

The Northern Breeding Business program – Peer to peer learning fostering the adoption of improved cattle grazing business management practices and technologies in the Fitzroy River catchment

Ryan Honor^B

Department of Primary Industries, Rockhampton 4701

Introduction

The Northern Breeding Business (NB2) program is a producer-driven research, development, and adoption program and joint initiative of Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and the North Australia Beef Research Council (NABRC). The aim of the NB2 program is to improve the long-term productivity, profitability and sustainability of the Northern Australian beef industry by helping businesses adopt improved practices in; enhanced breeding herd performance through improved systems and interventions, optimising feed production and supply, exploring sustainable rangeland management and on-farm practice change. The Fitzroy NB2 pilot group was formed with the aim of exposing members to information and technologies that would foster the adoption of practices that align with the NB2 objectives of increasing productivity, sustainability and profitability.

Methods

Queensland Department of Primary Industries extension officers were appointed to create and facilitate a peer-to-peer learning group with the assistance of a producer coordinator. The group consisted of ten grazing businesses from across the Fitzroy River catchment of central Queensland, Australia. Quarterly face-to-face group meetings were conducted from February 2022 to June 2024. Business records were initially collected using standardised templates to establish baselines of herd productivity, feed base production and business profitability. Knowledge gaps in the use of improved grazing management technologies and marketing of niche cattle breeds were identified by the group. Subject matter experts were then invited to group meetings to provide the specific information members required to fully adopt improved grazing land management and cattle breeding practices. Upon conclusion of the NB2 pilot project in June 2024, the ten businesses were individually surveyed to analyse management practice changes within the group.

Results

As a result of involvement in the project, all businesses improved their use of various herd recording and grazing land management technologies and showed interest in emerging sustainability issues. Consequently, 50% of the group made significant breeding herd practice changes by introducing Wagyu and other *Bos taurus* cattle to target market premiums. One business increased profit from their weaner production enterprise by 63% following the introduction of Wagyu genetics suiting niche market specifications. The remaining 50% of the group made significant changes in grazing land management practices by becoming efficient in pasture budgeting and matching stocking rates to carrying capacity.

Discussion and conclusion

The peer learning process was based upon all businesses sharing a common goal to increase productivity, sustainability and profitability. This fostered constructive group discussion and feedback, leading to the formation of key performance indicators for each member's business. In conclusion, the Fitzroy NB2 pilot group was successful in exposing members to information and technologies that fostered the adoption of significant management practice changes.

^B Corresponding author: ryan.honor@dpi.qld.gov.au