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Online communication channels can influence adoption: a FutureBeef case study

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FutureBeef is a collaboration between Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australian agricultural departments and Meat & Livestock Australia. It provides a coordinated approach to the delivery of online information and industry engagement for the northern beef industry. FutureBeef utilises a variety of online communication tools, including website, webinars, social media (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn), eBulletins and multimedia. The objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of FutureBeef's online communication channels in influencing adoption of recommended best management practices by northern beef producers.

An evaluation of adoption of best management practices resulting from producers and service providers engagement with FutureBeef's online communication channels was undertaken between March and June 2021. An online survey was emailed to all FutureBeef users (5826 recipients), included in the FutureBeef eBulletin (5812 subscribers) as well as promoted through FutureBeef's social media channels (total of 16 333 followers across Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn).

The survey was completed by 202 FutureBeef users. Almost half of all survey respondents (48%) indicated that FutureBeef had contributed to the adoption of cattle management practices such as pasture management, supplementation including phosphorus, weaner management, early weaning, feed budgeting and adjusting property stocking rates (Table 1). A further 26% indicated that FutureBeef had contributed to their intention to adopt practices such as pastures and grazing management (pasture improvement, livestock movements and fencing), animal production (cattle and herd management practices) and animal health and welfare (pain relief, vaccinations, and biosecurity). Twenty-five percent of survey respondents reported that the three FutureBeef communication channels, website, webinars and eBulletins, had the most influence on adoption. A further 24% indicated that the same three channels had the most influence on their intention to adopt. Survey respondents were asked to rate the impact to their farm business by the adoption of best management practices promoted by FutureBeef, on a scale from (1) small to 10 (very large). Where some attribution to FutureBeef was reported, there was an average rating of 6.4 out of 10 (6.5 for producers and 5.9 for service providers). The average percentage of the impact of adoption attributed to FutureBeef was 58% for those who had implemented a practice change versus 37% for those who nominated a practice change they intend to implement.

Table 1. Number and percentage of survey respondents that indicated that FutureBeef has supported adoption

Type of respondent	Contribution of FutureBeef to adoption		
	Yes	Intend to in the future	No
All respondents	89 (48%)	48 (26%)	49 (26%)
Producers	65 (49%)	34 (26%)	33 (25%)
Service providers	24 (44%)	14 (26%)	16 (30%)

The survey data indicated that the information provided through FutureBeef's online communication channels was used to support adoption of best management practices by northern beef producers and service providers. This is consistent with Coutts (2016) who conducted a previous survey for FutureBeef, where 68% of respondents indicated that FutureBeef had (37%) or might have (31%) stimulated or supported practice change. Of interest, adoption and intention to adopt was very similar (in percentage terms) between both producers and service providers. This indicated that as well as influencing producers directly, FutureBeef provided resources that enabled service providers to work with clients to stimulate practice change. Three key FutureBeef communication channels that supported adoption were the website, webinars and eBulletins. In contrast, the social media channels (and the eBulletin to some extent) simply 'alerted' people to this information.

In conclusion, this study highlights the effectiveness of FutureBeef's online communication channels in influencing on-farm adoption of best management practices for the northern beef industry.

Reference

Coutts J, Coutts R (2016) 'DAF FutureBeef Website and Intranet Evaluation Report.' Available at <https://futurebeef.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Futurebeef-Website-and-Intranet-Report-April-2016-FINAL.pdf>

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