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ASHEEP & BEEF Quarterly

Local demonstrations: Latest learnings on early weaning calves

Dr Enoch Bergman, Swans Veterinary Services

ASHEEP & BEEF's Optimising Age of Weaning Cattle Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project – funded by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and facilitated by Swans Veterinary Services – is wrapping up after three years of demonstrations.

The project design was simple, perhaps too simple. Enrolled producers would nominate their planned weaning date. First calving heifers were targeted and within their management group each producer attempted to randomly choose and wean half of their calves roughly two months earlier. What the PDS was trying to demonstrate is that by weaning calves earlier, feed resources could be better managed without significantly reducing the calves' weight for age by the traditional weaning date.

The concept of earlier weaning is rooted in good science and has been advocated across many beef and dairy production systems. Milk is an incredibly expensive product for cows to produce. Newborn calves are quite skilled at extracting value from their mother's milk, able to extract roughly 90% of the energy donated to them by their dam. However, as calves grow, their rumen begins to develop preparing them for a life of eating grass. Once the calf is around 4 to 5 months old, or around 150 kgs, the calf is no longer able to digest milk as effectively, instead degrading much of it within their developing rumen, wasting almost half of their mother's energy investment. *[Continued over page].*

Image: Ryan & Elisha Willing's calves on 23/10/2025 at time of early weaning.

Highlights

Ruminant nutritionists have noted that a cow and calf separated require just under 40% less energy derived from dry matter to maintain the cow's weight and to keep the calf growing than if they are co-grazed. The caveat to this simple equation is that young growing calves are far more susceptible to suffering poor growth outcomes if protein levels in their feed on offer falls much below 16 to 17 percent.

Conceptually a producer's goal could be to calve with feed, ensuring that peak milk production of cows is co-ordinated with peak digestibility by their calves, wean early enough that feed is still of high quality, and partition feed resources so as to look after the calves at the expense of the feed offered to the breeding herd.

The initial demonstration design did not involve having enrolled producers manage the dams of the calves differently (the early weaned calves were drafted off from the herd whilst the remaining unweaned calves and all the dams continued to be managed together until the second weaning event). Regardless, the dams whose calves had been weaned earlier (identified by wet drying all of the cows at the traditional weaning event), were both consistently heavier and had better body condition scores than the heifers whose calves remained on them for a longer time frame.

The PDS ran over 3 years, began with 7 sites and finished with 4 sites for a total of 15 data sets. One site (in the first year) showed improved weight gains amongst the early weaned calves as compared to their unweaned siblings, however, on the remainder of sites, the earlier weaned calves were consistently lighter and in some cases much lighter by the time of the second weaning event. Calves weaned earlier ranged from 0.7% heavier to 16.3% lighter compared to their siblings weaned later with an average reduction in weight at the second weaning event of 5.8% or 18.2 kgs. The cows comparatively were 16.5 kgs heavier if their calves had been weaned earlier.

A single producer, in the final year of the project, was able to identify most of the dams of the early weaned calves and manage them separately. He then moved those cows to a paddock of dry feed at a stocking rate of three cows to the hectare. The remaining cows and the unweaned calves were maintained on excellent green feed at a stocking rate of one cow to the hectare. He was still able to maintain almost identical body weight and body condition scores between the two classes of cows. The calves which were weaned earlier onto good feed were just under 10kgs or 3% lighter than the unweaned calves at the second weaning event.

Overall, the enrolled producers felt that the PDS clearly showed to them the impact that nursing calves have on the weight and body condition score of their mothers. They felt that it has improved their confidence in weaning earlier when conditions require and that they gained a better appreciation of the feed requirements calves would need if they were to be weaned earlier. Further, it was noted that producers who traditionally sell their calves at or close to weaning were much more likely to be financially impacted than those who background or grass finish their calves. Some sites have shown the gap between the heavier later weaned calves and their early weaned siblings has been narrowing over time and believe that by the time they market their calves as grass finished or as replacement heifers that there will no longer be able to discern the difference.

We will be excited to share some of the findings of the PDS in our next ASHEEP & BEEF newsletter once the final results have been compiled. In the meantime, below are some of the things we have learned and read on for case studies on two of the demonstration sites.

1. **Cows whose calves are weaned earlier maintain better weight and body condition.**
2. **Calves weaned earlier usually require some form of supplementation to maintain the growth rates of unweaned calves.**
3. **Tailoring your weaning date based on the body condition score of your breeding cows, your feed on offer, and seasonal forecasting is a good management tool to protect your breeding herd.**

Case study: Early weaning at Carnigup

Sarah Brown (ASHEEP & BEEF) & Dr Enoch Bergman (Swans Veterinary Services)

Ryan and Elisha Willing own 'Carnigup', a mixed farming enterprise with cattle and cropping in the Neridup and Boyatup areas of south-east Western Australia. Carnigup has hosted a demonstration site for the full three years of ASHEEP & BEEF's Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) "Optimising Age of Weaning Cattle", funded by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and facilitated by Dr Enoch Bergman (Swans Veterinary Services).

With the final year of demonstrations now complete, we caught up with Ryan to get his take on Carnigup's results and key learnings.

Farm Snapshot

Farm name: Carnigup

Farm area: 1,850 ha in Neridup and Boyatup

Enterprise mix: 1/3 crop, 2/3 cattle

Average annual rainfall: 525mm

Soil: Sand over clay, pH 5

Typical rotation: 30% of farm in permanent Kikuyu, the rest in a canola, cereal, grass pasture, legume pasture 4-year rotation

Cattle: Angus, 600 breeders + grass-finished yearlings

Farm and cattle program overview

"The cropping program for the business currently involves 300 ha canola and 300 ha of cereals, some of which is oats for hay and ryegrass for silage, the rest is typically barley," Ryan said.

"For livestock we run approximately 600 Angus breeders, retain the heifers and FTAI [fixed time artificial inseminate] them. We also retain 50-75% of yearlings to grass finish and send them straight to abattoir at 18 months old. We breed our own bulls with a registered stud herd of 40 cows. Every breeder is pregnancy tested as early as possible after mating and culled if empty."

"Cattle are all black Angus. Our breeding objectives are to keep up with current Angus average growth rates but also to maintain a reliable cow that gets pregnant every year. Feet, structure, fertility and temperament are as important to me as growth. When choosing bulls to use for our AI [artificial insemination] program, calving ease figures must be in the top 30% (of current Angus Australia rating), growth ideally top 20% or better and everything else top 50% or better. I won't use a bull that may have top growth but a ridiculous mature cow weight or terrible feet."

"Cattle and crop go well together: having stubbles to keep them going all summer or having the flexibility to crop-graze as much or as little as necessary during winter, having equipment suitable to establish pastures better than a livestock only enterprise may have. Not to mention cleaning up weeds, trampling stubbles to reduce snail numbers, free N [nitrogen] for crops after pasture years."

"Key dates in Carnigup's cattle program include heifer calving starting 5th April, cows calving starting early May. Heifer AI is on 30th June with the bulls in after FTAI on 10th July and out 30th July, and the cows have the bulls in on 30th July and out 9 weeks later. Pregnancy testing is typically 6 weeks after the bulls are out (mid-September for the heifers and end of November for the cows). Weaning is in December as that is when green feed usually runs out. With sale timings, some weaners are sold during summer, usually late if the millet does well. Grass-finished yearlings are sold in September to October, dry cows after calf marking in July, and empty cows after pregnancy testing in December."

Overview of how the demonstration ran at Carnigup

"My aim in running a demonstration site for this PDS was to see if the cow and calf unit could be more efficient if separated at the end of spring," said Ryan, "The cow on lesser quality and quantity of feed and the calf on the best." *[Cont'd]*

Above: Carnigup staff member Seth White, with owners Elisha & Ryan Willing, drafting off the early weaned calves in October 2025.

In the first year of the PDS, half of the randomly selected calves were weaned 60 days earlier. All calves were weighed at that point. The remainder of the calves were weighed subsequently when they were weaned. Cows were wet/dried at that point to attempt to identify the dams of the early weaned calves. The cows were weighed and body condition scored at both weaning events.

The process was repeated in 2024 and 2025, though calves were weaned 48 and 32 days apart respectively. The only difference is that in 2025 an attempt was made to identify and remove as many of the dams of the early weaned calves as possible. They were managed separately with minimal feed. As can be noted in the data [see Figure 1], in the first two years of the PDS the cows whose calves had been weaned earlier gained weight between the two weaning events. In the final year, having their access to high quality feed restricted, the weight gain of the cows was nearly identical between the two weaning events. First calvers were used for each year of the demonstration.

Year 1 (2023) "We typically start weaning with the first calvers as they calve a month earlier than the cows. This is normally at the end of November, but in 2023 we took part in the first year of the PDS and weaned a random half of the calves 6 weeks earlier. 2023 spring was pretty good and the early half went onto lush lucerne and chickory. The unweaned half and all cows stayed on kikuyu with a good sub clover pasture until their weaning. The biggest learning in the first year was that the extra condition the early weaned cows held saved a month of feeding in the 2024 autumn which was very dry."

Year 2 (2024) "In the second year we had similar weaning dates. The 2024 spring was very ordinary to top off a terrible year. We put the early weaned calves onto the best pasture we could find (a ryegrass legume mix) but it was pretty ordinary. We could have looked after the calves a bit better with pellets perhaps. The difference between early and late weaned calves was the same as year 1. Average weaning weights across the farm for myself in 2024 were 70kg lighter than the 10-year average, so being a little bit worse than normal weaned meant those early weaned calves were very light and took a long time to grow to anything. Again, the extra condition on some cows was very valuable in 2025 with a long dry summer and minimal fodder made during the bad spring of 2024."

Year 3 (2025) "In year 3, I pushed the early weaning date back a bit with the intention to still wean the 2nd half 6 weeks later, but I ran out of feed by December meaning that there was only a 4 week gap. For the final year of the demonstration, we decided to separate the early weaned cows from the other half. We did this by leaving the gates open back to the yards and most of the cows were there the next morning. The separated cows then did it tougher on limited dry feed, to see how little I could feed them whilst maintaining the same condition as their lactating sisters. Their stocking rate was 3 cows per hectare on dry feed vs their sisters at 1 ha per cow calf unit on green serradella / clover over kikuyu."

"Each year of the demonstration I made sure that there was green feed locked up ready for the early weaned calves. We stuck to the same weaning protocol: a 6-day yard wean on silage, weighed, drenched (Dectomax V) and minerals (Nutriject)."

Observations

"The weight gain was less in the early weaned across all 3 years of the demonstrations. Temperament was noticeably better in early weaned calves each year. There were no extra health issues either way."

"In the first year, lighter calves weren't an issue as they caught up over winter and made the grass finished market by spring, perhaps later but not a big deal. In the second year, the lighter calves were definitely noticed due to me running low on fodder, so I had to sell most as weaners. It was especially an issue with the heifer weaners as their weight category heavily discounted their worth. The final year of calves are still growing out; we expect that the early weaned calves will catch up by spring."

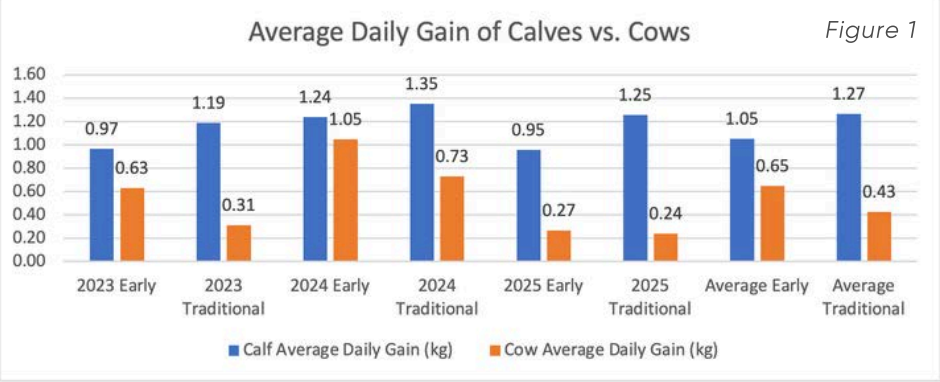
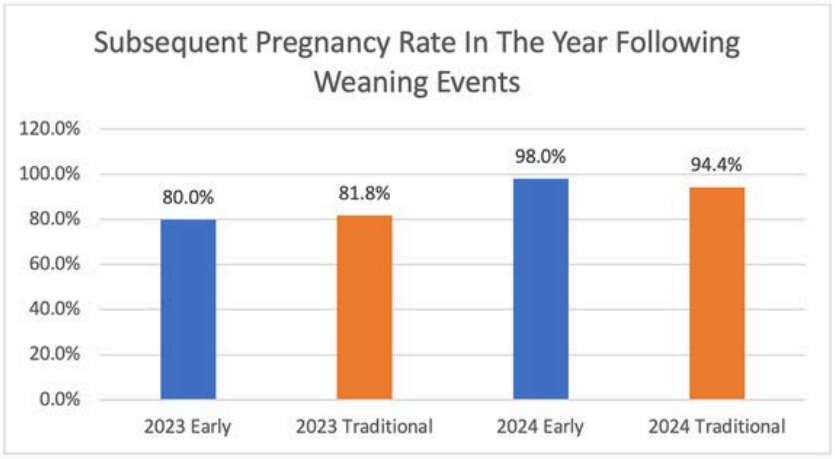


Figure 1

"The earlier weaned cows had a noticeable "hay-stack" on their [...]

[...] back the first two summers compared to their 'normal' weaned sisters. The final lot of cows are more even in condition this summer as I separated the earlier weaned cows and managed their condition separately."

The dams of the calves which had been earlier weaned in 2023 had similar pregnancy rates in their subsequent joining in 2024 to those which had been traditionally weaned, with a 1.8% better pregnancy rate amongst the cows which had been traditionally weaned. The dams of the calves weaned in the second year of the project showed a better subsequent pregnancy rate amongst the heifers whose calves had been weaned earlier with an advantage of a 3.6% better pregnancy rate.



Have you modified your target weaning date as a result of this PDS?

"I think the PDS helped confirm that I was weaning at the right time. I think weaning once the green feed runs out is about right and this PDS taught me that doesn't have to be a fixed date but flexible depending on year. When the spring is terrible and you have limited fodder for the next year, wean early, put some fat on the cows so they can make it to calving without feeding and just look after those weaners better than I did depending on your target market. When the spring is good and you have lush green feed hold off a bit."

Are there any changes you think you could make to get an improvement in the weight gain of earlier weaned calves in future?

"I think whilst cows can be inefficient at converting grass to milk, they do a good job at converting mediocre feed into energy for calves. I think with the right feed you could get calves to gain the same on their own but that is more expensive to buy/ grow than just using more area for a cow/ calf unit."

"Early weaning will always be in my toolbox, when the spring fails I now know my options and can plan accordingly and make the best decision for the whole farm. Some of the pastures or fodders used to grow out weaners on other farms running demonstration sites were of interest, such as kale and also the silage-based feedlot rations."

Thinking back on this PDS, any advice for others looking to wean early in dry seasons?

"Wean just before the cows start losing condition, let them have enough feed after weaning to put some fat on their backs. Then look after the calves as well as possible, silage if you have it, grain-based ration, pellets or a good stand of millet could all help to get them back on track but don't put them on a stubble and hope for the best, they won't magically grow!"

What are your other focuses for taking Carnigup's beef enterprise forward?

"The biggest thing we have started work on is feeding, introducing silage (over hay) 3 years ago was a game changer. Now we are investing in feed troughs and a mixing wagon with the goal of being able to confine animals whilst gaining weight, suitable to their situation. Being able to mix silage, grain, hay and straw means we can more accurately feed the right amount to each animal and confining them to small kikuyu paddocks, so they don't waste energy and let other pastures get away."

"Technology is rapidly becoming cheaper and more advanced and will have many roles in the future I think. Camera weighing, calving detectors, heat detection, genomic testing etc won't give us any more time off, but will allow us to farm more efficiently and focus on other challengers to keep us farming into the future."

Above: 5th November 2025 drafting off Chilwell's early weaned calves.

Case study: Early weaning at Chilwell

Sarah Brown (ASHEEP & BEEF) & Dr Enoch Bergman (Swans Veterinary Services)

Simon Fowler is an owner of Chilwell, a mixed cropping and livestock enterprise in Condingup on Western Australia's south-east coast, where he leads livestock operations. Chilwell has hosted a demonstration site for the full three years of ASHEEP & BEEF's Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) "Optimising Age of Weaning Cattle", funded by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and facilitated by Dr Enoch Bergman (Swans Veterinary Services). With the final year of demonstrations now complete, we've caught up with Simon to get his take on Chilwell's results and key learnings.

Farm Snapshot

Farm name: Chilwell Farms

Farm area: Condingup, 50,000ha

Enterprise mix: Wheat, barley, canola, sheep, cattle (80% crop, 20% livestock)

Average annual rainfall: 600mm (coast) to 350 (north)

Typical rotation: Canola, wheat, pasture

Soil: Sand over clay 5.5pH, Loams 6.5pH

Feedbase: Ryegrass/clover or ryegrass, vetch, serradella

Sheep: 28,000 Merino ewes, 2000 UltraWhite ewes

Cattle: 2000 Angus breeders, Finish steers and cull heifers for Woolworths

Team: 10 stock team members

Farm & cattle program overview

"Chilwell is a large broadacre cropping business with an intensive livestock component, with a focus on maximising production in all enterprises and utilising the synergies that exist between cropping and livestock systems," said Simon.

"Our cattle breed of choice is Angus, with our genetics coming from Blackrock Stud in Vasse and Allegria Park in Esperance. We finish our steers and cull heifers for Woolworths on grass in the spring so our breeding objectives are based on selecting genetics that will allow the finished animals to have good fat cover and moderate frame size to meet supermarket specifications. Cattle fit in well to our farming system as they have the ability to perform well in parts of the farm that are too wet for cropping and can utilise stubbles and summer crops efficiently."

Key approximate dates for the cattle program include calving 25th March, bulls in 16th June, pregnancy testing in November / December, weaning from 7th November into December, with sales timed between September – October the following year.

Below: Chilwell staff Steve Bingham & Daniel Walker weigh calves.

"We start weaning calves on the 7th of November," said Simon. "We wean in batches of about 400 calves, and the calves spend a week in the weaning pens, so the whole weaning process takes about 5 weeks. We aim to get the weaning finished before Christmas to make management easier over the holiday period and enable the calves to settle before they start grazing summer crops." *Cont'd.*

Overview of how the demonstration ran at Chilwell

"By joining the PDS, we were interested to see if we could wean early to enable the cows to gain extra condition without impacting too greatly on calf performance."

"We used our first calvers in all three years of the demonstration (2023 – 2025), as we see these cows as the most important animals to look after because they are still actively growing and take longer to recover from having their first calf. For year one and two, these animals calved down on dry paddock feed and were fed on straw and silage until the paddock feed was sufficient. Calves were weaned based on having an odd or even numbered ear tag. In year three, the first calvers calved down in containment pens to allow us to better meet their nutritional requirements and to ensure easier management of the calving process."

During the course of the demonstration, Chilwell trialled a range of different weaning strategies for the early-weaned calves.

In 2023, the first year of the PDS, half of the randomly selected calves had Easy Weaner devices applied 35 days earlier. All cows and calves were weighed and the cows were body condition scored. All cows and calves were then reweighed and cow body condition score estimated again when the remainder of the calves were yard weaned. Cows were also wet/dried at that point to attempt to identify the dams of the early weaned calves. Data was summated for cows and calves identified as either early weaned, or traditionally weaned.

In 2024, the process was repeated, however, half of the calves were removed from the population of cows and calves and were fenceline weaned adjacent to the cows and unweaned calves on strong Balansa clover. 49 days later the remainder of the calves were weaned.

In 2025, the calves which were weaned earlier were removed and went directly into containment pens where they were fed a daily ration of silage and grain. 28 days later the remainder of the calves were yard weaned and both groups of calves were weighed 6 days later.

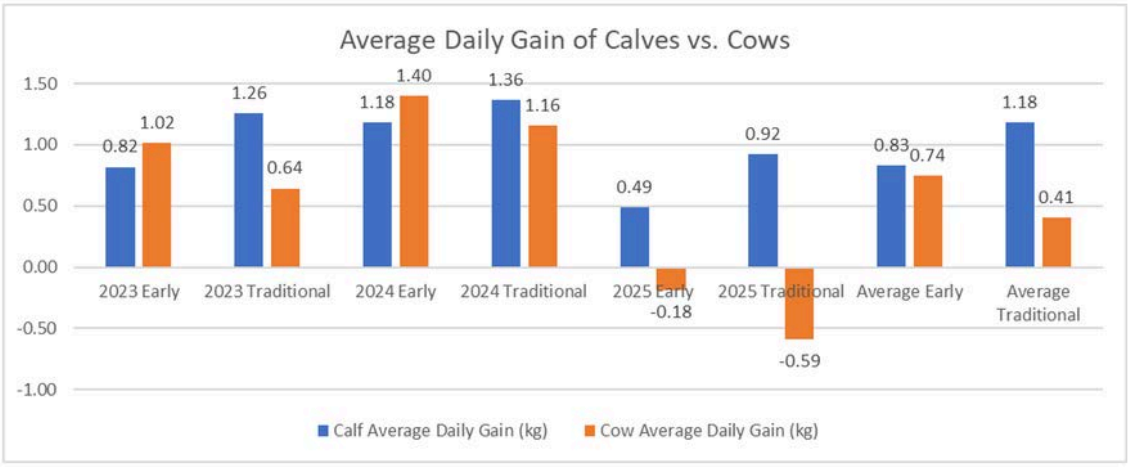
Each year all of the cows were returned to the same mob as the unweaned calves so condition score could be monitored.

Seasonal conditions in 2023 and 2024 were challenging, with notably early finishes and declining feed quality. 2025 saw an improvement on that with a more typical spring finish.

What did you observe?

"In the first year, the unweaned calves weighed in at 306 kg with an average daily gain (ADG) of 1.25 kg/d and the early-weaned at 292 kg with 0.82 kg/d. The second year, unweaned calves weighed in at 263 kg with an ADG of 1.36 kg/d and the early-weaned at 256 kg with an ADG of 1.18 kg/d. The third year, the unweaned calves weighed 312 kg with an ADG of 0.92 kg/d and the early-weaned were 291 kg with an ADG of 0.49 kg/d."

"Across all three years the body condition and weight of the cows that had been early-weaned was definitely better."



Have you modified your target weaning date as a result of the PDS?

"No, but I will be happy to wean early in the future if seasonal conditions dictate."

Are there any changes you think you could make to get an improvement in the weight gain of earlier-weaned calves in future?

"I would change the ration we used in the containment pen for weaning to see if we could improve performance. Earlier weaning won't be standard practice for us, but will definitely be used when the seasonal conditions are dry and the feed availability is limited. I would use the containment feeding option as it was easy to manage and was good training for the calves for future feeding. It also frees up grazing areas for other livestock classes which is often required in tough seasons."

Thinking back on the PDS learnings, any advice for others looking to wean early in dry seasons?

"Don't be scared to wean early if seasonal conditions are tight, it is a good tool to improve the condition of your breeding stock and allocate resources more efficiently. Early weaning will not impact on long term calf performance if you are finishing them on farm and if you are selling as a weaner it may be worth developing some infrastructure or system to help with the process."

What are your other focuses for taking Chilwell's beef enterprise forward?

"Current focus is on intensifying the production system, which includes more virtual feedlots and calving in confinement. This will allow us to achieve better pasture deferment and a higher stocking rate."

Above: Chilwell's calves (left) and cows (right) at the time of early weaning on 5th November 2025.

Executive Officer's Update

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

With a number of ASHEEP & BEEF's cattle projects wrapping up, this edition of our newsletter is leaning toward being a bit of a beef-fest, my apologies to those of you who prefer a chop!

New sheep-focused projects are on our radar. The ASHEEP & BEEF Committee recently commenced establishing a dedicated Sheep Sub-Committee (similar to the Cattle Sub-Committee). We have also submitted an application for federal government funding associated with the termination of sheep live export, seeking to deliver a project over the next couple of years focused on sheep production systems, with an emphasis on finishing.

Two new projects are also getting off the ground, looking at soil improvement and optimisation of poorer performing soil types in partnership with South Coast NRM. In addition, a new Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) Producer Demonstration Site (PDS), *Raising the Bar for Harvestable Annual Pasture Legumes*, is underway. This project will extend learnings from the latest Harvestable Annual Legume Options research through a range of demonstrations over five years, benchmarking varieties against RM4 vetch.

Back to cattle, we are wrapping up our MLA PDS projects on *Optimising Age of Weaning Cattle* and *Preventing Bull Preputial Breakdown by Vaccination*. A three-year extension has been approved for *Utilising Heifer Pre-Mating Serology to Manage BVDV*. We are also commencing a new MLA PDS, *Utilising Liver Biopsy Techniques to Assess Key Micromineral Levels in Cattle*, once again in partnership with Swans Veterinary Services. This PDS will demonstrate live liver biopsy to provide accurate micromineral status measurement, aiding producers to identify and implement optimal supplementation strategies.

Project Coordinator Jan Clawson has been bringing together the final round of baselines for the *Emissions Intensity: Getting Started on Farm* MLA PDS, as well delivering the final workshop in our *Mastering Merino Genetics* project.

With field days coming up, further grant applications under review, continued input into industry strategy, and plenty happening across projects, we are keeping busy. As always, members, get in touch if you have ideas.

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Supply squeeze helps drive wool market higher

Australian Wool Innovation February 2026 Market Intelligence

The Australian wool market carried a steadier tone through February, before strengthening further in the opening weeks of March as buyers responded to tightening supply and renewed competition for better-style wool. While the market has shown intermittent volatility in recent months, the broader trend through February was one of consolidation and gradual improvement.

The AWEX Eastern Market Indicator (EMI) sat around 1,693c/kg clean in mid-February, already more than 40 per cent higher than the same time last year, highlighting the stronger underlying position compared with early 2025.

February trading was characterised by a mix of small corrections and recoveries from sale to sale, but overall support remained evident across the Merino fleece sector. In late February, prices lifted across both selling days in all three selling centres, with most micron categories recording gains as the market recovered from a brief setback the previous week. For the trade, the February pattern reinforced a key theme that has been building across the season: the wool market is increasingly being shaped by tighter supply rather than purely demand-driven signals.

Australia's national wool clip continues to contract, and the reduced volume of wool flowing through testing and auction channels is now clearly influencing competition at sale. Fewer bales available means buyers are increasingly having to compete for the types they need, particularly in the finer Merino categories that dominate Australia's production.

The impact of that tightening supply has become more visible in the early weeks of March. Auction results in the opening March sales series extended the positive momentum seen late in February, with the market recording stronger competition across a number of Merino micron categories. Finer microns in particular have attracted solid buyer interest, reflecting continued demand from processors focused on higher-quality apparel fibres. Early-March auction results also highlighted the role of market confidence. As prices began to lift through February, grower pass-in rates remained relatively controlled, suggesting sellers were willing to meet the market while still holding confidence in the broader price trend.

That combination — moderate offering volumes and active buying interest — has helped underpin the recent lift.

From a broader analytical perspective, several structural factors continue to support the current market tone. Firstly, supply remains historically tight. Reduced sheep numbers following the recent run of dry seasons across parts of Australia have constrained the national clip, and this reduced production is now working its way through the supply chain. Secondly, demand for fine Merino wool remains comparatively resilient within the global textile fibre market. Wool continues to occupy a premium segment in apparel manufacturing, particularly in high- performance and natural fibre clothing categories.

Currency movements also continue to influence week-to-week results. Exchange rate shifts between the Australian dollar and US dollar can amplify or soften price movements at auction, meaning short-term fluctuations do not always reflect underlying demand.

For woolgrowers, the key takeaway from February and early March is that the market lift is being supported by tangible fundamentals rather than short-term sentiment alone.

Lower production, disciplined selling volumes and ongoing demand for fine apparel fibres have combined to create a firmer market platform than has been seen in several seasons. That does not remove volatility. Auction markets remain sensitive to global economic conditions, currency movements and short-term buying strategies.

However, the signals emerging from the February trading period — and reinforced in the opening weeks of March — suggest the wool market has entered a phase where supply dynamics are once again playing a stronger role in price formation.

For growers watching the market closely, that shift may prove one of the more important developments of the current season.

Stephen Bingham joins Cattle Sub-Committee

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

Welcome to Stephen Bingham (Chilwell), who has recently joined ASHEEP & BEEF's Cattle Sub-Committee. Stephen takes on the role following Simon Fowler (Chilwell) stepping away to focus on developing the Sheep Sub-Committee, which ASHEEP & BEEF has recently moved to establish.

Stephen was born and raised in the Esperance region, growing up west of town on ERP properties. Following school, he took on a role in Beaumont with John Nicoletti for seven years, five of those as Livestock Manager. During this time, he was involved in running up to 15,000 Merino ewes and 1,000 Charolais breeders.

"In 2012, Chilwell took over the lease of one of the properties and purchased the livestock," said Stephen. "Unfortunately, that meant they have been stuck with me ever since! I took on the Livestock Manager role for Chilwell in 2017 and love the challenge of this position on a large progressive property."

"Simon has been a valuable member of the 'ABEEF' committee since it began and is ready to step down," said Stephen. As one of the larger beef producers in the Esperance region, Cattle Sub-Committee members felt it was important for Chilwell to continue to have involvement.

"It is very important for us to be part of the committee to help push beef production forward in the area," said Stephen. "Currently the Chilwell operation is investing heavily in confinement feeding sheep through the autumn feed gap, and over the past few seasons that is something we have also done with younger cattle. I am excited to see what support and learning we can develop in that area through ABEEF. Calving in confinement is an area we are just starting to go into and seeing if the economics stack up with traditional paddock calving would be something we are very keen to look into. Another area of interest for me is BVDV and the possible side effects production-wise it's causing and what benefits we will gain by eradicating it."

Simon Fowler has been a valuable member of the Cattle Sub-Committee, including being one of its founding members. We thank Simon for his contribution over many years and look forward to seeing what the new Sheep Sub-Committee delivers!

Stephen Bingham (Chilwell), snapped in the middle of capturing calf weights for the Optimising Age of Weaning PDS.

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Tim O'Dea
Territory Manager, Western Australia
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BARENBRUG

When a “cheap” shearing deal might cost you

WA Shearing Industry Association

It sounds like a riddle: what happens when a shearer walks onto your farm and offers a cheaper rate than your usual contractor?

At first glance, it seems like a win-win. But right now, individual shearers and shed staff are approaching farmers directly, offering small teams at lower rates.

With contractor teams scaling back due to reduced workloads, many contractors have had to let shearers and shed hands go. As a result, some workers who are struggling to secure consistent roles are choosing to go out on their own. In doing so, they often undercut established contractors and in some cases, operate without meeting all required regulatory and compliance standards.

Here’s the catch. Contractors don’t just supply labour, they carry the business obligations that come with employing people, including workers’ compensation, superannuation, payroll tax and ATO compliance. When individuals quote you directly and don’t meet these obligations, that responsibility doesn’t disappear, it shifts - to you.

Without a properly insured contractor in place, farmers may be legally required to ensure workers are covered and employment standards are met. If they’re not, that “cheap” rate can quickly turn into unexpected costs and increased risk.

So the real question is: once you factor in your obligations as the engager of labour, is it still the cheaper option? Darren Spencer, WASIA President, says “the first question I would ask would be, are all the legal compliance regulations covered in this price? For example, do you have a certificate of currency for workers’ compensation that covers everyone, and who is paying the payday superannuation? If you are paying the employment costs, does it actually work out cheaper?”

He adds that growers should always request a current certificate of currency from their shearing contractor when booking and growers need to be aware that if they engage shearing staff directly, rather than through a contractor, those workers may be deemed employees, meaning the farmer assumes greater legal responsibility and risk.

Insurance is not just a box-ticking exercise. Caroline Jackman from PSC Insurance warns that if an injury occurs and the contractor, or the individuals completing the shearing is uninsured, the law may treat the situation very differently than many farmers expect.

“Under principal–contractor deeming provisions within the Act, if a contractor or worker is injured while carrying out work that is directly part of the farmer’s business, the farmer and the contractor can be deemed employers and held jointly liable for workers’ compensation. Even where those provisions don’t apply, a farmer may still face a third-party bodily injury claim. In either case, an injured person should reasonably expect to be covered while they recover. The safest and simplest way to avoid disputes, unexpected costs and legal exposure is to ensure individual or contractor insurance and compliance are confirmed before work begins.”

In summary, insurance might feel like a riddle, but it’s one worth taking the time to solve.

Podcast spot: George Millington, new AWI Chairman

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) has a new Chair, George Millington. You can hear from him on Episode 278 of The Yarn podcast, which explores his background, experience and pathway into the role of AWI Chairman. “The conversation provides growers with insight into leadership, governance and levy investment, while also outlining key priorities for Australian wool and the broader direction of the organisation as the industry looks ahead to the year underway.” Search “The Yarn” in your podcast player, or visit the QR code.

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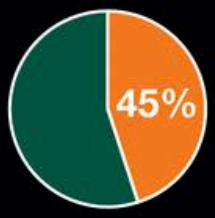

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References: 1. Elanco National Drench Check Summary 2022-2024 PM-AU-25-0128. 2. Playford, M.C. *et al.* (2014). Prevalence and severity of anthelmintic resistance in ovine gastrointestinal nematodes in Australia (2009-2012). *Aust Vet J* 92(12):464–471. 3. Monepantel is a member of the amino-acetonitrile derivative (AAD or 'orange') family of anthelmintics. 4. Hosking, B.C. *et al.* (2010). A pooled analysis of the efficacy of monepantel, an amino-acetonitrile derivative against gastrointestinal nematodes of sheep. *Parasitol Res* 106:529-532. 5. Refer to registered label. 6. Baker, K.E. *et al.* (2012). Efficacy of monepantel and anthelmintic combinations against multiple-resistant *Haemonchus contortus* in sheep, including characterisation of the nematode isolate. *Vet Para* 186(3–4): 513–517.

WA on track for mandatory sheep and goat eID in 2026

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Kaylene Parker, DPIRD

Western Australia's transition to electronic identification (eID) for sheep and goats continues to gain momentum, with producers across the State moving to the new national livestock traceability system.

The Australia-wide eID system for sheep and goats enables rapid response in the event of an emergency animal disease or food safety incident, while strengthening valuable domestic and international trade relationships. Since the program commenced, more than 10 million sheep and goats have now been fitted with eID tags in WA, supporting improved traceability, biosecurity, and market confidence for the industry. This includes approximately 5.4M white tag lambs marked last year.

The WA eID system will come into full operation by 1 July 2026, when all sheep and goats will be required under legislation to be eID tagged before leaving any property, and all movement must be scanned and recorded on the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) database.

The Tag Incentive Payment (TIP) scheme has been extended for a fourth year to support producers by providing a 60-cent discount per NLIS-accredited eID tag. The scheme has expanded to include orange 2026 year-of-birth tags, as well as pink and yellow eID tags required for tagging older stock (sheep and goats born prior to 1 January 2025).

It is important to check for existing eIDs before tagging, as only one functional eID is allowed per animal. All pink and yellow eIDs are applied to the same ear as the existing visual tag, which should not be removed.

For more information about the implementation of sheep and goat eID in Western Australia, please visit the 'Electronic identification for sheep and goats' webpage. See QR Code.

For producer queries:
Call the DPIRD sheep and goat eID hotline between 9am – 4.30pm weekdays on 1300 926 547

Ovine Johne's disease (OJD) reports

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

There have been recent incursions of OJD in the Esperance district through buying in lines of infected ewes. David Swan (Swans Veterinary Services) recommended via the *Livestock Health Alerts WhatsApp group* that producers protect their biosecurity by knowing their own OJD status, asking for an animal health statement with the bill of sale, and specifically checking on vaccination status when purchasing in sheep.

According to the Department of Primary Industries and Regions South Australia, "Johne's disease in sheep is an infectious and incurable wasting disease. It is caused by the bacteria Mycobacterium paratuberculosis." "Affected sheep progressively lose weight (wasting) and usually die or are euthanised 3 to 8 months from clinical signs being observed. The classic clinical sign of OJD is a distinct 'poor' tail end of the mob. Due to a long incubation period, healthy looking animals can spread the bacteria for some time before becoming clinically affected. A slight increase in deaths and wasting from the disease may initially be mistaken for sheep being in poor condition due to old age, or having internal parasite issues."

Gudair (produced by Zoetis) is the only commercially available vaccine in Australia to control OJD. Using it does not introduce the disease into the flock. Sheep only need to be vaccinated once, ideally between 4-16 weeks of age. It has been reported that vaccination rates in WA dropped over the last couple of years as some sought to reduce production costs whilst stock prices were low. To find out more about the vaccine visit the Zoetis website via the QR code to the right.

For more information about OJD, SA's Department of Primary Industries has some great resources (see QR code to left).

Easy2Gro LM Feed Boosts Farmer Profits and Slashes Methane

Michael Tarling, General Manager, Milne Feeds

Milne Feeds' research delivers a major step toward profitable and sustainable sheep production.
Western Australian sheep producers will soon have a major new tool to support sustainable farming thanks to Milne Feeds' new Easy2Gro LM (Low Methane) sheep feed, which cuts methane emissions by up to 70% compared with a typical home-mixed ration — with growth rates of over 500g per day achieved on feedlot lambs.

Developed over more than a decade of R&D, Easy2Gro LM has been tested in commercial-scale trials involving more than 2,500 feedlot lambs, with trial design and results reviewed by scientists with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to ensure accuracy and consistency.

From the Lab to the Paddock

Milnes' nutrition and research teams began by simulating the sheep's rumen in the lab using an artificial rumen bioreactor combined with chromatographic analysis to measure gas generation and volatile fatty acid (VFA) production. This allowed laboratory screening of hundreds of combinations of feed ingredients and treatments, pinpointing combinations that deliver both efficient digestion (crucial for profitable feeding) and low methane output (to support sustainable farming).

Once proven effective in the laboratory, the optimal rations were produced at scale in Milnes' specially adapted feed mill in Welshpool and then proven in a series of trials with merino and merino cross lambs fattened at Milnes' dedicated Feed Trial Centre near Mt Barker, with lambs gaining 20kg of liveweight to reach slaughter weight. Methane emitted from the feedlot pens was monitored continuously over the entire feeding period using Open-Path Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (OP-FTIR) equipment imported from the USA, confirming the methane reductions in typical feedlot conditions, with the trial design and results reviewed by USDA experts.

The trials proved that Easy2Gro pelleted formulations can deliver excellent growth rates, exceeding 500g per day, whilst also slashing methane emissions up to 70% compared to home mix rations.

Building for the Future

To support commercial rollout of the new feed, MAG has completed a $50 million feed mill expansion at Welshpool, doubling production capacity to be able to reliably supply its depot network across Western Australia and into the Eastern States.

The company has lodged a patent application for the Easy2Gro technology and continues to refine feed ingredients and fibre processing to further improve feed performance and reduce the farmer's cost of liveweight gain.

Flexible Solutions for Farmers

The technology is an extension of Milne Feeds' Hyfibe range of products that incorporate a high percentage of fibre and can therefore be fed ad lib to animals straight off pasture. Easy2Gro LM can therefore be used for trail feeding in a paddock, confinement feeding, or in the feedlot. This flexibility makes it a versatile feed that can support multiple strategies to improve farm productivity and profitability.

"Easy2Gro LM gives sheep producers an affordable, highly flexible, performance feed that also reduces emissions, improving both their bottom line and their sustainability credentials."

For more information on Easy2Gro LM, contact our Sheep Specialist on 0407 720 040.

WAFarmers Livestock Council – Review of 2025

WAFarmers

2025 was one of the most demanding and politically consequential years for Western Australia's livestock industries in decades. Producers faced volatile seasonal conditions, market uncertainty, and above all the ongoing shock of the Federal Government's decision to phase out live sheep exports by sea. WAFarmers' position remained unchanged: the trade underpinned WA flock numbers, regional jobs, and the viability of processors, transporters and shearing teams. While a rebound in sheep prices prevented an even sharper exodus from the industry, producers continued to express frustration with a slow, confusing and confidence-sapping transition rollout.

Despite these pressures, the WAFarmers Livestock Council delivered strong advocacy and substantial policy work across sheep, cattle, wool and dairy. Council meetings were held in Katanning (February), CSIRO Floreat (July) and Denmark (September), with active producer engagement shaping priorities.

Markets improved through 2025, particularly in sheep. Lamb and mutton prices surged sharply from 2024 lows as supply tightened, restoring profitability for many producers. Wool recovered modestly early in the year but remained unstable, adding continued pressure to the sector. Beef prices strengthened significantly, supported by global demand, tightening U.S. supply, and shifting trade dynamics. However, processor margins deteriorated as livestock costs rose faster than export and retail returns, highlighting ongoing structural weakness in WA's supply chain.

Infrastructure challenges intensified. Boyanup Saleyards remained under strain from effluent costs and lack of government commitment to a replacement facility. Muchea continued operating at a loss of around $1 million, with flock decline and direct selling raising questions about its long-term viability. Processing capacity contracted further with the closure of Tammin Abattoir and confirmation that Shark Lake would not reopen, forcing Esperance producers to freight stock long distances. A rare positive signal came from the Kimberley, where new owners plan to refurbish and reopen the Broome abattoir in 2026.

Biosecurity remained a top priority, including support for the NLIS Cattle Help Desk and stronger enforcement against serious breaches. Animal welfare reform advanced, with Council endorsement of mandatory pain relief for mulesing and preparation for changes to long-haul transport standards. WAFarmers also reinforced that livestock inspections must remain with DPIRD, not activist-aligned groups, and insisted public funding for the RSPCA must not support political campaigning against producers.

The Council updated policies across biosecurity, welfare, traceability, transport, processing approvals, sustainability and feral animal control. Looking to 2026, priorities include defending live export and long haul livestock transport, rebuilding processing capacity, strengthening border protections, and ensuring climate and carbon frameworks remain practical, science-based and commercially realistic.

Esperance Zone Livestock Rep

Cascade farmer and ASHEEP & BEEF Committee member Mark Walter (pictured right with Liv Walter) is the WAFarmers Esperance Zone Livestock Representative. If you are interested in knowing more about the local branch, how to get involved, or if you would like to bring livestock related matters to the Livestock Council's attention, Mark can be contacted on 0427 951 417.

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Vet Spot: Why aren't my expensive copper supplements working?

Dr Scott Jackson, Swans Veterinary Services

What is the secret behind the contrast in the two images below? Between the mother with a black glossy coat and vigorous calf at foot in comparison to the dull and barren animals to the right? You would be half correct in guessing the supplementation of copper! However, true success also lies in how we supplement it.

The importance of adequate livestock copper supplementation in the south-east coastal grazing region cannot be overstated. Copper is an important cofactor in connective tissue and immune function. Deficiencies in cattle can result in poor coat quality, manifesting as rough/dull /yellow tinged coats and depigmentation around the eyes resulting in a "bespectacled" appearance. Additionally, we will witness poor foot conformation, infertility and ill thrift/scours in calves. Deficiency in livestock commonly arises as a result of excess dietary sulphur and molybdenum (commonly found in fertiliser/trace element mixes such as super/moly/copper/zinc) forming Thiomolybdates (TMT's), which can bind and render useless elemental copper in the rumen and blood stream. This is where the traditional methods of oral copper supplementation, such as use of licks blocks and top-dressing pasture, may be sub-optimal due to the presence of TMT's binding copper in the rumen. Most traditional dietary copper supplements are also copper oxides which are poorly bioavailable in the normal rumen environment.

Injectable copper supplements, administered under the skin, are delivered straight to the liver, thereby avoiding loss through binding with ruminal TMT's. Yet, the residual activities of these forms of supplementation, have been found to be sub-optimal. Part of the reason for this is that injections are highly bioavailable, and copper is toxic, so the dose needs to be low. The main reason there are no longer any registered forms of copper injection in sheep.

What we need is a form of supplementation that provides a constant release of bioavailable copper that also avoids excess loss through TMT binding. The solution? Sustained release copper boluses! Orally administered, these copper (often combined with selenium and cobalt) glass boluses overwhelm copper binding TMT's by flooding the rumen with highly bioavailable (ionic) copper. Much of the copper, therefore, functions in a "sacrificial" sense, insofar as it binds and renders harmless TMT, allowing remaining free copper to be readily absorbed. They will release the equivalent of a shot of injectable copper every two weeks for six months! Producers who have switched to this form of supplementation have noticed adult cattle with blacker and glossier coats and thriftier calves. One producer, who sends liver samples from killers to DPIRD for trace element analysis, reported markedly improved liver copper levels after switching to boluses from more traditional supplementation techniques. The only setback of boluses appears to be the comparative difficulty of administration compared to giving an injection, though a well-trained technician may perform the task almost as quickly. A small sacrifice for the potential benefits gained!

New sponsor: DATAMARS

ASHEEP & BEEF welcomes DATAMARS as a new Silver Sponsor of our grower group. Following is an update from Territory Manager, David Howey. Many thanks from ASHEEP & BEEF to the DATAMARS team!

DATAMARS update

David Howey, DATAMARS

Having worked closely with ASHEEP & BEEF in my previous role, it is a genuine pleasure to be able to work with the group as a sponsor again.

Since joining DATAMARS last year I've noticed that many people know our key brands better than they do the company name, and while that should change over time, it's not critical as long as we can help people solve their animal management and measurement problems.

I've dropped a few pictures and logos below of products that are themselves well known but may not be clearly associated as being part of the DATAMARS range.

In terms of promotions we have two running currently which should be of benefit to ASHEEP & BEEF members.

Within our Prattley range, we are offering **free Load bars with every 3 way Electric Autodrafter ordered until the 10th of April**.

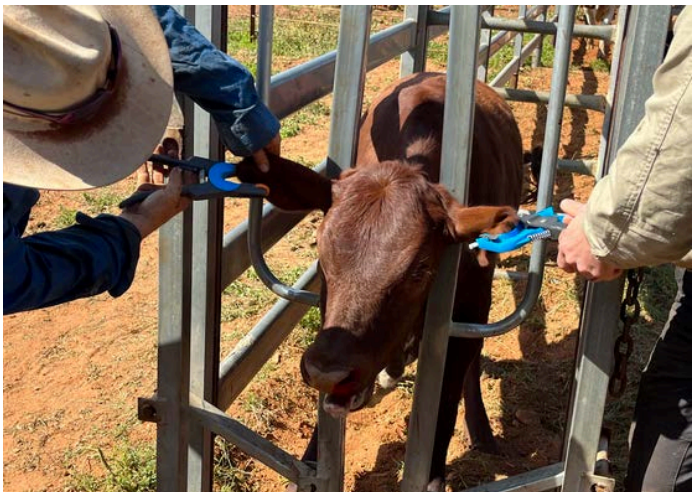
Within our Z Tag range we have a **free head torch promotion running until the middle of May** (while stocks last).

For more information on this or anything else please give me a call on 0404-908-905 or email me at david.howey@datamars.com.

Dave Howey – Territory Manager DATAMARS

Western Australia police force Rural Crime Team

Detective Sergeant Chris King, WA Police Rural Crime Team



In August 2020 the Rural Crime Team (RCT) was formed to manage and assist with livestock theft investigations and provide oversight and coordination of rural crime investigations. This position provides liaison between internal and external partners, and with industry.

RCT is a dedicated team of detectives with extensive rural experience, available to deploy across the state as required. The team works closely with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and have to date conducted several joint investigations involving livestock theft, bio-security breaches and animal welfare issues.

Since 2020, RCT has successfully investigated livestock thefts in every district of Western Australia, and even further the Eastern States.

DNA

The use of livestock DNA testing is normally related to stealing investigations where parentage information is required to afford physical evidence to assist with proving livestock ownership. DNA evidence can also be used to determine specific breed or herd genetics over multiple generations for more complex Stealing or Property Laundering matters.

RCT investigators are experienced in taking DNA samples using Tissue Sampling Units. Collection of DNA samples from suspected stolen livestock should be collected by RCT investigators or a Vet, to avoid any issues or legal challenges with continuity of evidence.

Ear Marking

Whilst ear marking livestock is no longer a legal requirement under the Bio-Security and Agricultural Management Act, RCT strongly recommend ear marking livestock. Whilst NLIS tags assist in identifying ownership they are easily removed and replaced, whereby ear marking is permanent. RCT have located cattle and sheep during investigations where the NLIS tag has been removed and replaced. In these cases the earmarks were utilised to assist in identifying the lawful owners of the stock.

Under Reporting

One of the main issues encountered by RCT investigators is under reporting by primary producers. This has become evident when a report is received, and the victim then informs the investigators this is the 4th or 5thtime in the last couple of years they have had stock stolen but not reported. Timely reporting of offences is crucial for the successful collection of evidence and investigation. Stock theft reports can be made at any police station in person, over the phone or emailed to stocktheft@police.wa.gov.au

Current Crime Trends

In the past 12 months we have seen an increase in the theft of pregnant ewes. The thefts range from 20 to 30 sheep and in some cases up to 200. Thefts of this nature require a degree of coordination. Regularly check your stock and fences, and consider locking gates to paddocks where stock are kept. In nearly all of these cases access to the paddocks where stock was stolen was gained through unlocked gates.

Information Fact Sheets to provide security advice for your property can be located on the WA Police website. https://www.wa.gov.au/service/security/law-enforcement/report-rural-crime (via QR code).

Rural Crime Team investigators are more than happy to take calls or respond to emails regarding any security advice or concerns you have in safeguarding your rural commodities.

Email: stocktheft@police.wa.gov.au P: (08) 9267 5839

Managing BVDV risk before joining: Quintarra Farms case study

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

Todd Quinlivan (Quintarra Farms) is the lead producer of ASHEEP & BEEF's 'Utilising Heifer Pre-Mating Serology to Manage BVDV' Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project, funded by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and facilitated by Dr Enoch Bergman (Swans Veterinary Services). The PDS is now at its mid-point, having run for three years with three remaining. ASHEEP & BEEF caught up with Todd to learn about his experience with managing the risk of BVDV and the project's impact at Quintarra Farms. Our thanks to Todd for his time giving the following interview.

Bovine Pestivirus (BVDV) Background:

Bovine Pestivirus (BVDV) is an endemic viral disease of cattle responsible for considerable financial consequences for both Australian Beef and Dairy producers across Australia. Initial exposure to BVDV can result in potent immune suppression, infertility, early embryonic death, abortion, or the production of Persistently Infected (PI) animals. Whilst Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) ranked BVDV as the second costliest endemic disease of cattle in Australia in their 2015 endemic disease prioritisation survey, and third in their 2022 survey, BVDV still remains possible to control and even eradicate at the herd level. Find out more about BVDV and how to manage the risk via the BVDV Producer Guide: www.asheepbeef.org.au/post/producer-guide-bvdv (see the QR code).

Farm and cattle program overview

Todd Quinlivan owns Quintarra Farms, an operation that involves properties at Merivale and Neridup in the Esperance region of south-east Western Australia. The Neridup farm, located north-east of Esperance, is run as a 100% cropping operation, while the Merivale farm closer to the coast supports a mixed system of cropping, cattle and sheep.

This case study focuses on Quintarra's cattle operation, a self-replacing Angus herd predominantly based on Lawson genetics. Todd's focus is on calving ease, growth, carcase quality, structure, fertility and temperament.

Key dates in the cattle program include heifers calving from late February and cows from late March. Heifers are artificially inseminated (AI) in the first week of June and bulls are introduced to the cow herd in mid-June. Pregnancy testing is carried out in August and October. Weaning occurs over December-January. A key market target is to sell steers as weaners to lotfeeders, usually in December/January.

Farm Snapshot

Farm name: Quintarra Farms

Farm area: Merivale/Neridup

Enterprise mix: 70% cropping, 30% livestock

Feedbase: Annual clover/rye pastures, grazing cereals, improved ryegrass pastures, summer forage crops, kikuyu

Sheep: SAMM / White Suffolk

Cattle: Angus

Team: 6-10

Why did you start testing for BVDV?

"Being made aware by Enoch Bergman of the importance of the disease and the significant economic cost of an outbreak and overall potential production losses was the catalyst to test," said Todd. [Cont'd]

Images: Left - Taking a blood sample for BVDV testing. Right - Todd Quinlivan yarding heifers.

"We had occasional poor calves that gave us the incentive to test for a cause. At the time, we were agisting cattle across the district and in other shires so we knew we were exposed to a higher level of biosecurity risk."

How did you clear the herd of BVDV?

"In consultation with Enoch, a testing programme was developed whereby we tested, identified the presence of the disease, found PI's [animals persistently infected with BVDV] and removed them. We did this over several years from the mid 2000s until we cleared our herds of BVDV and have been vaccinating since.

"It was remarkably quick to identify the PI animals and remove them, and to get our herds from being positive to then having no exposure and thus just requiring annual testing and vaccination. Following the recommended pathway was clear and simple to achieve this.

"Anecdotally, we have significantly reduced the tail on our calves' performance. We have noticed we now have generally very few poor calves at weaning.

"Controlling BVDV is another tool in improving the number of calves weaned at the best weights."

How do you manage the risk of re-exposure now that the herd is BVDV-free?

"Annual testing for BVDV of a small sample of weaner heifers and vaccinating accordingly, along with following good biosecurity practices, including buying vaccinated bulls from a known source and running a self-replacing herd."

How did the economics of testing and eradicating BVDV stack up for you?

"The initial ear notching programme was probably the biggest cost in terms of time and labour. Doing nothing, considering the risk to our cattle enterprise from a production and fertility point of view, was never an option."

What's the importance of running a PDS on BVDV?

"BVDV is a disease that can cause many production and fertility issues affecting profitability. Considering its level of importance but relative ease of removal I wanted to share how it can be controlled within a herd with the right advice and program."

Top three practical tips for producers considering screening for BVDV?

- Run all heifers together for 8 weeks.
- Test early to allow for corrective action.
- Seek veterinary advice.

What are your other focuses for taking the Quintarra cattle program forward?

"I am very interested in the potential of virtual fencing collars with cattle for grazing and overall cattle management. The other PDS projects running in the district are very relevant to our cattle enterprise e.g. preventing preputial bull breakdown. We have recently installed scales under a new crush and are recording data on individual animals with eID readers and Koolstock software to help manage our cattle herd."

Todd's involvement in this PDS, as a producer who has experienced and effectively managed BVDV, has been a valuable resource to the project. Many thanks from ASHEEP & BEEF to Todd & the Quintarra team.

Below: Todd Quinlivan & Dr Enoch Bergman.

To find out more about testing for BVDV, take a look at this video of veterinarian Dr Enoch Bergman blood testing at Quintarra. Follow the QR code or visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPFMeFyRp4M

Join the BVDV Blood Drive!

Dr Enoch Bergman, Swans Veterinary Services

It's that time of year again!

Above: AI-generated image. No cattle were taught to drive, no windscreens dissolved.

Meat & Livestock Australia has extended ASHEEP & BEEF's Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project focusing on annual heifer pre-mating screening for exposure to BVDV (Bovine Pestivirus). We're now able to run this PDS for an additional three years!

Please get involved and help you and your neighbours rid your properties of BVDV! Through the PDS we are offering free blood testing for your replacement heifers prior to mating. Within the project, Swans Veterinary Services will collect blood samples from 5% or a minimum of 6 of your replacement heifers, preferably a couple of months prior to joining. Again, the testing and interpretation is completely free and the travel to get Swans Vets to come out and collect the samples is either free or heavily subsidised. Reach out to Swans Veterinary Services @ **08 9071 5777**, Enoch @ 0427 716 907, or for more information, Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF's Executive Officer, @ 0409 047 944. We are planning to organise "blood drives" to ensure that all costs are covered for involved producers by sharing travel allowing it to be completely subsidised by the project. Call up to get on the list!

We are entering into the third year of ASHEEP & BEEF's Meat & Livestock Australia Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project focusing on demonstrating the value of implementing "Annual Heifer Pre-Mating Screening for Exposure to BVDV (Bovine Pestivirus)". Within the project, Swans Veterinary Services will collect blood samples from 5% or a minimum of 6 of your replacement heifers, preferably a couple of months prior to joining. Get involved! Read on to understand both the why and the how.

BVDV is the most economically significant infectious disease of cattle within the Esperance district in my opinion. If you don't know your BVDV status, now is the time to find out. With assistance from MLA in funding this Producer Demonstration Site project, with assistance from IDEXX to subsidise the cost of testing, and with some free vaccine for participants from Zoetis, now is the perfect time to investigate BVDV within your herd.

BVDV is spread almost exclusively by Persistently Infected (PI) animals, who were infected with the virus in utero and who shed enormous amounts of virus their entire lives. They suppress the immune systems of animals they live with as well as leading to poor pregnancy rates and higher abortion rates. By simply blood testing a small proportion of your replacement heifers, we can accurately identify groups of heifers that have been exposed to a PI, (or wherein a PI still remains) vs. groups without any immunity to BVDV (conclusive proof that none of the replacement heifers are a PI). If a group of heifers has a PI within its numbers, it can be a serious risk to other management groups on your property and conversely if they have no immunity, should other management groups on your property still harbour a PI, they could be at risk. By screening your replacement heifers prior to joining, as is the thrust of this project, you can invest in the best strategy to progress towards BVDV freedom. By screening them annually, you will be in control of your property's BVDV status and will be able to maintain BVD freedom. Get involved! Make sure your property, like the majority of the properties in the Esperance district, is BVDV Free!

Cheers!
Enoch, ASHEEP & BEEF, and Swans Veterinary Services

ASHEEP & BEEF

Swans Veterinary Services

mla MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA

Producer Demonstration Site

GENOMIC TESTING OF COMMERCIAL HEIFERS

INHERIT™ select

Supports commercial multibreed and crossbred enterprises seeking to improve productivity & Profitability through genetic improvement

Why use Inherit SELECT?

- **Identify Superior females** as the basis for rebuilding your herd.
- Identify females that have the **greatest reproductive potential**
- Identify genetically inferior females to **support culling decisions**
- Utilise results to make herd management **decisions to drive profit**

Data Provided on genomic testing:

- Three economic Indexes: Total Return Index, Cow-calf Index, Feedlot-Carcase Index
- Twenty profit driving traits: Growth, Fertility, Feed Intake, carcase. Confirmation & Meat quality.
- Sire & Dam verification
- Evaluation for 8 major breeds including: Angus, Red Angus, Simmental, Hereford, Limousin, Charolais, South Devon & Gelbvieh
- Genomic Breed composition results provided, spanning 15 different breeds

Reporting of data is on a comprehensive platform – SearchPoint. SearchPoint displays data where it can be utilised to make breeding decisions with confidence.

*No membership fees to test with Inherit SELECT

ANGUS HeiferSELECT™

To utilise HeiferSELECT users must be a member of Angus Australia. The advanced genomic tool to inform the selection of replacement heifers for commercial Angus breeders. For best accuracy breed of cattle must be ≥87.5% Angus.

Angus HeiferSELECT™ aids in delivering increased profitability by:

- Selecting the right heifers that meet your breeding objective
- Supporting targeted breeding to produce valuable calves and superior replacements
- Avoiding the costs associated with rearing the wrong cattle for your operation

Angus HeiferSELECT™ provides genetic predictions, including:

- Total Value Index
- Cow-Calf Traits (7), Carcase Traits (4) & Docility
- Twelve (12) important maternal, growth, and carcase traits
- DNA sire identification Angus BreedCHECK identifying genomic breed composition for Angus cattle (≥87.5%), Angus cross (<87.5% -50%) or non-Angus (<50%)
- More traits to be added in the future

Data is reported on Angus Australia's angus.tech website – reported in quintiles of 10 representing relative performance for each trait. Higher the value indicates "more favourable" to the discretion of the breeding objectives.

PROMOTIONAL OFFER

For the first 5 participants to submit 50-100 genomic samples of either InheritSELECT or HeiferSELECT they will receive 100x TSU's & 1x Applicator FREE (valued at $620)

Also, for the first 5 participants will receive 1x 500ml Decto-V or 1x 250ml Ultravac-7in1

*participants must be willing to share results anonymously with ASheep for educational purposes.

Please contact for more info:
Lower Greater Southern & South East WA - Senior Area Manager - Ben Fletcher - 0418 955 097
Genetics Southern Region – VIC/TAS/WA/SA - Sinead O'Gara - 0419 664 834

Final results of 3-year PDS: Preventing bull preputial breakdown by vaccination

Sarah Brown, ASHEEP & BEEF

ASHEEP & BEEF's Producer Demonstration Site (PDS) project, "Preventing Bull Preputial Breakdown by Vaccination", funded by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and facilitated by Swans Veterinary Services has concluded after 3–years of surveillance. The project strongly demonstrated the value of vaccinating virgin bulls prior to their first joining with either of two commercially available vaccines with the goal of reducing the incidence and/or severity of bovine herpes virus infections.

ASHEEP & BEEF would like to thank MLA for funding the project, Dr Enoch Bergman and Swans Veterinary Services for facilitating, our local producers for participating, and Zoetis Animal Health for providing access to free Rhinogard vaccine for the duration of the project.

Read on for Enoch's summary of the final results.

Figure 1 Bull penis with severe case of IBP.

Exploding willy syndrome

Dr Enoch Bergman, Swans Veterinary Services

As part of a Meat & Livestock Australia Producer Demonstration Site project, we have just concluded compiling information from three years of survey work and veterinary investigation of cases relating to Infectious Bovine Balanoposthitis (IBP), colloquially referred to locally as "Exploding Willy Syndrome". Whilst no bovine genitalia have ever actually exploded, the moniker definitely provides a fairly succinct description of the reality! Read on for a description of the syndrome and some of our findings.

IBP is a condition caused by a herpes virus in cattle. It causes ulcerative inflammation of the penis and prepuce of bulls and of the vulva of cows. Like all herpes viruses, infection is permanent, often going into dormancy, later to "recrudesce" (return) when animals are stressed. In this way, virgin bulls working with other older bulls or merely by being in contact with young cows can become infected during the joining process.

IBP is likely impacted by a number of infectious, environmental and genetic contributors to the syndrome. Regardless, many cases of IBP may be initiated by the herpes virus, leading to secondary infection, and damage to the bull's prepuce. Sometimes, the preputial swelling renders the bull unable to retract his penis, resulting in further damage.

There are 3 keys to managing IBP successfully

1. Vaccination
2. Early Recognition
3. Treatment and sexual rest.

Figure 2: Rhinogard applicator & vaccine.

Vaccination

The targeted vaccination of virgin bulls can be accomplished through the use of commercially available vaccines, either Rhinogard and/or Bovilis MH + IBR.

Rhinogard, produced by Zoetis, is a modified live vaccination administered intranasally requiring a single dose. The vaccine is available in either 10 or 50– dose packets which are reconstituted with either 20 or 100mL of saline respectively. Administer 2mL intranasally using the Zoetis-designed applicator.

Bovilis MH + IBR developed by Coopers is an inactivated or killed vaccine requiring two 2mL doses to be delivered subcutaneously in monthly increments. It is available in 100mL or 250mL packs. No reconstitution of the vaccine is required. *[Cont'd]*

Figure 3: Bovilis MH + IBR.

Early recognition

IBP often progresses rapidly, and can have catastrophic consequences. By remaining vigilant through joining, producers can remove affected bulls promptly, improving the chances of recovery for subsequent seasons.

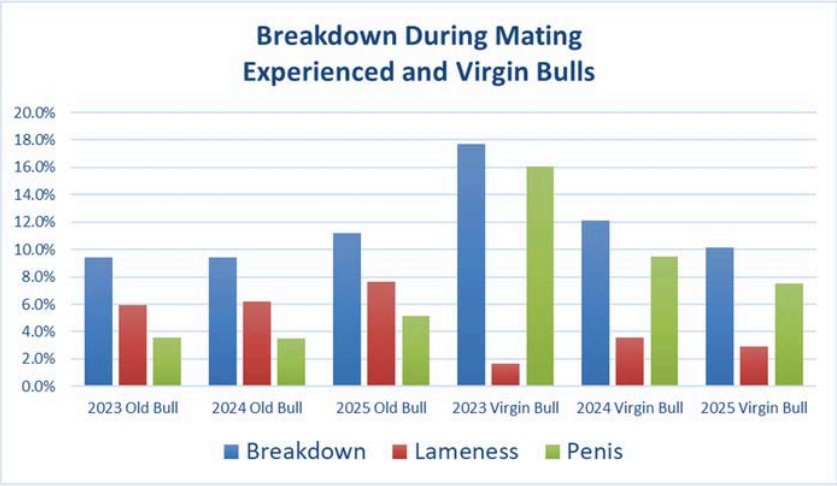
Treatment and sexual rest

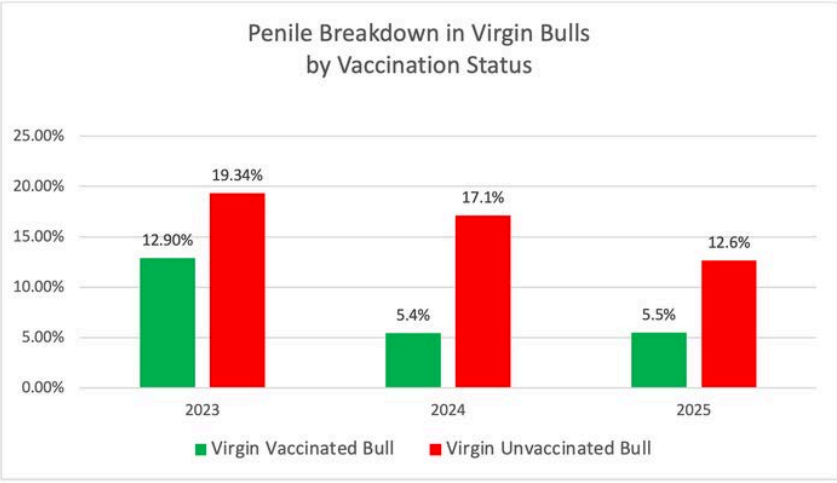
Sexual rest is critical for improving the likelihood of adequate recovery. Broad-spectrum antibiotics and anti-inflammatories can further improve outcomes. Once infection and inflammation have subsided, your bull may need veterinary assessment to see if he will be able to function adequately next season. Many bulls are culled due to permanent damage to their prepuce and/or penis as a result of infection, however, sometimes damaged bulls can be salvaged. Using an Electroejaculator (a device normally used to collect semen from bulls), a veterinarian can evaluate whether a bull is capable of exteriorizing its penis, achieve an erection, and likely to still be able to serve a cow. In some recovered cases, bulls with preputial scar tissue may be surgically repaired (via circumcision) in order to restore service capability in subsequent seasons. In some severe cases, affected bulls unfit for transport may require veterinary treatment including surgery to allow salvage.

Our local producer demonstration site project

Over three years (2023–2025), Esperance beef producers were surveyed, resulting in just over 150 data sets accounting for close to 3500 bulls. Over the same time period, local producers were given access to free Rhinogard vaccines provided by Zoetis and extension work helped raise awareness of the syndrome, vaccine options, and local results.

The results of the PDS have strongly supported the use of the two commercially available herpes virus vaccinations to reduce premature bull breakdown associated with balanoposthitis in virgin bulls. Over the course of the project, each year a higher proportion of producers surveyed reported that they had chosen to vaccinate prior to joining, with a strong indication that they would likely continue to vaccinate in the future (scoring an average of 9.7 when asked how likely they were to consider vaccinating for bovine herpes virus on a scale of 1–10). The survey data strongly demonstrated that virgin bulls were more likely to break down during joining with penile issues whilst older bulls were more likely to break down during joining due to lameness.





The PDS strongly demonstrated a reduction amongst vaccinated bulls in the proportion breaking down during joining due to penile injury over all three years of the project.

Please keep your eye out for an opportunity to share your thoughts with ASHEEP & BEEF about the syndrome and the project as post-project surveys are distributed. In the meantime, strongly consider protecting your virgin bulls prior to joining and keeping your eye on them during their first mating season! Please contact Swans Veterinary Services or reach out to ASHEEP & BEEF if you have any further questions or are seeking advice.

Producer Demonstration Sites are an excellent vehicle for the dissemination of information within producer groups. Beyond that, it allows producer groups to share some of their local success with producers across Australia through the extension arm of Meat & Livestock Australia. Thank you so much to all of our local producers who helped make this project a success raising the profile of our vibrant agricultural community and our producer group ASHEEP & BEEF!

AUTUMN FIELD DAY

WEDNESDAY 25th MARCH 2026

ASHEEP & BEEF

11:00AM Welcome (Newtown Condingup Football Club, Newtown Oval, Bandy Creek Rd, Myrup)

- **Brendon Savage, Tolga Farm (Kulin) – Profit-Focused Sustainability**
- **Tiffany Davey - The Livestock Collective Update**
- **Ian Foster & Steve Bradshaw, DPIRD - Weather: Season outlook, forecast tools & resources, new app, understanding the long-range forecast**

12:00PM Lunch (catered by Bread Local)

12:30PM

- **Annie Ciampaglia, Elanco – New flystrike product CLiK Duostar**
- **Nick Ruddenklau (Epasco), Ryan Willing (Carnigup) - Optimising Age of Weaning Cattle Meat & Livestock Australia PDS learnings**

1:15PM Carpool & depart for Esperance Native Nursery (13 Frank Freeman Drive, Bandy Creek)

- **Tree nursery tour with Rick Graham (Owner)**
- **Kahree Garnaut (South Coast NRM) - Trees & shrubs in livestock systems (including grazing, shelter, confinement systems)**

2:45PM Todd Quinlivan, Quintarra (2544 Fisheries Rd, Merivale)

- **Lead producer of ASHEEP & BEEF's BVDV Meat & Livestock Australia PDS**
- **Summer Cropping: Super Sweet Sudan (SSS) & Nudan Forage Sorghum**
- **Covered cattle yard system**

4:00PM Continue on at Newtown Condingup Football Club

- **Brad McCormick - Shearwell Update: Ordering sheep tags + new cattle tags**
- **Sinead O'Gara & Ben Fletcher, Zoetis - Genomic testing of commercial heifers & OJD**
- **Dr Holly Ludeman, Milne Feeds, new Easy2Gro LM (Low Methane) sheep feed**
- **Murray Green, Gallagher – New products update**
- **Holly Butterworth & Ron Master, DPIRD - Soils New Horizons project**

5:30PM Drinks & nibbles (catered by Bread Local)

$20 registration, RSVPs essential, all farmers and industry welcome

Register by Monday 23rd March at www.asheepbeef.org.au/events or 0409 335 194

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Jake Hann - 0429 871 707
Ian McCallum - 0427 715 205
Nicholas Ruddenklau - 0488 070 065

April

Next ASHEEP & BEEF Committee Meeting is scheduled for APRIL 2026

Contact a committee or staff member to raise an item.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Gate 2 Plate Challenge Field Day - 24 Mar (Willyung Farms Feedlot, Albany)
ASHEEP & BEEF Carbon Workshop for PDS producers - 24 Mar (Esperance)
ASHEEP & BEEF Autumn Field Day - 25 Mar (Esperance region)
Stirlings to Coast Farmers Livestock Workshop - 25 Mar (Mt Barker)
ASHEEP & BEEF AGM & Conference -18 Jun (Esperance region)
LambEx Conference - 7-10 Jul (Adelaide)
AFIA National Fodder Conference - 21-23 Jul (Perth, www.afia.org.au)
AFIA Post-Conference Tour - 24-26 Jul (location TBC)
Soil Science Australia National Conference - 1-5 Nov (Perth)

SAVE THE DATE

ASHEEP & BEEF AGM & Conference 18th June 2026

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