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## **THE Y-NOT BEEFPLAN GROUP**

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### **OVERVIEW OF BEEFPLAN**

“Beefplan” was originally designed by MLA some ten years ago as an experiment. MLA recognised that a lot of the results of research in northern Australia were still sitting on the shelf and had not been adopted by producers in the paddock. Beefplan was thought of as another way of transferring this research knowledge to the business of grazing cattle.

The experiment involved asking five interested groups of beef producers over a three year time frame to come up with a whole of property management system. The proposed system would work for their own group properties and could also be shared with other producers. Other producers could then use the developed system or model of management to adapt to work on their own property.

The BeefPlan vision is to provide the opportunity for northern beef producers to gain a greater control of their future through personal development and improved business management.

BeefPlan is a non-traditional approach to learning where groups of like-minded beef producers, acting together as a management team, focus on property management outside of a defined training curriculum.

Each group of producers forms a management team to learn from each other, from consultants, advisors and other specialists that they themselves choose.

Regular on-property and off-property management meetings are crucial to facilitate this form of learning.

The groups are genuinely producer driven and aim to look at the whole beef business and not single issues of management. All in all, the approach is unique to northern Australia.

These groups stimulate attitudinal change resulting in tangible improvements to members' businesses.

These groups can facilitate change and benefits to the wider community.

A group involves at least 6 business and no more than 15 businesses and is prepared to work not individually but collectively to improve their knowledge base, skills and business performance.

Groups must be willing to be responsible for their own strategic vision, set goals and achieve these goals with limited outside direction and facilitation.

All partners and/or all the members of the family unit involved in the business are encouraged to become actively involved in the project as BeefPlan participants.

Each group forms a partnership with MLA for 3 years. After the first 3 years, a group may decide to continue to work as a group without the direct involvement of MLA.

Groups can seek funding of up to \$10,000 per annum from MLA. Each group member pays an annual membership fee and the group seeks additional funding from other sources for specific projects.

### **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

The outcomes of the initial experiment were not what MLA expected. There were no models of management at the end of the three year trial. Instead, the outcome was five groups of like-minded producers who with very little guidance from MLA, became better equipped to make important decisions about running the whole of their

business. This was brought about by learning to work and share information with others, and distils information that was important to the many parts of their business. The groups took aim at their own goals and worked towards them at their own pace, using their preferred approaches.

During 2007, the Beefplan project was reviewed by external consultants and the report recommended to MLA that it continue to support Beefplan as one of its tools to build producer capacity. One of the biggest changes stemming from Beefplan is simply equipping people with the confidence and ability to make important decisions about the whole of their business. Sometimes significant on the ground changes can take longer than 3 years to materialise.

### **THE Y-NOT BEEFPLAN GROUP**

The Y-Not Beefplan group currently consists of members from 8 beef enterprises from the Barcaldine, Jericho, Blackall and Aramac areas. We usually meet on a different member's property each time to discuss what each enterprise has been doing since we last met. We talk about what has gone well, and what hasn't gone so well! We discuss our own experiences, future plans, offer suggestions and support; we stimulate and challenge one another.

As we see a gap in our knowledge or experiences, we will attend a course, or initiate the same and invite other producers in the area to attend.

One of the aims of the original Beefplan vision was to improve the economic side of our businesses. Members have been involved in benchmarking and associated workshops. As well as exchanging information, doing relevant courses, and taking measures to improve the productivity of our beef enterprises, improve the environmental and biodiversity of our properties, many of us have also done courses in off-farm investments.

One of the challenges for our group today is to continue to find the time, amidst our increasing work load both on and off farm, to meet regularly. It steadily becomes more difficult to juggle timetables to get everyone together at one time. This is important if we are to maximise the benefits of our group meetings and discussions.

Our Group organized a Forum in the Jericho area, with many different speakers on a variety of topics, and with an on-property visit for NLIS electronic identification of cattle demonstrations prior to its introduction.

Our members discuss current, and what we perceive as future trends in beef production and consumer needs, demands and perceptions.

Through our interest in animal welfare and achieving high standards of meat production for the consumer, our Group was involved with a pilot program to look at setting an Environmental Management System for grazing industries. Many meetings, heated discussions, and hard work went into the production of our own Best Practice. We are very proud of our results, especially as we did it all ourselves.

More recently we have produced our own information brochure, providing the photos ourselves, and every member writing different parts of it. It sets out to promote our local area and meat industries, and to educate the general public on what we perceive as the natural and healthy environment in which it is produced. We want people to understand how much we care about what we do, the time and effort and care we put into producing food, and the wonderful benefits of the free range enterprises we run out here in the rangelands of Central Western Queensland. We point out how our animals live largely stress-free, healthy, happy and natural lives on natural pasture diets in a healthy environment.

The brochure has proved popular, especially amongst tourists to the area and we are now on our second and updated edition. The brochures have travelled interstate and overseas!

Our group has also actively lobbied peak organizations to proactively undertake a marketing program to promote the positive side, particularly the health benefits, of our meat industries.

We are taking an interest in the current greenhouse and carbon emissions debate, taking a good look at how our own free-range operations cause or reduce greenhouse emissions. We are also looking at carbon storage on our properties, both in the vegetation and in the soils.

We see a push via animal welfare issues for the vegetarian lobby to try to influence people, especially the young, not to eat meat products. Yet, from our perspective we believe that the way our animals are reared, and the resulting meat products, are more healthy, environmentally including greenhouse friendly than many cereal, grain, fruit and vegetable products.

One of the reasons that grass fed meat is criticized is because it can be tougher than meat from animals fattened more quickly in a feed lot. Because of this, one of our members has been fully involved with using the research for more naturally tender meat through the detection in his cattle of the gene for tenderness. By identifying those animals with a high tenderness gene, and using those animals for breeding purposes, it is hoped that his whole herd will be producing meat that is more tender naturally. Our Group organized a Genestar Forum to inform other interested parties in the central west about the different genes that can now be detected to indicate tenderness, marbling, and how efficiently cattle utilize the amount of feed they eat.

#### **FORMATION OF A NEW BEEFPLAN GROUP:**

Should anyone be interested to form a Beefplan group in their area, the following Time Line may be of interest to them. More information for potential new BeefPlan groups can be obtained by contacting MLA's BeefPlan Coordinator, Steve Banney on 0427 161 072 or [sdb@austarnet.com.au](mailto:sdb@austarnet.com.au)

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## BEEFPLAN PROJECT TIME Line

