

New direction and opportunity for MFS in the LLS landscape....

The MFS Chairman, Oli Cay with Board support as well as support from our past Chair David Mitchell, has recently been in negotiations with SRCMA Ag as well as Agricultural Ministers and their advisors to discuss where MFS may fit in the new extension restructure on the Monaro.

Discussions have taken place on the significant role grower groups like MFS can play in "filling the extension gaps" which have come about due to the recent loss in many areas of local, experienced, DPI staff.

With a proven track record now behind us, MFS have been able to negotiate a strong position in the field of influencing and coordinating research and extension delivery on the Monaro. SRCMA Ag has agreed to give MFS additional funds to the amount of \$84,230 for the next 12 months and potentially as an on-going arrangement.

However in order to take advantage of this opportunity, MFS needs to look at broadening our scope and taking on a few more roles and responsibilities, whilst still maintaining a specialised "service" to foundation members and not losing sight of our original goals.



Oli Cay explaining proposed new direction for MFS to members at recent breakfast in Nimmitabel

MFS is currently in the process of seeking feedback from the membership to;

- (a) Lower the level of MFS subscription to \$350 plus GST per farm business from the commencement of the next subscription period (01/01/2014).
- (b) Work through a transition period up until the 2013 MFS AGM (August) to enable MFS to deliver services on the two levels as described below from Sept 2013;
 - Service level to MFS financial members will include:
 - Free admittance to all MFS activities
 - Membership of the Soils Club
 - A limited number of "free soil tests" pa
 - Free attendance at the GrassGro seasonal updates (GrazProphet)
 - Emailed "GrassGro seasonal updates" (GrazProphet)
 - MFS newsletters
 - Current members will now be "Foundation Members" and additional entitlements will include;
 - Access to a "members only" area of the website which is to be developed;
 - Information on a "Members First" basis
 - Access to a weekly market commentary on meat, wool and grain (proposal currently in negotiation with Ag Concepts).
 - Proposed Service level to non-financial MFS members includes:
 - Free admittance to selected activities
 - Access to selected MFS information
 - Access to MFS website (tiered user log-ins)
 - Emailed MFS "GrassGro seasonal updates"
 - MFS newsletters
 - In addition to the levels of membership and service listed above MFS will lift the standard of presentation of its communications, develop a comprehensive website (as indicated above) and employ Project Managers and other professionals with specific technical expertise

as required to assist the MFS Project Officer (Nancy).

- MFS will continue to monitor funding opportunities and develop and submit project applications when relevant and timely to benefit the entire membership and local Monaro rural community.
- It is envisaged that the LLS appointed Board (Jan 2014) will develop an ongoing three year contract with MFS which will allow renewal after each two year period.

This feedback is being sought through a member enterprise survey which was recently sent out.

MFS Trainee – Alec Boyd

Alec has joined us this year as the MFS trainee, working for the “Bombala” producer end.

Alec has grown up in Sydney and his background has not been in Agriculture however he has always been interested in agriculture from time spent on his grandfather's property in Alberta Canada as a boy. Alec's experience includes three months in New Zealand working on a large 1000 ha sheep and cattle property west of Timaru running 5000 sheep and 400 head of cattle. He has also spent two years working as a landscape gardener and home construction apprentice labourer. Alec seems to be enjoying life on the Monaro, living in a small cottage at “Bukalong” and spending time at the Bombala gym and football training.

Alec's says he “loves being outdoors, working hard and staying busy” and feels “right at home on a farm.” His experience in New Zealand made him realise the amount of formal study and mentoring needed in order to become a successful farmer or farm manager.

Alec has worked on the following properties over the last 5 months; Tintagel Pastoral, Corrowong, Delegate Station, Inverloch, Finchley, Quinburra, Kydra and Sth Bukalong, improving his skills and learning the variety of ways of farming on the Monaro.

He feels all his employers have been really good to work for and have spent the time training and

mentoring him. Alec is quite happy to work for several different employers saying this “gives variety in his work and shows him many different ways of doing things”.

His jobs have included maintenance work on buildings and water systems, fencing, stock work etc.

Feedback from employers has been very positive and includes;

- “He is a really pleasant bloke...willing, a good worker ethic, polite etc.
- “Alec is an excellent example of the perfect candidate for a traineeship, he is keen to learn, willing, reliable..”
- “Alec's attitude is fantastic, he's willing to learn and enjoying the bush which is good for rural Australia if he decides to stay in the bush”
- “he's stronger than the average aging farmer”
- “when drenching sheep he seems to have spider man qualities”



Alec at Delegate Station helping with pregnancy scanning

As employers have pointed out, “its all about the attitude and not so much about the starting skill level that's important to make these programs successful. It teaches work ethic to young people just having to be ready for work at 7.30am each morning.”

“It will depend on the nature of your farming systems ie. cropping versus grazing and your labour set up and infrastructure as to how much reliance and responsibility you would put on a trainee. “

For some properties already with a full labour workforce, the emphasis has been more on mentoring

and training whereas other properties with no full-time labour component have relied on Alec for busy periods during their management program.

Overall there is a general consensus that the traineeship program has been extremely good for MFS, not just for the employers but also for raising the profile of MFS within the wider community and major R&D Agricultural Organisations.

It is widely acknowledged that its very hard for young people to get a start and this sort of program allows them to gain invaluable experience which hopefully will translate into a career in Agriculture.

There is a certain level of expectation that goes with any traineeship and that's a willingness to provide a certain level of training and supervision. Another consideration is the need to be aware of the risks that can arise with inexperience, especially with heavy machinery and quad bikes which comes when employing any new, young labour.

An update on the 2012 Trainees....both were offered fulltime positions on local properties with Daniel Rowson taking up this offer on a local farm near Berridale.

In the next newsletter there will be an article on Kristy who is the trainee for the "Cooma" region.

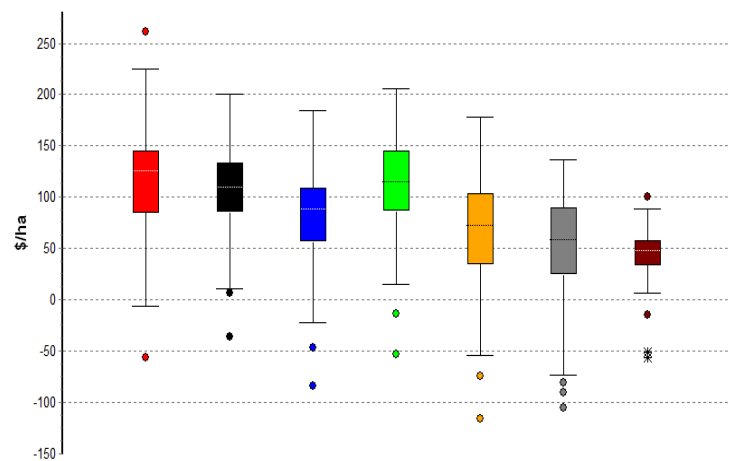
Thank you to RB Sellars who has again provided clothing for both the trainees to a value of over \$1000.



Recent MFS Breakfast....June 4th Nimmitabel

Profit in sheep enterprises...where do wethers fit in?

Monaro Farming Systems recently hosted a field day in Nimmitabel for 40 producers to discuss the never-ending question of enterprise mix within a farm business. Doug Alcock presented results from the CSIRO GrassGro model comparing the profit of several different merino and crossbred sheep enterprises under market conditions averaged over the past 6 months. Particular attention was paid to see if retaining a wether flock is currently an attractive option for producers on the Monaro.



Enterprise Key

- Merino (18μ) 44kg lambs
- Merino (18μ) sell weaners
- Merino (18μ) sell hoggets
- Dohne 44kg lambs
- M X T 44kg lambs
- BLM X T 44kg lambs
- Merino wethers

Based on average economic performance, in comparison with a merino breeding (wool) or a crossbred lamb enterprise, wethers usually do not perform as well. However, as Doug highlighted, they can confer other benefits. Wethers can be run "harder" than a breeding ewe flock and especially during the tougher winter months, can be run in unsheltered paddocks on lower quality pastures. Wethers are generally more resistant to parasites and require less labour.

One of the difficulties is because of variations in physical characteristic and finances between individual farms, it is very hard to put a blanket dollar figure on the value of a wether enterprise to the whole farm. Doug said "Wethers are certainly lower risk and a farm that is running more wethers is more flexible in terms of reducing numbers in a strategic way during poor seasons".

Integral to the analysis was the strategy of which wethers to keep. Mr Alcock said "while current market prices still leave the average wether lagging behind the ewes, a small specially selected group of the finest micron wethers can be more profitable and along with better grazing management, easier worm management and flexible selling options during drought a small mob can pay off across the whole farm."

For a copy of the presentation, please contact Nancy, nancy@msanda.com.au.

Up Coming events & news...

-Sydney University has submitted an application under the DAFF, "Filling the Research Gap" funding stream to specifically target the following priority areas; Increasing soil carbon; Farm systems design (cell grazing); Adaptation to climate change. Approx. 6-8 MFS members have volunteered host sites to trial new **legume species** if this application is successful.

-MFS has recently submitted a Project Application (\$421,000) under the "Caring For Country Innovation Grants" funding stream with help from partners SRCMA and Sydney University. This project, if successful, will look at helping to validate hand-held remote biomass sensing devices to monitor pastures & grasslands to identify "production potentials" across 6 case-study Monaro properties and target management strategies to "fertility zones" within a farm.

-2013 MFS Member Survey – closed on 7th July, a summary of results will be included in next newsletter and the prize winners will be notified shortly.

-New sponsor Gallagher has come on board as a bronze sponsor for MFS (\$1000 pa). We welcome their support and look forward to working with this company in the future.

Events.....

❖ 27th Aug 2013 – MFS AGM;

- Seasonal Outlook for Spring (Graz Prophet)
- Mark Trotter (CRC Spatial Information) - tbc

Mark is a Research Lecturer in Precision Agriculture within the School of Science and Technology at the University of New England (UNE). Mark's research interests focus on spatio-temporal variability in agricultural systems and the development of sensors and management techniques that enable producers to increase production and efficiency in the face of variation found in animals, plants and landscapes.

❖ 17th Sept 2013 – mid-side sampling wether trial

❖ early Oct 2013 – initiation of annual soil testing bulk submission as part of MFS Soil Club

❖ mid Oct 2013 – wether trial shearing

❖ early Nov 2013 – Animal Health Field Day

❖ Nov or Dec 2013 – MFS & GLW - presentation of MFS Wether trial results (2 years data)

❖ late Nov 2013 – Soil Club Presentation – Richard Simpson CSIRO

Update MLA Lean Meat Yield Eating Quality Project – "Greenlake", Brad & Lauren Yelds

Several "proof of concept" producer demonstration sites (including "Greenlake") have been set up across Australia by MLA to trial, on-farm, the efficacy of research breeding values (RBVs) for lean meat yield and eating quality. The project aims to demonstrate that the RBVs for LMY (lean meat yield), tenderness (SF5) & IMF (intra muscular fat) can be translated through the lamb supply chain therefore allowing selection for desirable eating quality traits and LMY.

Initial results have found measurable differences between sires in progeny carcass traits and positive relationships between progeny carcass traits and sire RBVs **for example**;

- a 1kg increase in sire RBV translates to a 170g increase in average progeny HCWT (hot carcass weight)
- a 1mm increase in sire RBV translates to a 0.6mm increase in average progeny carcass fat (cfat)
- a 1% increase in sire RBV translates to a 0.2% increase in average progeny LMY (lean meat yield)

On Greenlake, 8 group's of 40 XBred ewes were artificially inseminated with semen from 8 different terminal sires. The pregnancy scanning took place last week with conception rates ranging from 49% to 72% across the 8 groups of ewes with a high percentage of twins. The potential lambs out of 317 ewes are 307. The ewes are due to start lambing on the 20th August and the lambs will be blood typed at marking.

Brad Yelds pushing up ewes to be scanned and recording results on TSi farm notebook against EID tag.



The University of Sydney

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