



Mixed farm aim for new alliance

By CATHERINE MILLER

THE South East Prime Livestock Achievers have joined forces with the MacKillop Farm Management Group in a formal affiliation to deliver more knowledge and research opportunities to farmers in the South East and western Victoria.

The two groups will retain their separate committees but will share each group's database to communicate new information, and hopefully increase farmer participation in their activities.

It is also hoped the strengthened membership base of 140 farming businesses will enable MFMG and SEPLA to attract more industry funding for research projects of interest to both the livestock and cropping sectors.

The affiliation will be similar to that which already exists

Key points

- Two well-known SE farm groups join forces
- Whole farm management key focus
- Leading provider of R&D key aim

between MacKillop and the White Clover Growers Association with the chair of SEPLA sitting on the MFMG committee.

MFMG executive officer Krysteen McElroy – who will also perform the administration role for SEPLA – said in its latest strategic plan, the committee identified the need for a whole farm management focus.

She said most SE properties run as mixed farming businesses so joining with SEPLA was a perfect fit.

“We want to continue to be a leading provider of research and information relating to

whole farm management which will increase the adoption of sustainable practices in the region,” Krysteen said.

“Many of our members are not just croppers so it was a good chance to broaden our scope too.”

MFMG was founded in 1998 after a group of local farmers identified the need for cropping research trials in the high rainfall region and it has grown into a strong grower network.

The annual spring field days of the National Variety Trial sites at Frances and Conmurra remain a major part of the group's calendar enabling farmers to evaluate the performance of the latest new cereal, pulse and oilseed varieties and view other agronomic trials.

MFMG has also run a series of successful extension workshops on topics such as precision agriculture and sustainable

grain production as well as hosting grower groups from across Australia.

“It is about delivering what our members require to assist them to run profitable and sustainable businesses now and into the future. If a member has an area of concern on their property, it is important for them to let us know as there maybe others with a similar issue. A lot of the time it is simply about providing a link to enable communication and then information flow.”

SEPLA chairman Nick Edwards said there was a good synergy between the two groups especially with many livestock producers using cropping to renovate their pastures or using standing crops to feed livestock.

“In the past couple of years, we have seen the cropping focus on many farms change so rather than simply seeing

cropping as a way to make money, they are using it as a part of their livestock enterprise,” he said.

“It is there to grow feed to feed back to stock over summer but if the yields are high enough the surplus grain can be sold.”

Nick said the group would receive the professional administration support it required, and sponsors from both groups would receive more exposure.

He was also confident that the affiliation would give both groups extra leverage obtaining research funding from government and industry such as Meat & Livestock Australia and the Grains R&D Corporation.

SEPLA was formed in 2002 and in the past few years its main projects have focused on perennial pastures and lamb finishing systems.

On-property trials guide future farming

SEVEN South East Prime Livestock Achievers' businesses were involved in a Meat & Livestock Australia supported Producer Initiated Research and Development trial from 2007-2010.

The on-farm trial tested four strategies to improve the current red meat (lamb) production a hectare which were developed to suit the aims, management and targets of each of the properties.

The four strategies included:

- Improving feed efficiency and growth rate of lambs through more closely matching animal requirements and feed quality on a range of different finishing systems
- Maximising pasture use throughout the year by changing the grazing management and the pasture base.
- Compare two opportunity finishing systems, bean stubbles and a white clover pivot.
- Test fertiliser strategies to increase the return from investment from an irrigation-

based finishing system.

Of the four approaches trialled, three demonstrated the ambitious project target of increasing productivity by 30 per cent to 50pc.

Through finetuning the grain supplementation system, lamb growth rates were achieved in excess of 300 grams a day on one site. Another site achieved a 55pc increase in lamb growth rates and a 150pc increase in lambs achieving sale condition by more closely matching the nutritional requirements of the lambs.

SARDI's Nick Edwards said: “We expected a productivity gain but were surprised by how much better the treatment lambs went because it was difficult to know exactly what they would do based on the lack of good industry information.”

Producers also found that through close monitoring of their feed base, they were able to make cost-saving decisions. By having accurate information on feed quality, one property



FAMILY BUSINESS: Aaron Long (holding his daughter Chelsea), and his brother Trent run the family farm at Coonalpyn.

was able to save the cost of lamb supplementation and achieved lambs to ‘finished’ specification in less than 10 weeks.

An average 100kg/ha increase in the liveweight of lambs weaned from perennial pastures as a result of increase in both ‘normal’ and ‘intensive’ stocking rates, by up to 100pc, was achieved at another site.

Coonalpyn farmer Aaron Long was involved in trialling the first strategy and said: “Our aim of

being involved in the trial was to re-evaluate our finishing systems for our lambs.

“Being involved in the trial has helped our profitability through time-savings and better placed inputs,” he said. “The trial has given us the science to back our theory.”

Naracoorte farmer Mark Buckett said running the trial gave him, “a real feel for how the system would work across the whole farm”. “There is no better way of learning than actually

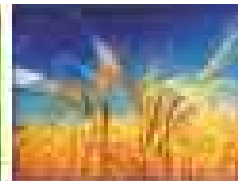
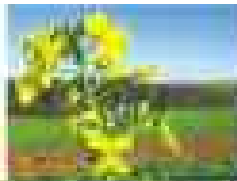
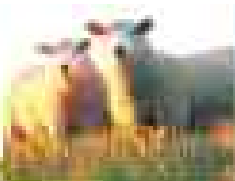
gaining first-hand experience.”

The third system achieved a 32pc increase in weight gain for lambs finished by changing from finishing on bean stubbles to finishing on irrigated white clover post-harvest.

As a direct result of the trial success and their involvement, the producers involved are making various positive and profitable changes to their enterprises to further increase production and profit of their red meat systems.

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