



# Over the fence Newsletter

## Christmas 2007

[www.grazingbestprac.com.au](http://www.grazingbestprac.com.au)

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### FEATURES

- **Compost Tea Field day is a brewing success!!!**
- **Grazing Management pays off at "Moora Plains"**

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### Ag Funding wins for innovative groups.

The Blackall and Benlidi BestPrac Group and the Leucaena Network are among five Queensland organisations that will benefit from \$149,400 funding under the federal government's Advancing Agriculture Fund. The Blackall and Benlidi BestPrac Group will receive \$54,750 to support a project to demonstrate best practice 'e.sheep' technology for extensive grazing in central western Queensland and the Leucaena Network will receive \$20,400.

Blackall and Benlidi Group spokesman Bill Cripps said the project would act as a springboard for local wool and fat lamb producers to learn about and trial innovative methodologies. "Individual producers will be able to see and experience first-hand the benefits of tagging, weighing, scanning and micron testing their own and local flocks of sheep," he said.

Senator Ron Boswell, in announcing the funding on behalf of the federal government, said Agfund was aimed at assisting primary producers to manage change and improve profitability of their enterprises and industries. "It matches funding from local producer groups to support projects that help them tackle industry issues at the local level," he said.

The three other groups to receive funds are The The Q-Group at Gayndah, Callide Valley Landcare Association and the Gayndah Shire Council. Senator Boswell said that he looked forward to seeing the improved outcomes for local farmers that would likely emerge from these small, but significant projects. "In these times of severe drought, the AgFund initiative is just one of the ways that the coalition government is seeking to assist farmers," he said.

### Good News!!!

They say "Bad news spreads like wildfire and good news rarely spreads at all". Well, thank you to those of you wonderful people who rang and emailed us with fantastic positive comments for compiling the last edition. Welcome to our Christmas 2007 of "Over the fence". It seems we, in this industry, especially our political lobby groups focus on the bad news stories and totally forget the amazing innovators all around us. This type of newsletter is obviously rare today as we have had many requests for people to be mailed or emailed to stay in touch. Once again, this edition is concentrating on exciting activities for the future of the grazing. Please have a wonderful Christmas and let us know your thoughts on how we can make this even more relevant to your needs. We will endeavour to catch up in the new year. Cheers,

Staff and families of Grazing BestPrac



### Foresthme Pasture Stands out.

Beef producers, Stewart and Glenda Jones and Jack Jones, Foresthme, Marlborough have irrigated pasture like no other. When you fly over forest country some 90 km to the north west of Rockhampton, you may be pleasantly surprised by the expanse of what seems to be irrigated pasture on hills amongst contour banks. More than 600 acres (240ha) was developed using water holding and spreading techniques designed by Bill Chapman in the early 1990's and is looking even better in dry years.

The Morinish Landcare Group held a field day and AGM on Foresthme in mid November, to assess the success of this unique pasture renovation program 15 years on. A large crowd attended to hear Stewart and Glenda Jones and Bill Chapman discuss the approach they took when developing steep stony paddocks. Stewart invested more than \$140/ acre in the development back in the 1990's to enable them to develop permanent weaning paddocks with a year round capacity of approximately 1 beast/ 2 acres . At that time, he took a risk and spent as much on development as the land was worth.

Development included the establishment of:

- Level contour banks
- Deep renovation (30cm)
- Improved pastures.



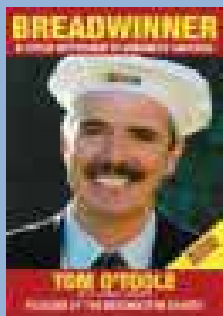
Stewart & Glenda Jones:

"We have carried a weaner to 2 acres year round on this country for the past few years"

### TOM OTOOLE POSTPONED

Tom will be in Rockhampton on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2008. His workshop was to be held in December, but due to a change in bookings, will be unavailable. I apologise for any inconvenience and will be promoting this course from December onwards. Tickets will be \$595 + GST for first person with reducing prices for multiple bookings.

Ring 49 276 790 to book, NOW...



# Moora Plains – Dream Big, work smart and Win

The debate between rotational grazing and conventional grazing has been going for 20 years and will continue while people close their eyes to the world around them. The Lawrie family, Andrew and Meagan “Moora Plains” Gogango and Peter and Simone “Esher” Westwood near Rockhampton have set a benchmark for the industry to now match or better. Talk about “Best Practice”.....

On the 31<sup>st</sup> October, 60-70 people travelled to “Moora Plains” to check out the Lawries operation which has been managed in a rotational grazing system for nearly 3 years. According to Andrew Lawrie, it was the best move they have ever made and the benefits are enormous. The field day was organized by Chantelle James, Field Officer for FRCC with support from FBA, Grazing BestPrac and McCrackens. Chantelle said the aim of the day was to review the success from the past 3 years and to pass this information onto the community, as well as celebrate the Lawrie Families achievements. Presenters on the day included Graham Lightbody FBA Biodiversity Stewardships, Kevin Wormington CQU and Chantelle James FRCC.

The Lawrie’s are a well known multi-generational family in the district who were looking to find a way they could develop a viable future for their families on the land. In Andrew’s words, “In the past 7 years, we have come a long way, broken the mold and are constantly looking for new and better ways to improve the business and ourselves”. They focused on education and have all attended the Grazing for Profit course, Low Stress Stockhandling, and various business and personal development courses as well as moving through a succession process. The results speak for themselves. The Lawrie’s have some very exciting results which highlight the need to rest pasture, destock early and increase mob sizes. Peter said, “We are taking the pressure off ourselves by managing for the grass and the microbes in the soil”.



Innovators Corner: Simone and Peter, Andrew and Meagan Lawrie.



A few of the 60 strong crowd at Moora Plains in October.

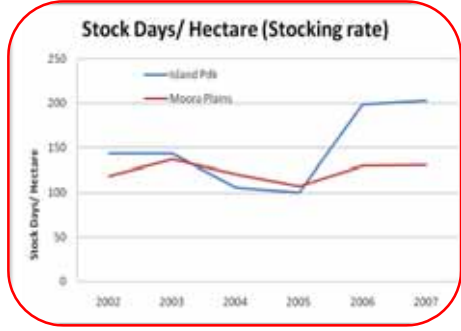


Figure 1. SDH/ Hectare (stocking rate)

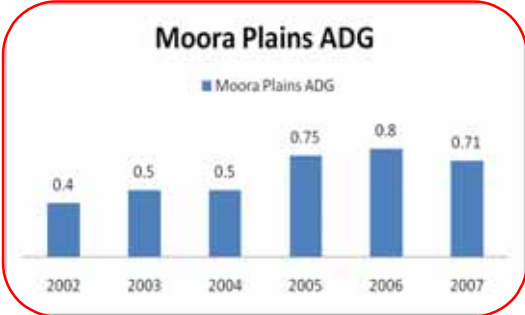


Figure 2. Average daily gain 2002 - 2007

Andrew said “We had to learn how to do things smarter as this is a whole new way of managing the grazing business”. The results, figures 1 and 2 compare the developed portion of Moora Plains (The Island Paddock) to the total production of Moora Plains. The Island Paddock is approximately 3,500 acres and production has increased from around 140 stock days per hectare (SDH) before development to 200 SDH post development. Peter said, “In the past we ran about 400 steers in the Island Paddock, now with reduced area (200 ha), we are running up to 700 steers on the same area.”

The cost of development was approximately \$90 per hectare, compared to a purchase price today of around \$3,000/ hectare. The development has already paid for itself at a 42% return on capital (ROC) in year 1. In 2006, the average daily gain was .8kg/hd/day across winter with the lead doing 1.25 kg/hd/day.

The group feedback from the day stands as testimony to the success of this family. Comments included:

- We have never seen this country in such good order.
- Just keep on doing more of the same.
- Congratulations, you are leading the way.

If you would like to know more about this field day or the Lawrie’s management system, call Andrew on 49 347526 or Peter on 49349901 or call our office. More on Moora, next time.....

## NLP Innovations Grants!!!!

Queensland State Landcare Coordinator Rick Kowitz has been running workshops around Queensland to assist primary producers and groups to apply for innovative National Landcare Program Grants. Grants open on the 17<sup>th</sup> November and close on 25<sup>th</sup> February.

To find out more:

**Phone**  
**Rick Kowitz on 0428 330 121 or contact your local NLP regional coordinator ... or call Mick on 0438 395255**

## Grazing BestPrac: Courses in 2007

- Technology of growing grass.
- Goals & Visions
- Computer Mapping
- Grazing Bestprac
- Strategic planning
- GPS and GIS training
- Vegetation Management
- Funding Submissions

**For more details, call 0749276790**



Simone Lawrie demonstrating a Brix Meter.





## ENVIROFUND – More popular than ever !!!

**Round 9** of the Federal Governments NHT Envirofund Grants was announced on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, after a looong wait. Nearly 1,000 projects were successful across Australia and 236 of those were in Queensland from the 2,159 families and community groups who applied for more than \$47 million dollars in on-ground environmental support. However, there was only \$20 million dollars available across Australia, and so many excellent projects missed out this time around. This also means only the very best got funded. Congratulations to those who are successful and go again early next year for those who were not successful.

If you were successful in securing funding, and would like advice on property planning or sourcing quotes for materials etc, please give our office a call. 0749 276790.

**Round 10 (the Coastal Round)** was announced on the 14<sup>th</sup> October. A total of 167 projects totaling \$4 million across Australia were funded from a possible 564 applicants applying for more than \$14.3 million in on-ground support for coastal related projects. In Queensland, we had 35 projects funded, with only one in the Fitzroy Region. The focus was on rehabilitating and protecting coastal ecosystems and so precluded all inland regions.

This is an exciting process to be involved with when, Federal Government, community groups and individual primary producer families are all working together for the same goal – “A healthier ecosystem”. If you have not heard if your application has been successful, please have a look on the website [www.nht.gov.au/envirofund/](http://www.nht.gov.au/envirofund/) or give Grazing BestPrac a call on 49276790. If you have been successful, however, securing the funding is only the first step to achieving these wonderful outcomes. Good Luck and have fun building your dreams.

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Activity
<b>November</b>	
21 <sup>st</sup>	MLA Beef Forum (Paradise Lagoons Rockhampton)
22 <sup>nd</sup>	MLA Annual General Meeting Rockhampton
23 <sup>rd</sup>	FRCC Annual General Meeting Rockhampton
29 <sup>th</sup>	Phoenix Mapping Workshop (Agdata) Rockhampton
<b>December</b>	
10 <sup>th</sup>	Pasture and Soils Course (Scrub Logic) Biloela ph 0429 929 104
25 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas



## WOOL BESTPRAC Around the yards

**Wool BestPrac up and running again.** AWI and Rural Directions is initiating the start of the next 3 year Wool BestPrac program for pastoral regions of Australia in early 2008. Existing sheep and wool groups and new groups will be supported to implement best management practices which assist individual businesses and the industry at large.

### E.Sheep Project successful -

The Blackall and Benlidi BestPrac Groups were successful in securing \$54,750 from Agfund (Federal Government Innovation Grant) to carry out the “E-Sheep” project. E-Sheep aims to set up and trial electronic sheep management technology in the Central Western areas of Queensland. This was an initiative of bestprac group members, being coordinated by Bill Cripps and Jack Banks.

### “Investing for the future” \$\$\$\$\$

Off – Farm investment and farming your equity were the focus of recent training days held in Blackall in October. BestPrac members from Blackall and Muttaborra attended two separate one day “Introduction to Investment” workshops run by “Share Safe” and Paul Reynolds. Participants were all members of western grazing families who believed in the long term future of the sheep / wool industry, but generally also believed it was smart to spread the risk and opportunities maximize off farm returns from the increase in land values in recent years. The workshop focused on two main areas of real estate investment and share trading/ investment. and were excited at the prospect of working closely with such passionate and skilled investment specialists.

**Blackall Contact: Jack Banks**

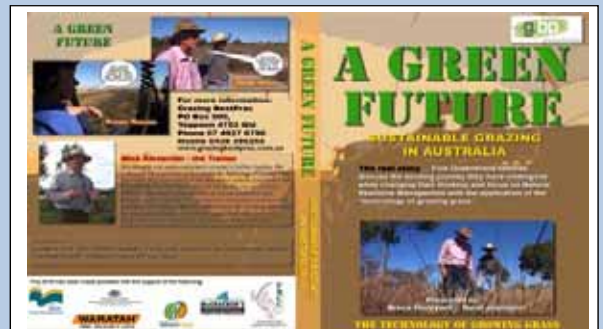
**Phone: 07 4657 5958**

**Tambo Contact: Hume Turnbull**

**Phone: 0746546163**

**Muttaborra Contact: John Seccombe.**

**Phone 07 4658 7198**



## COMPOST TEA - the answer is fungi

Moura graziers, Peter and Charles Attard "Shingle Hut" are leading a quiet revolution in grazing management in Queensland. The third generation farming brothers are pioneering the use of compost teas and management of grass from the soil up. They strongly believe the basis for all production comes from the living micro-organisms in the soil (bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes etc) working within the chemical structure of the soil. Compost teas have improved pasture health significantly at Moura and reduced fertiliser use and improved yields and sugar content (14CCS to 17CCS) on the families Mackay sugar cane crops.

Late in October, the Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments NRM group and Morinish and Wycarbah Landcare groups joined forces to host a field day on "Shingle Hut". Some 50-60 graziers attended to learn "What the Heck is Compost Tea?" and how can we get some? Peter presented the most amazing data and simple explanation possible to keep the young and old intrigued to the end. He demonstrated the brewing process, the application process, the science behind it and his results. Some interesting benefits of Compost Tea include:

- Recycle nutrients
- Retain nutrients
- Build soil structure
- Make nutrients available.
- Detox soils.
- Control diseases
- Improve water holding capacity
- Drive the roots down
- Help residue management
- Decrease herbicide use
- Increase organic matter and Carbon.
- Significantly reduce cost of production.



Peter Attard, grazier from Moura, explaining the benefits of compost teas.



Some of the 60 people who attended the Compost Tea day at Shingle hut

Its as simple as, "The health of grass pastures is not dependant on adding mineral fertilisers, but by getting the bacteria and fungi ratio's right" and working on the biology. The ratio needs to be about 1:1 for both cropping and grazing soils. This was a total 180 degree change in direction from the basic science we have been taught for generations. Most of our pastures in Central Queensland are bacteria dominant and lacking beneficial populations of fungi. The starting point is to improve the populations of fungi and we can immediately improve the health.

In simple terms: chemicals, fertilisers, tillage, fire and overgrazing destroy beneficial soil organisms and create an opening for disease entry and a downhill spiral. For fifty years, the world has tried to rectify the imbalance by adding more chemicals, more fertilisers, reducing tillage, burning for disease etc. However, the only way we can realign the balance is to add the beneficial micro-organisms, which we lost due to poor practices.

Peter has improved the organic matter on "Shingle Hut" from 2.2% to 3.7% over 3 years and believes he has only just begun. His production / carrying capacity (figure 3) has increased by 29% from 2003 and 2004 average 8768 stock days (4 applications of compost tea started in 2005) to 2005 and 2006 average of 11302 stock days. Compost tea is a highly concentrated brew of beneficial living micro-organisms, which are produced by extraction from compost or vermin-compost (worm castings). The tea is then able to be sprayed onto crops, pastures and in many cases bare soils. It is best to spray the brew onto trash/ organic matter or live plants to ensure the microbes survive in high populations. Peter also suggests it is beneficial to spray a food base as well so microbes can begin growing and reproductino immediatelv.

year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 (5 months)
<b>Stock days</b>	8,816	8,722	11,104	11,500	6,655
<b>Average</b>	8,876		11,302		

Figure 3. Production on Shingle Hut trial paddock with compost teas.

Some of the highlights of improvements to sugar cane on Farm 3151, Mackay Sugar include

- 15% increase in sugar content
- Yield increase of 30%
- Nitrogen requirements reduced from 200kg/ha to 80kg/ha
- Water holding capacity increased by 400%



Charles Attard explaining the application process

Brewing is an important process which needs to be managed at constant temperatures and in a controlled situation, with the correct foods to grow aerobic organisms. The brew also requires large volumes of oxygen to be constantly pumped through to stop anaerobic organisms reproducing. It may take 16 – 24 hours to brew 3,000 litres of compost tea, which can be sprayed at as low as 20 litres per hectare. If the tea is brewed too long, it will become toxic (high populations of bacteria) and potentially cause more harm than good. The brewing tank and equipment can be set up for less than \$7,000, if you follow Peter's plan. This is only the first in this series, so please watch this space and ring Peter on 0749957244 If you are interested in learning more, go to the [www.soilfoodweb.com.au](http://www.soilfoodweb.com.au). We are establishing a number of compost tea groups across Qld. If you are interested please call Mick on 0438 395255