

Participant questions

MLA Updates: Redefining resilience through producer innovation

- 1. The whole farm systems approach is laudable. To what extent are MLA looking at interactions holistically - e.g. genotype by management by environment interactions to identify more profitable combinations over the long term?**

The producer adoption programs such as Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS) do this by validating research out of what can be a controlled research environment into real commercial businesses in a particular region or environment. When doing this, the adoption programs measure the impact the trial has on the whole business profitability. For example, impact on animal performance, pasture and crop performances, prices paid for improved performance etc.

For new and existing research investments, the projects are being designed to best leverage off the investment so we can answer many questions at once. For example, animals used in genetic projects, may also have information collected that help inform feedlot performance, have cuts collected to be used in eating quality trials, and the same meat may be used for food safety/shelf-life trials. This helps link research results right back to any genetic influences.

Importantly many research and adoption projects include and consider the whole supply chain so the efforts of producers to make practice change are recognised and rewarded by the customers of the final product.

- 2. Question for Sarah Strachan, R&D adoption map shows almost all work in Qld is occurring along the coastal regions (or close to). Is there a reason for that? You said not much left of Australia that hasn't been included, however the map shows not much of Qld has been covered...please clarify.**

The green dots representing PDS projects and yellow dots representing Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) training packages are representing the location of the contracted partner with MLA. In a lot of cases this might be the facilitators of a producer group or the coach of a training package. So these do represent regionally based and locally based support networks. From these dots presented on the map, many PDS sites would span further into western parts of QLD and remote areas of Australia.

Additionally, to provide more access to adoption programs, the PDS program has been updated to be more flexible to be better suited to the extensive production areas of northern Australia, including more flexibility around the numbers of producers and sites needed for each project, as well as the way to support the projects to get started quickly

Before these changes, there was 1 PDS project in Northern Australia, since these changes in 2019, there are now 11 PDS project in the region (9 active and 2 to be contracted)

A dedicated QLD state coordinator has been engaged for PGS to increase uptake in northern Australia. Over the past year there have also been additional feeder activities and capability

building activities held in QLD and the NT. One northern specific program is now available, which is Satellite Foraging, and five more are currently in development.

3. Subsequent question following the above

Can you then please explain why MLA does not provide financial support for events that are not solely focused on red meat production? 80% of businesses in my region are mixed farms with red meat/wool and dryland farming or irrigation - which are generally interrelated, yet MLA will not support a collaborative event which includes R&D and information relating to industries not just red meat but generally relevant to red meat production?

MLA sponsorship is prioritised for red meat & livestock events that align to the application criteria to make the best use of the available sponsorship budget. At times, events may not be successful in the application round when evaluated against all applications. MLA do invest in mixed farming systems in both R&D and Adoption activities. Where not successful in achieving sponsorship support, we would welcome further discussion should we have another program area where we can explore working together.

4. Who is running the Rangelands and non-wetting soils projects?

The Rangelands project is being conducted with NSW DPI and the non-wetting soils projects is being conducted with the Coorong Shire Council in South Australia.

5. Hamish, when will the industry have the confidence to purchase without a photo of the animal?

Travel restrictions due to COVID19 have moved industry to be much more heavily reliant on objective information and EBVs for this ram and bull selling season. However, it is important to think about which traits are important in your breeding program. Where EBVs are available using them to make selection decisions is the most accurate and effective way of making the right choice. If EBVs are not available for a trait you still need some way of assessing animals. Visual assessment in some instances may be the best option, but keep in mind that it will be relatively low accuracy.

6. Can producers actually indicate and lead research project and if yes, how do they navigate the ethical standards application and funding governance requirements without systems in place for them to do this?

It is very important to the success of having wide-spread adoption of research that producers are able to initiate and lead projects. MLA aims to support producers that wish to do this through options for obtaining the appropriate approvals to adhere to the requirements for ethical standards related to animal husbandry practices.

There are also benefits in producers partnering with research organisations and institutions who have access to these systems.

7. Sarah, I think you mentioned "key producers" when talking about who you work with. Does this mean you are selecting more active/innovative/successful producers? If your PDSs have a

1:10 ratio of core to observer, do you think you are having similar impact on those observers as much as with the core?

Within the PDS program we refer to 'core producers' as those that are actively involved in the project itself and changing their practices to trial a new concept, and then sharing this information with other core producers.

Observer producers are referred to those producers who may hear and see the progress and results of the projects through awareness activities such as forums, webinar, field days, paddock walks.

It is evident that those producers directly involved in the activity have greater adoption rates presumably due to experiencing the benefits to their own businesses.

Any producers or producer groups interested in participating in the PDS process, are encouraged to visit the [PDS page on MLA Website](#).

Applications for projects are processed through an open call process. The next one will open in April 2021 where the areas that MLA are seeking projects will be listed. These priorities are developed in conjunction with the Research Advisory Councils (NABRC, SALRC and WALRC).

8. How many participants are there in this session?

For this webinar - Redefining resilience through producer innovation, there were 460 registrants, a percentage of which attended live. Those who missed out can view the recording and questions online.

9. What steps have you taken to increase PDS and PGS engagement in northern Australia? Have you noticed if they have been working?

The PDS program has been updated to be more flexible to be better suited to the extensive production areas of northern Australia, including more flexibility around the numbers of producers and sites needed for each project, as well as the way to support the projects to get started quickly. There are now 11 PDS projects in the region (9 active and 2 to be contracted)

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10. Who decides what PDS projects get supported?

The Regional Consultation process through the Research Advisory Councils (RAC's) identify three key PDS priorities for their region.

The Councils identify two producers from their committee to be engaged in review process.

The priorities are consolidated to provide terms for an open call where preliminary submissions are received. In the 2020 call we received over 30 initial applications.

MLA subject matter experts and the RAC's together review the preliminary applications and decide on those projects that best address the priorities and ask for further detail in a more extensive proposal.

Another review process, including RAC's and MLA, then decide upon the successful applicants based on the robustness of methodology, engagement of producers, expected impact and importantly addressing a key need of the region.