

Whats been going on?



- ❖ **GrassGro breakfast** – 7th May Nimmitabel, Doug Alcock demonstrated how GrassGro modelling can be used for farm planning and decision making by modelling the impact certain decisions will have on your enterprise risk and productivity bottom line before committing resources.

GrassGro training course, Cooma 24th, 25th May – CSIRO specialists delivered an intense 2 day course to a group of 16 participants made up of local extension staff, MFS producer members and SE Monaro Landcare members. Some **feedback** from the course included; *“excellent predictive tool for pasture growth, livestock performance.....huge potential for sharing analysis reports for common questions.....very relevant to individual farm systems and for validating your own systems.... this groups obligation to ask the right questions and disseminate to the wider MFS group.....can minimize risk in changing enterprises.....very useful in “what if’s”.*

Where to from here with GrassGro? Future plans include the setting up of “farm systems” around nine soil types (in-depth analysis done) representing the Monaro which members can relate to their own systems and common questions and reports will be distributed. Also planned are spring tactical runs using the model to analyse a variety of Monaro issues at this critical time.

- ❖ **CSIRO dual purpose cropping trial update, Delegate** - Dr John Kirkegaard and Dr Hugh Dove (CSIRO) recently visited the site to get biomass measurements for the different varieties of cereal and canola. The first grazing of the trials commenced 10th June and will be managed through winter and spring to look at overall impacts on final harvest yields. *See last page for results*
- ❖ **More funding success** – MFS secured **\$19,350** through Community Action Grants to run the “Building resilience within the family farm business” Project. We now have access to two of Australia’s leading communication specialists, Lyn Sykes and Rob Napier who will be working with MFS to strengthen communication in the family farm businesses. Also as part of this project Mike Stephens will run a session on Human Resource Management. To start 2011.
- ❖ **Monaro Mums** afternoon – 14th May Nimmitabel, 35 people attended to hear speakers David Sackett (Growth Farms Australia), Phil Graham and Doug Alcock (NSW Industry & Investment) and Hamish Dickson, Productive Nutrition South Australia. Speakers critically compared the ewe enterprises on the Monaro from both a production and an economic perspective. The day was a great success, generating some key questions to investigate further such as;
 1. Benefits of scanning? (could be modelled by “OzFarm”)
 2. Time of lambing? Early/mid/late spring? (can be modeled by GrassGro)
 3. Efficiencies of providing dry feed / roughage when grazing high protein cereals
 4. Whole issue of what are the “optimum” finishing crops (terms of DM produced, feed quality and COST) ie. cereals, brassicas versus ryegrass
 5. Finishing crops evaluated in terms of \$\$/tone/DM produced balanced with input and output costs
 6. Costs of producing a native pasture
 7. To what degree can a ewe draw on her own body reserves through winter when feed availability is low, if starting from a score 4
 8. Cost of not trying to finish lambs at all (Xbreds) and waiting for an autumn break ie. exploring the compensatory gain potential within different finishing systems
 9. Exploring issue of quick versus later finishing systems – can be answered by modeling? (tie in finishing system with marketing windows)

(Copies of the notes have been circulated)

- ❖ MFS Research and Development Plan has been finalized as well as Financial, Communications and Social Issues Documented Plans. These documents will give MFS added credibility and professionalism when approaching funding bodies as well as provide a structured direction and focus for MFS.



***David Sackett (CEO of Growth Farms Australia – Monaro Mums 14th May Nimmitabel)**

Upcoming Events

***Proposed Ministerial Monaro Tour** / official launch of The GrassGro Project – Minister for Agriculture Tony Burke, Member for Eden Monaro, Dr Mike Kelly and Steve Whan, NSW Minister for Primary Industries and Member for Monaro – Date to be confirmed

***Aug 2010 AGM** – possible speaker from Birchup Cropping Group and GrassGro Climate Change Modelling demonstration

***Quality Lucerne Hay for sale**– 1st 2nd 3rd cut lucerne hay, all cut from clean paddocks, large square bales, 8 X 3 X 3, test results available, transport can be arranged, large quantities available. Call Mark Eccleston 0419694325 or 6452 4639



Notes from the

AIASST (Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology) Conference

Canberra Thursday 11th 12th March 2010
The Future for Agricultural RD&E in Australia

1. **The Challenge for Agricultural RD&E into the future – Mr Ian McClelland, Chair, Birchup Cropping Group (BCG)**

- the business man lives on the factory floor
- community, environment, family and friends are so important
- farm debt has risen dramatically, 1.8 times debt to income ratio & farmers returns are declining
- one of the greatest challenges faced by agriculture over the next ten years will be interest rates and to meet the challenges farmers must increase efficiency, productivity, accept/embrace/adopt new innovations and continually improve management skills
- Research & Delivery models will focus more on research and less on Development & Extension with diminishing funding
- federal funding will become more short-term rather than long-term and directed more at “public benefit” ie. biodiversity, environment etc
- private benefit investment will fall ie. productivity gains, market research, responding to falling profit margins, advising individuals
- needs to be a balance between private and public benefit, public good flows from prosperous farming communities (trust, confidence in farming community)
- BCG see improved profits through innovation, partnerships in research projects, trials based on sound, robust scientific principles

Advantages of the Farming Groups

1. Link researchers, consultants, industry and farmers together
2. Provide platform for exchange of ideas
3. Can provide independent information free from prejudices

4. Relevant topics, scientific vigor, mutual respect between participants

Challenges for Farming Groups

1. Attracting and retaining quality staff and leadership (high turn-over of staff)
2. Maintaining and securing ongoing sponsorship – need to be CREATIVE
3. Attracting staff with experience & enthusiasm
4. Ensuring the group has a viable / profitable / realistic business model
5. Providing better business management skills
6. Considering the debt levels of many farm businesses, what is their capacity to innovate?
7. What will replace the EC interest subsidy?
8. Future Industry investment in RD&E not guaranteed, where will the \$\$ come from?
9. The RD&E model must change and “silo’s” must be connected
10. Getting balance right between short and long term investments
11. Making sure farm management decisions are based on science... “intuitive vs analytical” decision making processes”, farmers generally have an “instinctive” culture

-funding bodies must recognize that some projects have a two year lead time

-farmer groups can respond quickly and get tactical information out

-voluntary time and resources farmers give is never really recognized but SO IMPORTANT to longevity of the group



Grower Group Perspective – Dr Nigel Wilhelm, SA Research & Development Institute (SARDI)

-over 200 farming systems groups across Australia

-starting to take on a lot of the extension roles and often emerge as a result of lack of sufficient support by public sector or to provide leverage power in this area

-Characterized by;

- Common goal of improving farming in their backyard
- Leadership by farmers – vital to their effectiveness, strong attitudes
- Need strong & committed support from local farmers & agribusiness
- Support a clearly recognized region
- Know very well, the relevant issues but not always articulated
- Very good at identifying / ranking the local problems (often not good understanding of the underlying issues)
- Good at holding high profile, local events
- BUT weak at evaluation and measuring impact / change at a farm level

-as a consequence, FSG (farming system groups) very effective vehicles for facilitating change in their area of influence BUT struggle to be effective in applied R&D due to;

- RD very expensive
- RD requires specialist skills and resources
- RD needs strong and experienced supervision

Future

-FSG need to make the most of multi-disciplinary teams (growers, consultants, extension professionals, funding providers, researchers) to identify & priorities issues

-grower groups have a very positive direct effect on researchers by on-going face-to-face interactions, feedback to those researchers who are passionate & committed to the bush

-need to have flexible BUT formal structures with accountability & clear roles & responsibilities

-continually have to find ways to reward members / add value to membership while at same time not trying to deprive the general region of information exchange etc.

-Farming Systems Groups are vital & important component in flow of new knowledge from basic research to changed on-farm practices ie. the interface between research & functioning whole farm business

-BCG (Birchup Cropping Group) do this by providing regular fortnightly targeted information to members, that are not offered to general public

-SUCCESSION is a huge issue as “depth of talented commitment” is shallow and getting worse

-need to expand as public resources continue to retract from the applied end of adoption

For more information on the Institute please visit <http://www.aiast.com.au/>

CSIRO HRZ(high rainfall zone) Dual-Purpose Project

Biomass at Delegate from Sowing 1 (11th Mar 2010)

Cereal data

Crop type	Variety	Biomass (t/ha) 13 May
Barley	Urambie	1.7
	Yambla	2.4
Triticale	Endeavour	2.3
Winter wheat	CS106	1.8
	Mackellar	1.7
	Revenue	1.7
	Naparoo	1.7
Spring wheat	Preston	2.0
	HRZ03	1.5
	Bolac	2.4

Notes

- (1) barley and triticale have produced more early biomass than wheat
- (2) acid-tolerant Yambla barley has outperformed Urambie barley
- (3) spring types have started to elongate which may explain higher biomass

Canola data

Crop type	Variety	Biomass (t/ha) 13 May
Fodder rape	Winfred	2.1
Winter canola hybrids	Taurus	2.3
	CBIW208	2.3
	CBI306	2.6
	CBI406	2.1
Winter canola open-pollinated	Maxol	1.5
Spring hybrid	46Y78	2.1
	Hyola60	1.5
Spring conventional	Garnet	2.0
Spring TT	Marlin	1.2

Notes: (Winter types are favoured for this early sowing time as spring types will bolt early)

- (1) Winter canolas have produced as much biomass as the fodder type (Winfred)
- (2) hybrids generally outperform OPs
- (3) Garnet has done well as usual for an OP
- (4) TT varieties have low vigor



***Break Crop Trial, Delegate CSIRO Trial**



***Cereal plot, first sowing, Delegate CSIRO Trial**

