

the link



FarmLink Newsletter Autumn 2016



Friday Arvo Drinks in late February were a great way to start the more social side at FarmLink for 2016. It was also an opportunity for John Harper of Mate Helping Mate to generate discussions around the mental health of farmers and farming families. John was pictured with FarmLink members Jack Derrick (left) and Terry Walker.



AGM and Thank Yous



It's a sign!



Grazing Stubble

Catch up with CEO Cindy Cassidy



It all starts again! I missed the opportunity to wish everyone a Happy New Year and by now 2016 is well underway.... I hope that 2016 is kind to you all.

Our focus since Christmas has been all forward looking. For the coming year we are concentrating on paddock plans, weed and stock feed management, new trial planning and establishment, ewe joining and the exciting new AI program as part of the Satellite Flock. We are establishing two new projects – Harvest Weed Seed Management and Subsoil Amelioration – conducted in partnership with NSW DPI and Southern Farming Systems, respectively, and both funded by GRDC. Trials for these

projects will run for the next two seasons and we will be reporting outcomes from local trials as well as the national projects.

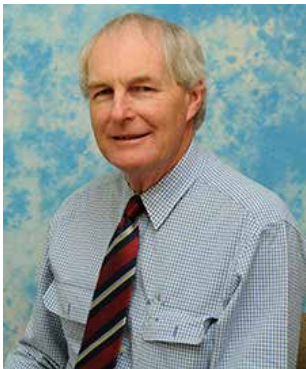
Prior to the AGM on the 18th March the Board will undertake strategic planning for FarmLink with a focus on the changing business environment and what FarmLink should be doing now to ensure that we are able to

continue to deliver benefits to farmers in Southern NSW. You will all be aware that project funding is becoming tighter, Research & Development Corporations are changing their investment strategies and operations and both Federal and State Governments are redefining their approaches to Agricultural innovation. These things impact FarmLink both directly and indirectly and we are keen to position ourselves to try to ensure the effects are positive.

I hope to catch up with you all at the AGM as we say a big THANKYOU to James Hunt, who has recently moved into a new role with La Trobe University based in Melbourne. And you will also have a chance to meet the two new additions to the FarmLink Team – Lyndal Turner and Malcolm Murdoch:

Good luck going into seeding and lambing.

Meet the Director: Robert Patterson



Robert Patterson has been a farm management consultant based in Cootamundra since 1978 and is the founding partner of the consultancy firm Rural Management Strategies Pty Limited.

He has BAgSc plus MAgSc degrees and is a Graduate of Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Due to his experience in business and financial management, Robert is currently

a Director of FarmLink plus a member of the Audit & Risk Committee.

Board of Directors

Each member of the FarmLink Board of Directors brings their own unique skill set to the organisation, combining business management and agricultural skills to ensure a positive direction into the future.



CEO
Cindy Cassidy



Chair
Darryl Harper



Deputy Chair
Rob McNoll



Director
Rob Patterson



Director
Lisa Anderson



Director
Ron Heinrich



Director
Lyndon McNab



Director
Bernard Hart

AGM and a chance to say thank you

FarmLink members are urged to reserve March 18 in their diaries for a valuable visit to Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre.

FarmLink's Annual General Meeting will be preceded by a three hour ProductionWise workshop conducted by Grain Growers. The 12.30pm to 3.30pm workshop will be an ideal opportunity for members to learn about ProductionWise, an online tool to help farmers manage nitrogen and other crop inputs. Utilising digital tools to record on-farm activities and operations farmers can will achieve greater traceability, improved accountability and as a result, achieve greater yields and profits through smarter farming.

A short break will then occur, before FarmLink's Annual General Meeting from 4pm – 5pm. FarmLink's 2015 financial reports will be tabled and Chief Executive Officer, Cindy Cassidy will report on FarmLink's strategic plan.

The AGM will also be the first opportunity for members to take delivery of the much anticipated 2015 FarmLink Research Report, the annual publication which is an exclusive member-only benefit summarising the year's research projects.

As is tradition, once the formalities of the AGM are completed, the social part of the day will begin from 5pm, with a BBQ to be held in honour of CSIRO researcher, James Hunt, who has left CSIRO to take up a position at LaTrobe University.



James is well known to FarmLink members as the lead researcher on a number of projects over the past many years including Water Use Efficiency, the GRDC Stubble Initiative and Early Sowing. He was also recently awarded the GRDC Seed of Light award, which is presented each year to someone who makes a significant contribution to communicating the outcomes of research.

Join us to celebrate our 2015 achievements and to thank James for his valuable contribution to agriculture in Southern NSW.



Annual General Meeting

Friday, March 18, 2016 - 4pm to 5pm

Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre

All FarmLink members are invited to attend the AGM, to hear about the fruitful results of the last 12 months and positive outlook for the future of Research, Development and Extension in Southern NSW

Items of interest –

FarmLink's 2015 **Research Report** presented by Research Technical Officer, Malcolm Murdoch

FarmLink 2015 in **Review** – Darryl Harper, Chair

Tabling of **reports** including Audit & Risk Committee report; Financial Report;

Director's Report; and Auditor's Report

Strategic **Directions** – 2016 and beyond – Cindy Cassidy, CEO

The meeting will be followed by a casual BBQ and light refreshments where members will have the opportunity to farewell CSIRO researcher, James Hunt

RSVP to assist with catering purposes on 6980 1333 or admin@farmlink.com.au

Working Smarter, Not Harder, With Your Sheep



Author - Murray Long, ClearView Consulting

Murray is currently conducting the livestock operations at the Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre

There is no doubt that over the past few decades, the increasing use of technology has led to significant gains within farming enterprises. The first thought that comes to mind is the implementation of GPS and yield monitoring in cropping operations and the reduction in labour input per unit of land cropped. The combination of technology, farming practices and machinery capability and capacity has meant that despite a reduction in the number of farmers over the past 50 years, the volume of production has steadily increased.

The same trend has occurred within the sheep industry and we only have to look at the past 20 years to see evidence of a significant change in production trends and volumes. In 1990, Australia had 175 million sheep (estimated 85 m ewes) producing 14.5 m lambs for slaughter, we now have 78 million sheep (est. 40 m ewes) turning off 22.5 m lambs for slaughter. Obviously there has been a corresponding change in wool production levels but how can we further improve efficiencies within our sheep operations on farm?

Recent advances in technology, genetic selection opportunities and management strategies have all provided sheep producers with a substantial opportunity to improve efficiency within their sheep enterprise. The good news is that these advances can be adopted either as a "stand alone" improvement or as an integrated strategy involving all possible opportunities.

So what is currently available to sheep producers?

Technology

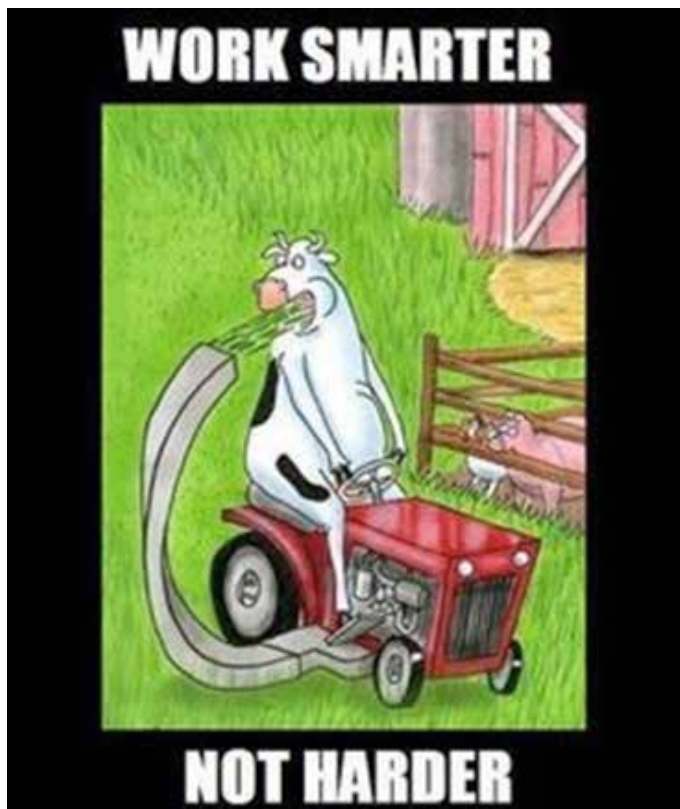
- The use of Electronic Identification – allows an individual selection strategy rather than a mob based strategy. Savings in time and lower risks to operator.
- Sheep Handlers – higher output per labour unit with less physical work and lower operator risk
- Auto drafters – come at a cost but savings in time and efficiency are significant
- Computers and Data handling – almost an essential tool in all livestock operations and increases the management options across the whole business.

Genetic Selection

- Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) – allows accurate selection across all the traits that are important to your operation
- Diverse genetics – there are many more options in regard to both breeds and breed types
- Genomics – the use of DNA to predict a whole new range of traits previously not able to be evaluated
- Industry education opportunities – there are many funded workshops and field days to assist producers in adoption of genetic selection strategies

Management Strategies

- Benchmarking – changing focus to a production/unit rather than just prices received per head
- Better ewe management – use of Condition Scoring and management of ewes before and during lambing to increase



lamb survival

- Use of grazing crops – better use of all available resources on farm
- Industry education programs – Plenty of funded workshops such as Lifetime Ewe Management and Bred Well Fed Well to educate sheep producers

The opportunities available to sheep producers to increase production and efficiencies within their operation has never been greater. The adoption of just one of the above examples within any of the three areas will lead to greater efficiency and production. The integration of several of these into a management strategy will have a compounding effect across the whole enterprise and the opportunities to build on the improvements made are endless.

The use of electronic identification and the range of labour saving equipment that can be coupled with this technology leads to huge savings in not only time and energy, but also creates a safer working environment and less stress to livestock. The question that always surfaces is the capital cost; Answer.... How much did that tractor plus header plus seeder plus GPS plus spray rig set you back?!!

There is little doubt the "attractiveness" of sheep has diminished over the past few decades, however all assessments of profitability across the range of agricultural enterprises consistently places prime lamb and wool enterprises ahead of cropping. The sheep industry has made significant gains across all areas, especially in regard to technology and labour saving, in recent years and the opportunities that exist to improve efficiencies are constantly

growing.

Recent analysis by the sheep CRC relating to the use of better genetics using ASBVs yielded an additional \$10-15/ewe/year income after 10 years of genetic gain. This increase in income was achieved by selecting sires that were superior for the traits important to the Merino enterprise and incorporating the compounding advantage gained through selection of ewes based on measurement rather than just culling on age. Incorporate some management strategies to improve lamb survival through both ewe nutrition and Condition Score monitoring and the improvement in efficiencies and profitability of the enterprise becomes even more

significant.

Improving production per unit of labour and achieving it with less personal risk and better time utilisation is the secret to the future of our rural industries. The opportunities that exist within sheep operations to achieve this goal is equal to that currently enjoyed by the cropping sector and the delivery of targeted workshops and group education programs is making the sheep industry a more efficient and profitable enterprise for producers. Working smarter not harder is essential if we are to increase the levels of production and profitability within our sheep industry.



Work smarter ... take advantage of workshops, such as FarmLink's Managing Ewes Workshop held late last year.





It is estimated that the cost to the Australian economy from the agricultural impacts of weeds is in the vicinity of \$4 billion per annum

- www.weeds.org.au



Embrace Farm Biosecurity – it's up to you!

Biosecurity ... traditionally biosecurity hasn't been an exciting topic of conversation for farmers, but a series of workshops planned for early April are aimed at breaking down the stigma, and arming landholders with real, practical and valuable tips which can help you protect your farm, family and livelihood from biosecurity risks.

The Farm Biosecurity workshops have a simple theme – they're about reality. The reality is that if you have a biosecurity breach on your property (think about the cost to you of spraying to control wild radish which was brought onto your place by a visitor's ute; or your rams becoming sterile and lambs being aborted because of brucellosis introduced through those new sheep you bought last season). These are all costs which can be avoided.

A team consisting of Riverina Local Land Services, Plant Health Australia, Livestock Biosecurity Network and FarmLink has met to plan the half-day workshops, which are to be held over three days – April 4, 5 and 6 - at Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre. The workshops will be repeated each day, with morning and afternoon options to try and cater for all landholders so everyone can have

the opportunity to attend.

The workshops are being developed around a series of real case studies - biosecurity problems which have occurred – and participants will be guided through what steps could have been taken to avoid the problems, how to handle a situation if it occurs on your property. Scenarios will be covered for croppers, livestock producers and mixed farmers. Hands-on, practical sessions will be included, with ram inspections and machinery checks proposed.

Material will be distributed at the workshops for participants to take home, including practical tools and procedures which can be taken home and introduced to your farming operation.

Updated information on the workshops will be distributed to FarmLink members as they are developed, and will be available via our website www.farmlink.com.au, Facebook and Twitter.

You can also register your interest via farmlink@farmlink.com.au to be updated on the workshop details.



Malcolm Joins the Team

It's a sign!

FarmLink members will soon have the opportunity to wear their membership on their sleeve – well front gate actually!



FarmLink farm gate signs are a part of the Farmer Membership package benefits and they're now in stock at our TAIC offices, straight from the creative workshop of Irvine Signs in Temora. While we're happy to send the signs out to you all, we'd love it if you were to pop in, say hello and pick yours up, or grab it from the front office at one of the many events we've got coming up here at TAIC.



FarmLink's Malcolm Murdoch with the new FarmLink membership signs, coming to a farm gate near you!

SM4Ag

Take your Social Media skills to the next level

Come and look at the different social media tools you can use in agriculture or business in a practical skills session which will cover getting set-up, started off and getting the best from platforms such as →   

Explore social media and mobile technology use in agriculture, with Professor Lisa Given of the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University, in partnership with the Graham Centre. Tell her about your perceptions of mobile technology and how it fits into your work, including what apps you use

> Tuesday, March 15 | Temora Ag Innovation Centre | 9am - 12noon | FREE
> RSVP Friday, March 11 | farmlink@farmlink.com.au



The Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee at Charles Sturt University has approved this project

Satellite Flock ewes joined to industry leading sires

Key progress has occurred in the Satellite Flock project being hosted at Temora Innovation Centre by Murray Long of Clear View Consulting under the Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Resource Flock Database, collecting data on DNA predictions.

Artificial Insemination of 230 White Suffolk Ewes took place on February 4 to a selection of Poll Dorset, White Suffolk, Southdown and Suffolk sires which were nominated from studs throughout the industry. Extensive measurement will be conducted on the lambs produced from this joining. They will be sent to a processor where a range of carcass evaluations will be conducted including lean meat yield, Intra muscular fat, tenderness, fatty acid profile and nutritional content, and this information will be fed into the MLA funded Resource Flock Database. FarmLink Chief Executive Officer, Cindy Cassidy, said the association with Clear View Consulting provided FarmLink with the perfect opportunity to further develop its strength in livestock research, development and extension. Mr Long gained the contract to conduct the project on behalf of TAIC and FarmLink, following on from his long association with Sheep CRC.

"With Murray developing one of the first Satellite Flocks under the MLA Resource Flock Database, it is a wonderful opportunity for FarmLink to be involved in exciting research which will not only benefit our members, but the sheep industry Australia-wide," Ms Cassidy said. "A lot of our members include livestock as an important part of their farming operation, and we strive to be involved in the research, development and extension of projects which will allow them to improve efficiency and productivity with an eye on long term sustainability."

"Murray Long is very highly regarded in the sheep industry, and having him managing the Satellite Flock will be invaluable. We look forward to Murray embarking upon this new project very soon, with the ewes to be joined next month."

Mr Long explained the Resource Flock was formerly the Sheep CRC Information Nucleus Flock (INF) that was the basis for the development of genomic testing covering the range of traits that is now available for use within the industry, including hard to measure traits such as those relating to Meat Eating Quality.



"It is now funded by MLA to ensure continuation beyond Sheep CRC and on to 2020 and is essential in maintaining the future of DNA predictions for all the traits being evaluated, especially the hard to measure traits."

"These flocks are the 'sheep behind the research' and 150 new young sires are tested each year. The information or DNA predictions need to be continually updated to maintain the accuracy of the relationships between the prediction and the actual trait being measured, especially as new young sires are introduced into the sheep flock."

The Resource Flocks are managed by the University of New England at Armidale (Kirby) and by the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia, at Katanning.

"The development of a Satellite Flock is the vision of the future where research stations and commercial operations work together to provide valuable information along with the opportunities to provide additional research opportunities into other areas. Once the concept is tested, it may be expanded to include a wider range of commercial operations," Mr Long explained.

Commonwealth Bank Agribusiness Team Members



FarmLink has enjoyed a partnership with principal sponsor Commonwealth Bank Agribusiness over many years, and is continuing to strengthen the relationship between the two entities, aimed at developing strategies which will benefit FarmLink members across the region. We're continuing to introduce members of the Commonwealth Bank Agribusiness team via The Link, and in this Autumn 2016 edition would like you to meet Angus Swann.

Angus grew up on a mixed grazing farm and vineyard in the South East of South Australia. "The Penfolds wine company purchased the vineyard from Mum and Dad which allowed them to relocate to Strathalbyn in the Adelaide Hills to a mixed farm with more reliable rainfall. The farm has since been sold as part of succession planning, due to me and my brothers pursuing other careers." His parents are now retired from farming in South Australia and now live in Adelaide ("Go the Crows").

While Angus saw the sale of the family farm as disappointing, it also created many other opportunities for him to be in the services to agriculture industry including agronomy, chemical sales, funds

management and agricultural banking. His career in agriculture was spring boarded by attending Wagga Ag Collage in the late 1990s. Angus now calls Wagga home, but declares he will always have a soft spot for South Australia, the land of the "Free Settlers". He is happily married to a rice farmer's daughter from Leeton and have three children, Tom, Ellie, and Zara.

What does he see as important in his role as an Agribusiness Executive? "Partnership in the client's business and helping them to make better informed decisions. To be the first point of call for clients and being available in all circumstances for a chat."

Angus believes now is a very exciting time in agriculture. "I think the whole Asia/India story is very exciting and I feel like the opportunity has been spoken about for a long time but it's about to really benefit us directly. Also, the fast rate of technology is very exciting and all business' should embrace it. CBA definitely is!"

Out of the office Angus spends most of his time with his family, but also likes the outdoors and doing some exercise. A past meeting saw Angus rub shoulders with Australian entrepreneur Dick Smith, when Angus had the opportunity to fly one of Dick Smith's planes, "with him in the seat next to me". As for the future, if there was one thing he could control? "Mind control would be good sometimes."

Grazing Stubble

Maximise your stubble value

- ▶ To protect soils from erosion maintain a minimum of 70 per cent ground cover (equivalent to 2-3t/ha of cereal stubble cover)
- ▶ Soil compaction by sheep is shallow and easily fixed by disturbance at sowing and has no effect on yields
- ▶ Weed control by livestock is unreliable so spraying weeds is important to conserve stored soil moisture during the summer fallow period
- ▶ Grazing stubble after harvest will have benefits that far outweigh the negative effects in a well managed mixed farming enterprise
- ▶ To estimate stubble load, for every 1t/ha of grain yield about 1.5 /ha of cereal stubble will be left as residue

Sheep grazing cereal stubble is an important tool in mixed farming operations throughout Southern New South Wales

Grazing in stubble retained farming systems

Balancing mixed farming

Grazing stubbles after harvest provides a valuable feed resource and allows pastures to be spelled during summer - forming the basis of mixed farming systems in southern NSW. However, stubble is also essential in order to protect soil from rain-drop impact damage, which breaks up soil surface aggregates and reduces soil water infiltration rates, which increases the likelihood of surface run-off and water erosion. A minimum of 70% ground cover is needed to prevent this from happening. This level of stubble cover is also required to protect soil from wind erosion.

Feed value of stubble

Most mixed farms graze sheep on stubble and grain residues left in cropping paddocks immediately after harvest. There is considerable feed value in the grain that has been blown out the back of the header (80% digestibility), and the leaf material (55% digestibility), but standing straw (30% digestibility) which comprises the bulk of the residue is of little value, except in very dry years. Sheep will quickly use this feed resource eating around 1kg/day.

Livestock will be selective, concentrating their grazing effort on spilt grain, on any germinating "green pick" and on the relatively small proportion of leaf in the stubble. A short period of weight maintenance (about 2-4 weeks) is generally followed by significant weight losses once these higher-quality components of the stubble are exhausted. There will be value in supplementary feeding either grain or a lick such as molasses/

urea to give better utilization of this roughage if stock need to be left on stubbles any longer than 2-4 weeks.

It should be noted that with most modern headers, un-harvested grain is only a small fraction (<1%) of the residues and the first rain event after harvest will see a significant decline in feed value as energy and protein is leached out of residues and broken down by fungi and bacteria.

Farmers have traditionally used livestock to clean up weeds in cropping paddocks, but this is mostly ineffective. Grazing does not completely kill weeds and they still transpire water and tie up N. Weeds in stubble paddocks should be sprayed before stock are allowed to graze them, and all with-holding periods observed. 'Spray-grazing' can be a cost effective way of controlling some species of summer weed e.g. flax leaf flea-bane and melons.



Photo 1 - Sheep grazing and trampling cereal stubble
Photo: Ben White

Grazing to reduce stubble

Livestock will eat some of the stubble, but in the process trample a large proportion putting residues in contact with soil. This has advantages especially in the higher yielding paddocks where residue levels need to be reduced before sowing the next crop in autumn. Managing stubble is a compromise between protecting the soil surface with adequate groundcover and not having too much stubble at sowing time where it can cause machinery blockages and problems with emergence. There are several methods used to reduce stubble either alone or in addition to grazing, including mulching, baling or burning.

This is the first section of a four page fact sheet created by FarmLink as a part of the GRDC National Stubble Initiative (CSP:00174).

The remainder of the fact sheet can be downloaded from the [FarmLink website](http://farmlink.com.au), or contact the office on farmlink.com.au or 02 6980 1333 if you would like us to send a copy to you

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Friday Afternoon Drinks at TAIC



John Harper talks shared his experiences with mental health issues during Friday Arvo Drinks.



El Warren, Dominica Walker, Christine Davey and FarmLink's Lyndal Turner enjoying Friday Arvo Drinks at TAIC.



Toasting the first social event at TAIC for 2016, Friday Arvo Drinks – were Chris Goesch, Dianna Wilson and John Harper.



Andrew Lockley and Pat Morton catch up.



John Harper talks shared his experiences with mental health issues during Friday Arvo Drinks.

Out on the Farm

An update from Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre (TAIC)



Planning, planning, planning

Setting the plan for season 2016 has been a strong focus of work at Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre.

A gathering of trial users was hosted by FarmLink in early February, determining which small plot, paddock scale trials and commercial crops will be planted in which paddocks for the season ahead, and where the livestock will fit into the rotation. Necessary spraying to control summer weeds and volunteer cereals and canola, soil coring and other preparations are also underway as we look forward to seeing what the year brings.

Among the research topics covered at TAIC this year will centre on stubble, carbon, genetics contributing to sheep fertility and lamb productivity, feeding supplements, variety trials and input trials covering wheat, canola and barley and nitrogen research.

Coupled with a range of FarmLink events and external events hosted by organisations taking advantage of the TAIC conference facilities, the early part of 2016 will see a lot of activity at the innovation centre which has been the home of agricultural research for over 100 years.

Diary

- March 9 – Industry tour, visiting TAIC & other Temora venues
- March 15 – social media workshop SM4Ag
- March 18 – Grain Growers ProductionWise Workshop; FarmLink Annual General Meeting; James Hunt farewell BBQ
- April 4, 5 and 6 – Farm Biosecurity Workshops
- May 25 – Partners in Grain workshop
- June – Precision Ag Expo
- September 2 – FarmLink Open Day
- September 20-22 - Henty Machinery Field Days
- September 28-30 – Universities Crop Competition

Current Projects

- GRDC Crop Sequencing (CSP-00146)
- GRDC/Department of Agriculture Cropfacts Soil Carbon (CRF00002)
- GRDC Early Sowing (CSP-00178)
- GRDC Harvest weed seed control in the Southern region (2015.03.06D)
- GRDC Managing Subsoil acidity (GRDC DAN00206)
- GRDC Micronutrient Deficiency (DAS000146)
- GRDC Regional Soil Testing (DAN0000168)
- GRDC Stubble Initiative (CSP-00174)
- GRDC Strategic Tillage (DAN00152)
- FarmLink Moisture Network and Yield Prophet
- Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Resource Flock Database Satellite Flock
- CSU/FarmLink Hardseeded Legume Grazing Trial

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