease.
- Ensure all cattle have ample supplies of good quality forage and water.
- Educate cattle so that they are easy to muster and handle.
- Select genetic stock that are adapted to your environment and desired by your markets. Cross breeding programs can be beneficial.
- Control the movement of cattle and optimise their access to forage supplies by careful placement of fences and water points.
- Know the carrying capacity of your land and ensure that long-term stocking rates align with this. At the end of the wet season, know how much forage is available for consumption by your cattle, work out how much forage will be needed by the cattle present at that time, and adjust cattle numbers (stocking rate) accordingly. The natural resource base of soil and grass must be carefully managed to ensure its potential to produce forage for cattle is not compromised. Use of purchased forage and feed supplements should be minimised as the costs are often greater than the benefits;
- Act in accordance with cattle, cash and forage budgets.
- Control the period of mating cows so that all calves are born during the wet-season, to align the time of highest nutritional requirements for cow and calf with the period of maximum forage quality and quantity.
- Set up and implement a structured yearly program of stock management, involving mating, calving, mustering, weaning, husbandry, culling and nutrition.

Concern was expressed at the workshop that lists of key management practices did not adequately convey what was needed for a beef business to be successful. It was suggested it would be better to list the principles for running a successful beef business first, and then describe the holistic implementation of the practices needed to achieve these.

Lindsay Allen noted his principles were high fertility, growth and survival of cattle. His key practices for these were:

- Controlled mating of cows
 - Produces even lines of cattle, making it easier to manage and market cattle
 - identifies non-performing cows
 - facilitates better pasture management by making it easier to move cattle around
 - greatly reduces need for supplements.
- Crossbreeding
 - allows targeted marketing (he sells to the southern market rather than live export)
 - makes use of hybrid vigour for growth (and possibly fertility).
- Feed budgeting
 - used for stocking rate calculations
 - it is vital that forage supply is measured and acted on – even if it does mean selling or moving a large proportion of your herd
 - needs to be done at the end of the growing season. This could be in May, but it could be as early as February.
- Overarching all of this is financial budgeting and business analysis.



Similarly, Doug O'Neill noted that economic analysis was his overarching activity, and that pasture budgeting, stock rotation, placement of waters, controlled mating, weaning and education of stock were all implemented together as a production system.

Neil Rideout also recounted that budgeting for the coming year was an important part of his planning processes. Other important practices of Neil's were preventing water runoff through physical interventions, maintaining good ground cover through controlling stocking rate, rotational grazing and placement of water points. It was also important to keep improving the productivity and efficiency of his herd through seasonal mating, early weaning, good nutrition, stock education and cross-breeding. Marketing is critical, with a need to be aware of the markets which give him the best prices at any particular time, choosing from live export, private sales, sale yards, and on-line auctions.

To better describe the implementation of critical management practices, it was agreed that case studies of beef properties would better convey the holistic or systems approach of implementing the practices which were needed for beef businesses to be successful.

Session 1 Day 1

Topic What are the key management practices for a beef business?

Table 1. What are the most critical management practices for the success of your business?

Management topic	Critical management practices recorded at the workshop
Breeder management	Controlled mating
Breeder management	Increase breeder productivity through better health and nutrition
Breeder management	Fertility and reproduction
Total	3
Business approach	Timely management decisions and limit influence on these by drought, debt etc.
Business approach	Be prepared to change management when review indicates need for change
Business approach	Treat the enterprise as a business and there are no silver bullets
Business approach	Analyse whole business and identify weakest links
Business approach	Look at the business from outside perspective and take a business chief Executive Officer (CEO) approach
Business approach	Economic analysis of business
Business approach	Spend capital on areas that are labour saving and on good machinery that does not break down
Business approach	Return on assets managed
Business approach	Debt to equity management
Business approach	Good financial management – measure and know costs and returns
Business approach	Continually review performance – at least quarterly
Business approach	Know what buttons to press
Business approach	Set a target for how much profit you want to make each year
Business approach	What you cannot measure you cannot manage
Business approach	Marketing for best results
Business approach	Budgeting scenarios
Business approach	Identify what you need to do to stay at the top of the game
Business approach	Recognise the reality of supply and demand and concentrate on things you can manage
Business approach	Holistic management approach
Business approach	Animal, pasture, people and financial management
Total	20



Community	Be aware of the wants and needs of the local community
Total	1
Grazing land management	Matching stocking rate to carrying capacity
Grazing land management	Active feed budgeting and make sure you act on the results. Use this to make management decisions
Grazing land management	We are grass farmers – grow and harvest grass
Grazing land management	Weed management
Grazing land management	Minimise need for inputs by optimising natural resource base and by adapting to the environment
Grazing land management	Minimise loss of water using pasture and herd management practices
Grazing land management	Manage for soil to grow grass and grass to grow kg of beef
Grazing land management	Efficient and effective use of grass and have a functioning herd
Total	8
Livestock management	Structured livestock management program
Livestock management	Educate cattle
Livestock management	Use wire and water placement to manage cattle
Livestock management	Cross breeding for hybrid vigour
Total	4
People	Work out what we want to do
People	Stay connected with other producers and industries such as grain
People	More networking between grazier businesses
People	Be open-minded to a diversity of opportunities
Total	4
Total Practices	40



Session 2 Day 1

Topic How do we encourage more producers to adopt these key practices?

What prompted me to adopt critical management practices?

The responses of beef producers to this question recorded during the workshop are listed in Table 2 under the topic headings of:

- personal
- industry
- business.

Personal traits, and personal relationships and interactions were by far the dominant reasons why the 14 producers at this workshop had adopted critical management practices.

Confidence, a desire for continuous improvement personally and in their business, having vision, being open-minded, being determined to succeed no matter what, being curious and looking outside of their properties and business for inspiration and ideas, enjoying a challenge and having drive were important personality traits that led to the adoption of critical management practices. These are people who know what good performance is, are determined to achieve it, continually seek out and adopt better ways of doing things, and exert control over their business.

Personal relationships also played a big role in adoption of new practices. These producers surrounded themselves with successful peers and successful professional people, and they constantly sought information and advice from them. They interacted with successful neighbours; they sought information from consultants, veterinarians, accountants, bankers, agency staff, staff from NRM groups, and pretty much anyone or anywhere they could find it.

Working in projects, having other people review their business, undertaking training courses, and employing consultants were important activities for these people. The majority of the 14 beef producers at this workshop had completed RCS and MLA Edge courses.

Session 2 Day 1

Topic **How do we encourage more producers to adopt these key practices?**

Table 2. *What prompted me to adopt critical management practices? What were my trigger points?*

Trigger topic	Triggers as listed at the workshop
Personal	Continued to learn and grow, and not hamstrung by industry norms, cultures and traditions. Interested in continuous improvement.
Personal	Is a survivor – keeps working and remains successful over time in spite of challenges
Personal	Group projects were the trigger to adopting better practices – Research to Reality, neighbours, Grazing for Profit, grass identification days, Edge courses
Personal	Operate within good networks, especially RCS. Big value in other producers scrutinising your business
Personal	Want to leave a legacy
Personal	Personal development opportunities arose through RCS courses
Personal	Personal relationships with DPI staff, particularly those with a lot of knowledge. Includes involvement in R&D projects – change backed up by research
Personal	Personal relationships with veterinarians and other consultants who could convey what works well elsewhere
Personal	People with drive and curiosity are the ones to complete courses and succeed. Enjoy challenge. Seek out information. It is a personality type.
Personal	Personal invitation to a course motivates attendance
Personal	Knowing that improvement is possible and how this can be done. Proof of what can be achieved. Can occur through benchmarking, such as grains best management practice and grazing best management practice programs.
Personal	Success is contagious. Successful neighbours show what can be achieved and this is very convincing for surrounding properties
Personal	Seeing that big improvements arise from even simple practices encourages people to do more – gives them confidence
Personal	Observed successful practices of decades as a professional (vet) or during contract work, and wanted to put this into practice
Personal	Good family attitude provided opportunity to implement learnings from courses
Personal	Surround myself with good people – accountant, bank, DAF staff, RCS, consultants
Personal	Don't know what we don't know – training courses are good for discovering new practices
Total	17



Industry	Promote practices of successful producers – industry champions. Industry to recommend courses
Total	1
Business	Financial pressure drove improvements in herd management and business management.
Business	Simple graphs showing \$ that can be gained from practices
Business	Measure things and improve where there are deficiencies
Business	Take a holistic approach first
Total	4
Total Practices	22

Day 2 Thursday, 17 July 2014
Session 3 Day 2

Topic *How do we encourage more producers to adopt these key practices?*

What will prompt other producers to adopt critical management practices?

Day 2 of the workshop commenced with a recap of some of the triggers identified on Day 1 that had prompted the beef producers in the room to adopt critical management practices. These were:

- long-term relationships with trusted advisors
- looking over the fence and seeing successful results
- respected people who endorsed practices or technologies
- learning from outside your sector, such as grains industry
- predisposition to want to improve your business.

The producers at the workshop were then asked if there were any other triggers that could encourage other beef producers to adopt critical management practices. The responses to this question are listed in Table 3.

It was mentioned that personal relationships with agency staff that were built up over a period of time were needed before beef producers could trust the advice they were being given from them. Rapid turnover of staff in some regions meant that producers did not get to know agency staff and the staff did not develop sufficient understanding and experience of the industry.

It was noted that beef producers could be wary of the advice received from agency people that they did not know well, and would not trust this advice until they knew that agency staff had their best interests at heart. Similarly, some beef producers will not accept incentive payments, such as for fences and water points, as they are wary of the “strings that may be attached”. It was noted that in these circumstance some agency and other advisors appear to believe they have the authority to demand certain things of beef producers.

Even so, a number of producers placed considerable value on incentive payments as a means of encouraging beef producers to open their minds to other practices and to help improve their performance. Mention was made of the potential for offset payments made by some large mining companies to be used in incentive programs or to provide additional training opportunities.

Personal invitations to training courses or related activities from trusted neighbours or agency staff were much more likely to result in them attending these, and were much more effective than email invitations. It was noted that industry champions could successfully promote training courses and critical management practices.

Communication featured highly in the discussions of triggers that can prompt adoption of improved practices. There was considerable interest in using television to promote better practices and advertise training courses. It was also mentioned that more consideration be given to communicating via social media such as Facebook. Other more traditional forms of communication using newspapers such as Queensland Country Life are also important.

Training was regarded as an important trigger for the adoption of better practices. It was generally considered that more beef producers need to access training courses, and that subsidies for attendance are likely to increase the numbers of producers attending courses.

Getting more beef producers to training workshops through the provision of subsidies is important for them to find their own light-bulb moments. Resource Consulting Services have observed that attendance of producers at their very well-known training courses has dropped 50% since subsidies were withdrawn.

The ongoing promotion of training opportunities and assistance with adopting new practices that is provided by agency staff was also thought to be important. In this respect, agency staff provide the momentum and energy needed to commence and continue new practices. Setting up photo monitoring sites was mentioned as an example.

Table 3. *What will prompt other producers to adopt critical management practices?*

Trigger topic	Triggers as listed at the workshop
Communication	Use television more wisely to promote training courses and critical management practices
Communication	Personal invites from trusted people are most effective at encouraging producers to attend courses/events
Personal	Sufficient discomfort
Personal	Overcoming paralysis
Personal	Learning from trial and error
Personal	More hand-holding, such as setting up photo sites
Personal	Mentoring
Personal	Getting people started
Personal	More social media presence, such as Facebook
Government	Transparency of government information
Government	Provision of information e.g. sediment flow onto the reef
Government	Shortening information and results from R&D. Communicate just the key findings – half a page of messages
Government	Access to labour saving satellite imagery, such as VegMachine
Government	Use satellite imagery to identify properties that may be in poor condition as a way of targeting properties that may most need help with grazing land management
Training	Target emerging managers
Training	Need for subsidies to encourage attendance of courses



Session 4 Day 2

Topic How do we encourage more producers to adopt these key practices?

What can organisations do or do better to prompt producers to adopt critical management practices?

The beef producers at the workshop were asked what organisations could do to encourage more producers to adopt critical management practices. Responses are listed below under the heading of individual organisations.

Some of the key recommendations for regional NRM groups were:

- Keep good staff for longer periods of time, but difficult due to three year funding cycle.
- Could consider filling the extension gap.
- Need to get the balance right between training, incentives for on-ground works, extension and farm planning. Need to better link on-ground works incentives with extension.
- Producers that apply for funds should first have a property plan and have undertaken some training.
- Incentives for waters and wire has been successful; good structure.
- Critical for field officers to have skills/background in industry to relate to producers.

For government agencies in general, some key recommendations were:

- Bring back the Farm Ready program, and prioritise provision of training.
- Price for training courses can be a barrier to entry.
- There needs to be equity across producers and regions regarding the subsidies that are provided for training.
- Government could use television more to promote courses and good practices
- Small incentives can motivate larger private investment.
- When advertising, use sources that are trusted by producers, e.g. Queensland Country Life newspaper.
- Some funding support does not encourage participation in training, such as short-term one-off incentives.
- Consider funding five year rather than three year projects.
- Better use of offsets by mining companies (e.g. 150% reduction in sediment flow elsewhere) who have to pay for remedial activities elsewhere e.g. dredging in the harbour. Perhaps more of this should be put into training.
- Create a better economic environment so that beef producers can compete in global markets.
- Provide better infrastructure for the supply chain – ports, rail and road.
- Reduce red-tape and costs associated with live exports.
- Departments to talk with each other more.

For the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries specifically, recommendations were:

- Increases in reef funding have led to more extension officers in reef catchments, but there is a problem with low numbers of staff in other regions.
- Staff turnover is a problem – producers do not get to know and trust staff, and new and less experienced staff may not have industry experience.
- Short-term projects facilitate staff turnover.
- The age distribution of staff (mostly young or old) is a problem.
- Need more mentoring of staff.
- Property visits, PDS and field days are more powerful and bring people together.

Recommendations for MLA included:

- Invest more in promotion of courses and best practices.
- There is duplication of some state activities. MLA are investing more in their own extension programs, duplicating those of agencies, and it is not their core business.
- Too many beef committees (92) which confuses industry messages sent to government.
- Need a major review and major restructure and start again.

Recommendations for Agforce included:

- Producers need to see more benefit in membership.
- Represents mixed sectors, and has problem with focus.
- Need to stick to core business, and encouraging adoption may not be part of this.
- Agforce is closely involved in best management practice and may need to promote it more, which is not their usual role of protecting and lobbying for industry.

The total responses to the question “what can organisations do or do better to prompt producers to adopt critical management practices” are listed below.

NRM Groups

- NRM groups are more likely to be neutral when promoting technologies, and therefore are in a good position to judge the merits of these.
- Exceptional Circumstances is a different issue (drought and flood recovery funding).
- Keep good staff for longer periods of time, but difficult due to three year funding cycle.
- Could consider filling the extension gap.
- North and Southern Gulf operate as one sector and are a good example of a well managed group with good staff. In comparison, North Queensland Dry Tropics (NQDT) has more staff turnover and new staff need training.
- Number of staff in NQDT, there is a need to communicate what they do, the programs they manage and deliver and governance requirements.
- NRM Boards can influence approaches of their staff.
- Spend more of NRM funding on on-ground work rather than overheads, although the latter is capped.
- Groups need to consider the balance of investment between extension, grants, training and farm planning. All need to be delivered in a three year program.
- For NRM groups there is a weighting in project prioritisation to select land holders with D condition land to B condition.
- Work well together as other groups, such as Southern and Northern Gulf.

- Need to get the balance right between training, incentives for on-ground works, extension and farm planning. Need to better link on-ground works incentives with extension.
- Producers that apply for funds should first have a property plan and have undertaken some training.
- Incentives for producers in the bottom 10% may not drive change in practices.
- Incentives for waters and wire has been successful; good structure.
- Specific advice or training required before receiving on-ground funding.
- Need to have a plan.
- Funding stream has been positive.
- Don't always focus on education, and follow up with other forms of funding.
- Property infrastructure not always good private benefit, as need 30% return over three to five years.
- Critical for field officers to have skills/background in industry to relate to producers.

Government agencies

- Bring back the Farm Ready program, and prioritise provision of training.
- Some courses such as dog and horse handling possibly should not be subsidised.
- Family attitude to training can influence uptake of training courses.
- Divert drought funding to training.
- However, current drought funding for water infrastructure is good.
- Number of producers enrolling in RSC courses dropped by 50% when Farm Ready subsidies ceased.
- Price for training courses can be a barrier to entry.
- If people think it is necessary they will pay for courses.
- Providing subsidies for producers in some regions and not others causes tensions – is an equity issue.
- There is a challenge when some regional NRM Groups subsidise training and others don't.
- What you do post the courses determines the value you get from them.
- Relative cost of attending training courses is high for small enterprises, and they may benefit less from it.
- In delivering advice and training there is an advantage that scale brings in achieving greater on-ground change.
- Government could use television more to promote courses and good practices.
- Television is expensive / opportunity to target programs such as Landline which has a large area of coverage.
- Messages concerning best management practice should include link to profitability.
- Provide regular updates on how agricultural production can be increased and progress with this.
- Identify properties with low ground-cover and target them with extension, but need to tread carefully with this.
- If we are attempting to shift the bell-curve to the right, how long will this take.
- Promotion of courses and practices demonstrates to the public that industry is taking action.
- Banks are able to identify beef producers that are performing poorly and losing equity, even though this can take a long time. Occurs more quickly in the grains industry.

- Producers on the far left (10%) of the bell-curve can be a welfare issue and can also cause land degradation. They also present a poor image to the public.
- Policies need to be enforced if progress is to be made in the industry.
- Consider higher tax incentives for investment in infrastructure etc. that can improve performance of enterprise.
- Developing and implementing financial and economic incentives through policy has a long lead time, and thus may not be attractive to producers.
- Current land care adverts are promoting wrong stories. Needs to be more focused on a clear message or particular issues.
- Small incentives can motivate larger private investment.
- Continue tax incentives for infrastructure e.g. off-stream water points.
- Motivation to invest.
- A lot of investment (e.g. Reef Program) is committed to projects (e.g. funding riparian fencing) rather than to the business as a whole.
- When advertising, use sources that are trusted by producers, for example Queensland Country Life newspaper. Need to target your audience.
- Participation in best management practice can identify the need to undertake training.
- Some funding support does not encourage participation in training, such as short term one-off incentives.
- Some organisations are too reef-centric, and thus there is limited funding for non-reef regions.
- Consider funding five year rather than three year projects.
- Better use of offsets by mining companies (e.g. 150% reduction in sediment flow elsewhere) who have to pay for remedial activities elsewhere e.g. dredging in the harbour. Perhaps more of this should be put into training.
- Governments need to be more consistent with messages.
- Information is available but can be hard to access by producers, and it needs to be more dynamic and discussed.
- Create a better economic environment so that beef producers can compete in global markets.
- Provide better infrastructure for the supply chain – ports, rail and road.
- Reduce red-tape and costs associated with live exports.
- Departments to talk with each other more.

DAF

- Increases in reef funding have led to more extension officers in reef catchments, but there is a problem with low numbers of staff in other regions.
- Staff turnover is a problem – producers do not get to know and trust staff, and new and less experienced staff may not have industry experience.
- Short-term projects facilitate staff turnover.
- Government policy is also often short-term.
- The age distribution of staff (mostly young or old) is a problem.
- Queensland and the Northern Territory still have extension staff, whereas these have been disappearing from other states.
- There is always a challenge with shorter term funding programs of developing the proposal / approvals / reporting.

- Contestability review identified market failure in grazing extension.
- Staff development processes are locked into projects or regions.
- What will happen to information collected by DAF and staff a long time ago?
- Need more mentoring of staff.
- Good job / funding issues.
- First contact with DAF trustworthy / local. DAF extension is independent and trustworthy and is often his first point of contact. May seek advice elsewhere after this initial contact.
- Half day property visits more powerful.
- Field days that bring people together are good.
- Collate property case studies into a single publication.
- PDS are beneficial to demonstrate and provide information to other graziers.

RCS

- Clarity on funding time-frames.
- Increased call for one-on-one on-farm consultation from their existing clients.
- Some producers do not like to share financial and production information in groups, but this limits the value of group work.

MLA

- Invest more in promotion of courses and best practices.
- Need a major review and major restructure and start again.
- Past research has been good but now is a basket-case – not the right projects and need more of a future focus.
- Conflict between representing producers and processors.
- Conflict of interest between beef research council groups and payment by MLA.
- Funding for Cattle Council.
- Does a good job on overseas marketing.
- Need to focus on a single commodity being beef.
- No need to be in extension, but should fund extension in other organisations.
- There is a duplication of some state activities. MLA are investing more in their own extension programs, duplicating those of agencies, and it is not their core business.
- Rural RD&E funding from State and MLA is getting smaller.
- Too many beef committees (92) which confuses the industry messages sent to government.

Agforce

- Only 22% of producers are members – producers do not see benefit in membership.
- Represents mixed sectors, and has problem with focus.
- Do run some good courses, such as mapping, training and information on vegetation laws.
- Do good work.
- Need to stick to core business, and whether or not encouraging adoption is part of this.
- Agforce is closely involved in best management practice and may need to promote it more, which is not their usual role of protecting and lobbying for industry.



Workshop Feedback

Producers were asked what they liked about the workshop and what they thought could have been improved.

What we liked:

- Appreciated people sharing information.
- Good to talk about how to get others to adopt better practices.
- Broad knowledge / same wavelength. Shows willingness to do something what you achieve – successful.
- Good to ask graziers for their opinions.
- Good group of people to affirm what is good practice.
- Good to have had Kevin Gale from the Australian Government Department of Environment at the meeting.
- Good to get together with like-minded people.
- Good goals / appreciate producers views.
- Enjoyed people and learnt a lot, and appreciated opportunity to express views.
- Share views and trust.
- We are changing as an industry, and less pessimistic.
- Good to be positive.
- DAF here to take something from work.
- Good learning / mix of views, appreciate listening.
- Not having small groups was good.
- Good to work with willing participants that were working out how to get others involved.

What could have been done better:

- Have a bigger group of producers, with some from the beginning and end of bell-curve.
- Need to stay on track more.
- Could wing it a bit more, using strong chairmanship.
- More clarity on where the meeting outcomes will go.
- Need more information about the workshop prior to arriving.
- Wanted to see more on the workshop objectives.
- Government certainty about continued investment in extension.
- Involve others in supply chain – suppliers, processors.
- More structure for the workshop but it was good to share.



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Appendix 1. People who attended the workshop

Lindsay Allan	Longford, Cloncurry
John Bellingham	Clareborough, Richmond
David Comiskey	Melton, Alpha
Kevin Gale	Department of Environment, Canberra
John James	DAF Toowoomba (Workshop Facilitator)
Harrison Kemp	Lotus Park, Marlborough
Peter Long	Fitzroy Basin Association, Rockhampton
Dan Lynch	Tara Station, Cloncurry
Michael Lyons	Wambiana, Charters Towers
Ian MacGibbon	Ametdale, St Lawrence
Wayne Moxham-Price	Pindari, Thangool.
Brigid Nelson	DAF Charters Towers
Doug O'Neill	Mt Oweenee, Charters Towers
Barry O'Sullivan	Glenalpine Station, Bowen
Lester Pahl	DAF Toowoomba
Neil Rideout	Mount Kroombit, Biloela
Bob Shepherd	DAF Charters Towers
Eric Simon	Jimarndy, May Downs
Dave Smith	DAF Charters Towers
Raymond Stacey	Landcare Coordinator, Dalrymple Landcare Committee
Mick Sullivan	DAF Rockhampton
Sally Turley	Wandovale, Charters Towers

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