

Making more all round

An in-depth review of Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and MLA's *Making More From Sheep* (MMFS) program has revealed participants gained an additional \$10/ha in income on average.

Review project leader and Victorian agricultural consultant Dr Kristy Howard interviewed 179 producers and undertook 47 enterprise case studies to determine what impact participating in MMFS events had on businesses.

These producers participated in MMFS workshops across the country and indicated they would make changes on-farm as a result of what they learned on the day.

"Of these producers, 75% had made a change – either the one they planned on making or another change," Kristy said.

"Extrapolated over the entire MMFS participant database, we can confidently say 59% of participants were making changes to their business after attending a MMFS workshop."

Many are even feeling better about their farming situation and have more confidence to make business decisions leading to on-farm change. When it came to putting a dollar figure on the impact of these changes, Kristy said sheep producers increased their annual income by an average \$11,900 or \$10/ha.

MMFS is a package of principles and procedures, with signposts to further information and tools to help Australian sheep producers optimise business profitability and control risk. Since it was launched in 2008, 6,800 producers have taken part.

The review revealed that, as a result of changes prompted by attending a MMFS workshop:

- 76% had increased production
- 85% saw improved animal wellness
- 20% have seen benefits to soils and pastures from improved grazing management
- 89% recorded increases in knowledge and skills
- 98% have increased confidence due to practice change adoption
- 69% felt more in control or less stressed
- 56% decreased losses.

On-farm implementation of change was closely linked to each module topic. For example, 35% of producers were weaning more lambs by following new ewe management and lamb survival strategies learned in the 'Wean more lambs' module of the MMFS program.

"The results revealed that MLA and AWI's investment in the MMFS program was having a positive impact on increasing producers' skills, knowledge and confidence required to adopt new management practices to improve farm productivity and profitability," Kristy said.

Some producers who planned to make changes had not done so during the survey period because of the timing of seasonal activities, e.g. buying new genetics using ASBVs or fertiliser application.

Survey participants said they benefited from speaking to like-minded producers at the workshops and the exposure to experts in topics such as livestock nutrition and health.

“Many producers told me they had benefited personally – not just economically – from making changes to their business,” Kristy said.

“They said they felt less stressed and were enjoying farming again because they felt they were in control of their business, which is a really positive outcome for their communities and the agricultural industry.”

The review made several recommendations for the MMFS program, such as including more follow-up events to support producers make change – especially more technical activities.

The case studies conducted as part of the MMFS review showed that many Australian producers don’t formally record flock management information or look at history, making it difficult to identify production targets and measure progress over time.

Kristy said she would like to see future events encourage producers to identify and record simple on-farm measures to enable them to track and monitor key productivity indicators over time, such as stocking rate, kg phosphorus applied/ha, weaning rate, ewe mortality, etc. This could include follow-up events where producers can get together to compare before and after the change to demonstrate progress.

More information:

- The full report can be found at:
<http://www.mla.com.au/Research-and-development/Search-RD-reports/RD-report-details/Extension-Producer/Assessing-the-Impacts-of-MLAs-Southern-Majority-Market-Program/2643>
- Making More From Sheep www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au

Table 1: Types of practice changes made by producers attending MMFS events – based on module.

Making More From Sheep module	Practice change made as a result
Module 1 - Plan for success	Action plan, business analysis, record keeping
Module 2 - Market focused wool production	Using wool testing information, wool price monitoring
Module 3 - Market focused lamb and sheep meat production	Seek market data
Module 4 - Capable and confident farmers	Labour-saving strategies
Module 5: Protect your Farm’s Natural Assets	Improved soil management
Module 6 - Healthy soils	Soil testing and fertiliser use
Module 7- Grow more pasture	Grazing management
Module 8- Turn pasture into product	Feed testing, grazing management, rotational grazing
Module 9 - Gain from genetics	Use ASBVs
Module 10 - Wean more lambs	Condition scoring, ewe management/nutrition
Module 11 - Healthy and contented sheep	Worm control, fly control, health management plan