National Extension Plan

Australia’s beef cattle breeders can look forward to an innovative national technical extension service stretching forward to 2010 in the first phase.

The National Extension Plan is the result of collaborative agreements being forged between Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), the Agricultural Business Research Institute (ABRI), the Beef Improvement Association and the majority of Australia’s beef cattle breed societies. The aim is to give every one of the 2500+ BREEDPLAN users the opportunity to attend a regional workshop on the latest developments for a nominal cost. Limited on-farm assistance with recording programs will also be provided together with professional assistance to the technical committees of participating breed societies. The aim of the program is to ensure our beef cattle breeders are in a position to maximise their understanding and use of BREEDPLAN technology, thereby accelerating genetic improvement to its full potential with resultant economic benefits.

The National program will be conducted in two sub-programs – the Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) program in the North for the tropical breeds and the Southern Technical program for *bos taurus* breeds. The TBTS project has been running successfully in Northern Australia for over six years. Some key outcomes have been:

- A 2.4 times increase in BREEDPLAN recording.
- Over 80% of performance data is recorded electronically.
- A doubling of breeds using GROUP BREEDPLAN.
- All participating breeds now put pedigree and performance information in the public domain using Internet Solutions.
- Over 400 on-farm visits conducted to provide technical assistance.

The TBTS project has been extended for three years from July 1, 2005. To date it has been run using a full-time Technical Officer in Rockhampton – currently Christian Duff. By 2006, the TBTS project will expand to have part-time assistance provided in Murgon and Armidale to complement the full-time focus in Rockhampton.

Training has commenced to put together a technical team for Southern Australia. Active field work commences in 2006 and will run until the end of 2009 in the initial term. The requirements in Southern Australia are different from the North. GROUP BREEDPLAN, BreedObject and Internet Solutions have been used by most societies for many years but there is much work to be done to ensure that these services are used to their potential. Sixty-four applied breeder workshops will be run across all States over four years with on-farm follow-up. Training will be provided in the new StockTake software from AGBU which helps breeders to audit their genetic progress.

The request for the Southern Technical program came out of the Strategic Planning Workshop of the Australian Registered Cattle Breeders Association (ARCBA) in August 2004. The retirement of Brian Sundstrom as the National Technical Specialist of BREEDPLAN and foreshadowed retirement of other beef extension icons like Bob Freer have provided a wake-up call that we must have a succession plan for the high quality technical program that we have all taken for granted. The TBTS program and the Southern Technical Program will allow BREEDPLAN to train a multi-person team of young technical officers and give them the responsibility of operating a co-ordinated national technical extension program to the beef industry. Up to six young graduates will be involved in this program – and importantly most will have 30 years of professional life ahead of them. Most of the positions have been filled but ABRI would still welcome further applications. The program is radical but necessary to ensure that uptake of the BREEDPLAN technology keeps pace with the research and development behind the product.

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