

This Time Last Year...

One thing is true of agriculture: change is inevitable. People have different approaches regarding whether they resist it, go with the flow, manage it or plan for it. Last spring, we ran a spring strategies day at the end of August helping clients develop budgets for not only feed but water. This year, cashflow budgets are important given the impacts of the overly wet weather, the current grain prices and the silage versus hay debate. The change in the seasons has been remarkable.

Also remarkable is the Victorian Government's decision to implement mandatory electronic identification in sheep and goats. Despite whether you think it is a good thing, a bad thing or a necessary thing, after the 1st January 2017 it will change a small part of your sheep enterprise and your budget. There are many ways to use EID to grow the productivity of your flock and gain greater knowledge about performance. It's just another change to the way we farm.

Anna Cochrane, CEO

Lambex 2016

James Whale, Anna Cochrane and Richard Cannon at the Meridian Agriculture site at Lambex 2016 in Albury in August.



Safety September

During the month of September, Meridian Agriculture have put a focus on safety in farm businesses. The campaign has been called #SafetySeptember and has been encouraging producers and business owners to consider how to improve overall safety in the workplace. Daily facts, tips and advice have been published on both Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness. The thing we have learned is that it doesn't take much to make a big difference. To find the daily posts on Facebook* or Twitter*, visit our pages or use the hashtag to find what has been published.

We are also providing a free auditing tool to utilise on farm. The workshop is a work environment most farms have regardless of enterprise, yet all businesses carry the potential of the same risks and actions required. The free auditing tool will give you the ability to make assessments for yourself, while also inviting you to get free advice from a WH&S consultant, who will put together an action plan addressing the risks. All free of charge. You can get the audit tool by visiting www.meridian-ag.com.au/SafetySeptember or talk to your advisor as they will have the tool with them.

Links to our social media:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MeridianAg

Twitter: www.twitter.com/Meridian_Ag



#SafetySeptember

Article by Ben Reeve

Mandatory Sheep EID - What does this really mean?

The mandatory use of electronic tags in sheep and goats has been anticipated in Victoria for some time. It has now happened and all sheep and goats born after January 1, 2017 will need to be electronically tagged.

The driving motivation behind the move has been stock traceability.

A trial some years ago sought to track individual animals through the paper based system. The results were not good and would have resulted in the inability to quickly find affected animals in the event of an exotic disease outbreak.

Over the last 5-6 years the Vic Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resource (DEDTJR) has invested significantly to see how EID can be used to promote better farming practices. There is a lot of variation in the performance of individual animals. Identifying this difference can allow poor producing animals to be culled with an immediate effect on profitability. Some of this recording can be done manually (eg individual fleece weights and micron in wool sheep), while some is more difficult (eg lamb performance linked to ewes) and needs the use of EID.

There is a range of equipment in the market, from stick readers through to autodrafters. Careful assessment of what data you want to collect and why, and then determine if electronic recording will make the job easier, more accurate or more able to be analysed. Only buy the equipment that is fit for purpose. Let the need, not the technology drive the decision. Also remember that it will be easy to collect a lot of data. You will need to ensure that you have the means to

analyse the data for the purpose you want.

This is part of a larger industry move towards individual or precision management of livestock. In the foreseeable future electronic NVDs will be common, as will individual carcass feedback from abattoirs.

The Department will be providing support for the transition to electronic ID for sheep and goats. The details will be finalised following consultation with industry stakeholders, although one firm measure indicated is that for the first year, the electronic tags will be the same cost as the current non electronic tags. Speak to your Meridian Ag Advisor on how to implement.

Article by Jim Shovelton



(Photo Source: Ag Victoria)

Client Profile: David Merrin

Tell us about your business?

Rosie and I operate a grazing business near Peshurst, Victoria. We moved from a NSW mixed farming operation six years ago, which we leased out. After running merino wethers under blue gums in South Australia for three years we purchased a small property. We purchased it because it had great water infrastructure, layout, basalt soils, reliable rainfall, an extended growing season of three months and it was close to our home. We operate solely as a grazing business, backgrounding stock for other companies.

What is the biggest change you've seen in agriculture/your business in the past 10 years?

The biggest change to our business over the past ten years is that we have reallocated our capital from owning livestock and machinery and invested it elsewhere and used someone else's capital to generate income from our land.

What do you think the biggest change will be in the next 5 – 10 years?

The landowner will not always be the operator.

Why did you choose James Whale/ Meridian Ag?

We choose to use James because he was operating a very similar model on his own farm and is experienced with feed budgeting and nutritional requirements to meet our suppliers growth rate expectations. We were effectively tracking the same path as James but 12 months later. I thought we could learn from his mistakes and capitalise on his triumphs. We are very lucky because we can always bounce ideas off each other.



What has been the difference to your business/farm since using Meridian Ag?

We soil tested every paddock and tried to get all our paddocks into an optimal range on a paddock-by-paddock basis. The pastures were very reliant on nitrogen being added. We are in the process of building the clover levels to help cut down fertilizer cost.

Would you recommend Meridian Ag to your neighbours?

Yes I would, Meridian Ag has a great wealth of experience and expertise across the board. I would suggest choosing a Meridian Ag consultant that meets your requirements.

Where was your most recent holiday and when?

We go to the south coast of NSW in mid January.

What is your favourite meal?

Anything but coffee.

How much rainfall is ideal for your country and what time of year would it fall?

75mm per month would be ideal. Realistically, early break helps you setup up for the wet winters followed by late spring rains.

How much rain have you had this year?

We have had 640mm to mid September.

How do you spend your downtime/time off farm?

Usually running around with children's sport commitments.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Listen.

What have you learned from the 2016 season so far and how will that change how you manage your farm in 2017 and beyond?

I have learnt the need for some rocky country in winter, road base in gateways, Bogg gumboots, & Oringi wet weather gear!

Interviewed by Ben Reeve

Things to consider this wet Spring

How much rain have you had this September? Regardless, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Dry matter (DM):

The first target is to get pastures to 1200kg to maximise dry matter production by allowing them to capture enough light to photosynthesise at or close to their potential. Pasture kept below 1000kg of DM for an extended period draw on their stored energy "reserves". This results in smaller leaves being produced and tiller death if it continues. The first leaf in Ryegrass after grazing contributes 25%, the second leaf contributes 40% to the total available pasture produced.

Seed set on Sub Clover:

With the last two springs being short or much shorter than usual in many areas, ensuring good seed set for your Sub Clover pastures is another key point for this spring. Things that can be done to help this, especially in paddocks with limited Sub Clover or newly sown pastures (last 2 years):

- Ensure Red Legged Earth Mite are well controlled as they suck from the flower and can cause it to abort;
- Have the paddock grazed down to between 1200-1500kg/ha when flowering commences, then reduce grazing pressure;
- Do not cut new paddocks for hay or silage no matter how good they look or this will dramatically affect seed set of the Sub Clover.

Spelling Phalaris based pasture:

In a similar way to Perennial Ryegrass, Phalaris sets shoots (tillers) for next autumn this spring. Some older Phalaris pastures which we inspected this autumn after a number of years of very heavy grazing and limited spelling actually had dead buds underground and total plant size has been dramatically reduced.

One of the best ways to allow these plants to expand again is to allow the paddock to be spelled and allowing at least 10% of the tillers to actually produce a seed head. By allowing

the plants to grow and produce a seed head, significant amounts of carbohydrates are stored in the root system, which gives the plant more energy to produce more buds. A well-resourced Phalaris plant can produce 3-4 new buds on each tiller compared to 1 or 2 with plants under pressure.

So the paddocks that have opened up a little should be ones you are considering resting.

Maintaining Quality:

Given healthy non-water logged pastures, in most districts pastures will grow at between 50-80kg/ha dry matter per day for September and October. Given this, pastures may quickly become rank and animal growth rates will slow. Identify the paddocks with good Perennial grass bases and legume content and try to keep them between 1600kg of DM/ha and 2200kg of DM/ha (roughly between 6-10cm pasture height), where you intend to grow and finish younger stock eg lambs or cattle under 2 years of age.

The higher the legume content the higher the animal production will be. Also ensure that your clostridial vaccination program is up to date. Often, on high legume content pastures vaccination for pulpy kidney may only last 3 months.



Article by Andrew Speirs

The Ace Group - Hamilton

Meridian Agriculture, in collaboration with Rabobank, are piloting a new program for producers focussed on objective assessment of business performance to identify opportunities to enhance business profitability. The pilot group made up of eight livestock businesses surrounding Hamilton is part of MLA's Profitable Grazing Systems program, one of ten groups being run nationally during the 12-month pilot phase.

Our group has three key objectives to deliver by the end of the pilot phase:

- Enhance skills in assessing business performance (both financial and production measures) amongst participants;
- Identify key priorities within each business (modification most likely to enhance performance); and
- Implement strategies or business modification that results in enhanced profitability.

Three of the six planned sessions are now completed. Group members have participated in a range of activities, including a 2014/15 business performance review using whole-farm

business 'health indicators' to have an objective look at overall business performance.

The next step for participants is to compare their 2015/16 year business performance with South West Farm Monitor (SWFM) data. Comparative analysis against SWFM data will allow participants to identify strengths and weaknesses for both financial and production measures to identify potential areas for improvement. Participants are using each other as sounding boards to discuss what they are learning about their business and potential changes to the business to improve performance into the future.

Participants are being lead on a pathway of sorts to gain a better understanding of what's driving financial performance using objective measures and identifying what opportunities exist to improve this performance. The group environment has been really positive and some participants have already identified key areas for change. In six months' time it's going to be really interesting to review the range of business decisions made as a direct result of the program.

Article by James Whale

Let's get to know Ben Reeve



You have experience working with employers looking for the right person to join their business. If you could give a grower any advice when planning for this process, what would it be?

Define what skills and experiences are essential and what are desirable. Communicate these early in the process. Where possible hire people who are better than you. This enables

the business to grow and not be reliant on you.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity for people wanting to work in Australian Agriculture? There are many opportunities for people to not only have a great life/work balance but also create a highly rewarding and satisfying career making a difference. In addition, there are career opportunities on farm, agribusiness and beyond. People don't have to become stuck in one career path forever and can continually grow and develop themselves. Ag based skills are transferrable to other industries too.

What is the biggest threat? There are a lot of adhoc or redundant HR practices within some businesses that need addressing. Also some people expect things handed to them on a plate without working hard for it.

Tell us about your family and values that are important to your family life? My wife Dani and I have two children (Ava, 10 & Henry, 6). Spending time and doing life together is core. We want to ensure we provide a solid foundation for them to go higher, better, faster and kick more goals than we ever could.

Where did you go to school? Primary, secondary and tertiary education all in Ballarat.

What is the most important lesson you have learned in life? In everything, treat people the same way you want them to treat you.

What is your favourite holiday destination? We love California. Disneyland is seriously the best place on earth.

When growing a business, what is the first piece of advice you would give someone? Define what you can be the best in the world at, ensure you are deeply passionate about it and make sure it drives your economic engine. Don't compromise any one of these three things.

What do you do outside of work? I write music and spend time encouraging others who do the same. I also follow football (the round ball version) closely.

Why did you choose to work for Meridian Agriculture? I joined 11 years ago to get closer to home after working in Melbourne. There are plenty of opportunities to make difference in this business, which is what I enjoy.

How is your view from the verandah?

If you sat on the verandah and looked out over the next twenty years, what does your farm, your family and your business look like? It is critical to identify exactly where your business is now from a production, financial and succession perspective and ensure that you have a strategic business and succession plan to achieve your vision

Meridian Agriculture's Business Advisor, Warren Blyth, is working with family farming businesses in developing strategic, tactical and operational business plans and assisting families with the transitional issues that need to be considered. Warren also sits on some Family Advisory Boards to provide an experienced independent view.

One of the many benefits of planning is having an agreed process with open communication. Strategic planning and Farm Advisory Boards provide for clear goals to be set and worked towards and allows family members, consultants and banks to share in the direction of the business. There is a risk that other family members working in the business may have a different view from the verandah which may lead to conflict. It is better to open the lines of communication so that everyone is working towards the same goals. A business will be stronger and perform better if all team members know the direction in which they are heading.

For a balanced independent opinion with a 'fresh set of eyes' looking at your business, call Warren to discuss your requirements and have him prepare a proposal for your consideration. Warren can be contacted on 0428 508 153 or wblyth@meridian-ag.com.au

Article by Warren Blyth

Meridian Ag Newsletter:

This will be our last print newsletter. We will continue to email out newsletters to clients and networks, as well as being available on our website. If you want to ensure that we have your correct email address, please contact us on 03 5341 6100 or email us at info@meridian-ag.com.au

Yendon

a 96 Harbours Road,
Yendon, VIC 3352

p 03 5341 6100 | f 03 5341 7630

e info@meridian-ag.com.au

Casterton

a PO Box 226, 32 Henty Street,
Casterton, VIC 3311

p 03 5581 2826 | f 03 5581 2746

e info@meridian-ag.com.au

Hay

a 95 Lachlan Street
Hay, NSW 2711

p 0427 931 177

e info@meridian-ag.com.au