

SEARCH CRITERIA

Model	Model A: Empowerment Model
Industry	Beef, Lamb, Wool
Focus/Level	Industry
Outcomes	Finding resources from others, Building management skills
Special Interest Groups	Other

1. PROJECT TITLE:

Producer Initiated Research and Development

2. FUNDERS:

Red meat producers' research levy
Wool producers' research levy (up until 2001)
Federal government grants

3. PROVIDERS:

Government agency staff
University research staff
Private consultants

4. KEY CONTACTS:

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5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY:

Producer Initiated Research and development groups occur throughout Australia in rural areas that produce red meat and wool. Each year applications for funding are called for projects from rural producers groups who need up to \$10 000 to carry out on farm trials. Below is a summarised list of the type of funded projects that have completed and have been written up for the outcomes report 3 project OUTCOMES books have been produced by MLA and the 4th will be published later in 2002. Projects are for 2 years with some options to extend or run back to back PIRDS

1997/8 – New South Wales

Oberon Lamb Marketing Group
Lamb Marketing

Angus Society of Australia
Increasing the Adoption of BREEDPLAN EBVs

Shorthorn Youth Club of Australia
Assessment and Evaluation of Beef Cattle

Central Tablelands KIT (keep in touch) Group
Sustainable Pastures

1997/8 Queensland

Monto Branch Beef Improvement Assoc
Value based marketing workshop

1997/8 South Australia

Kangaroo Island Prime Lamb Producers Group
Finishing and marketing of Kangaroo Island Prime Lamb

Greenways Lamb Group
Mineral Nutrition for Finishing Lambs

South West Qld and NE SA Pastoral Group
Increasing Beef Production Knowledge

Geranium Lamb Group
Barriers Limiting Sheep Meat Productivity

1997/8 Victoria

South West Prime Lamb Group
Effective Lamb Production in South West Victoria

West Midlands Tagasaste Production Group - Beef
Beef Finishing on Tagasaste

1997/8 Tasmania

Tasmanian Beef Cattle Assessment Improvement Group
Improving Animal Condition Assessment Skills

98/V01 Trafalgar Beef Producers Group
Market Options for Beef

1997/8 Western Australia

Australian Poll Dorset Association WA Branch
High/Low LAMBPLAN Comparison

Previous wool PIRDS

Australian Wool Innovations Pty Ltd no longer provides funds for on farm producer research through the PIRD program, however a view of headlines of projects from previous PIRD project will give the reader an idea of their depth and range.

Woolgrowers target lamb mortality
Trial heralds footrot breakthrough
Bringing new life to arid rangeland pastures
Wether trial reveals profits potential - Franklin NSW/SA
Lamb shearing trial promises huge profits leap - KISPG – SA/Vic
Genetics trial revolutionises profitability
Growers discover path to fewer dags in sheep
Big savings on unnecessary supplements

New discovery in rangeland sheep nutrition
Growers investigate flystrike solution - Noorama – Qld
Growers join forces against OJD
Growers eliminate dag myth - Wando - Vic/Tas
Growers awaken to superfine potential - WASWA – WA/Qld
Woolgrowers monitor performance for better results

6. PROJECT CONTEXT:

The PIRD scheme was an initiative of the Meat Research Corporation, now Meat & Livestock Australia, and commenced in 1993 to meet the industry's request for greater producer involvement in research and development and to assist producers to tackle local issues. Producers were asked to nominate research projects that they could carry out on their farms and then apply for grants of up to \$10 000 to conduct trials. To date there have been more than 300 producer groups obtaining PIRD funding and Welsman (2001) estimates that 20 000 producers have had some contact (direct and indirect) with PIRDS.

To be eligible for funding, the projects must:

- be a producer group effort
- have direct value for the beef, sheep or goat meat activities of the group members
- be practical and technically sound
- have clear objectives, with a means for achieving a successful outcome
- have group members who indicate a significant personal commitment to the project
- have members who are physically involved in the project
- be completed within two years, and groups must be willing to share their information with others in the industry.

7. PROJECT NICHE (SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES):

The project niche is the red meat producers (beef, sheep/lamb and goat). The objective of the PIRD program is to bring producers together so that they conduct their own research and development to address everyday problems and find practical solutions

There is also an obligation to assist in disseminated the results to all industry levy payers

8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:

The approach is to make funds available to groups of producers so that they can carry out their own research. The criteria for eligibility are as follows:

- project must be a producer group effort (PIRD funding is not available to individuals – only to producer groups)
- project must have direct value for the beef, sheep or goatmeat activities of the group members
- project must be practical and technically sound
- project must have clear objectives, with a means for achieving a successful outcome
- group members must indicate a significant personal commitment to the project
- members must be physically involved in the project

PIRD projects must be completed within two years, and groups must be willing to share their information with others in the industry.

9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES:

This group is supported by a funded coordinator.

10. PROCESS/METHODS USED:

The PIRD website describes the processes used as based on group interaction. Group motivation and benefit is a major feature of this program:

Website description:

The PIRD philosophy employs group interaction and participation in on-property research and development. In this way producers have access to practical and relevant project outcomes as well as increased control over how their research and development levies are used.

PIRDs are also based on 'learning by doing', with groups needing to show most members actively participating in the project. For that reason PIRD funding is available to self-help producer groups that want to improve the profitability of members by identifying a problem and developing a planned solution. Sometimes answers are not found but benefits flow even from these projects.

Groups must be committed to success and want the benefits of their work to flow onto others.

PIRD Coordinator Gerald Martin, says PIRD funding is simply about groups initiating and managing their own research and development. "Through PIRDs, meat producers use their own levies to address the challenges they have identified." PIRD projects do not have to fit into a specific category, rather, the goal of the PIRD initiative is to have producer and grower groups conduct their own research into areas that will benefit their meat businesses.

"Meat producer groups are limited only by their imagination and the group's ability to develop the project to show that it can earn extra profits for producers".

"If your producer group can specify a need, the anticipated benefit to the group members, how the problem can be solved and the commitment of the participants, then you're on your way."

11. IMPACTS TO DATE (AND EVALUATION APPROACHES USED):

Welsman (2001) reported that ,since 1993, there have been 125 completed PIRDs, 56 active and 51 new applications for 2001. She also mentioned that a number did not start or were cancelled along the way.

There have been two major evaluation of impact of PIRD projects carried out by (Jim Lees, 1997) and Welsman (2001). The Lees report finding was inconclusive about the contribution PIRD projects were making to the overall profitability of the meat industry. However, where it made its contribution was to the interest and experience of producers conducting their own research and being confident about setting up and being involved in research projects.

On the other hand the Welsman report found that there was substantial contribution to the industry and to individual producers. The measure of direct or leveraged return was calculated by Collins on 10 projects using results and reasonable

adoption assumptions. They calculated that the estimate Net Present Value of return (1998) was \$11 million from these 10 PIRDS only.

An evaluation strategy was developed (Roberts 1999) so that project managers could carry out their own evaluations. The successful use of this process is also inconclusive although the information collected in the process of its development indicated that project managers gradually learned about evaluation by taking part in the development process and valued the regular contact from an evaluator to talk about their - the problems as well as the successes.

Their confidence with research could be greatly enhanced in the evaluation process when indirect achievements such as learning how to run a project were pointed out to them.

12. EFFECTIVENESS:

Coverage of target group

Information from the Welsman report (2001) indicates that up to 20 000 meat producers would have been involved in some way with a PIRDS project. This represents an estimated 20% of the red meat producers of Australia.

Ability to create change

The potential to create change is great because PIRD projects introduce several of factors that extension has grappled with in the past. These are implementation of participatory research where rural producers determine and carry out on farm research. The research group involves experts in appropriate fields but the research project is managed by rural producers. PIRD projects also expect that farmer will inform other farmers of the research results. Finally, the adoption of new, appropriate technology adopted is also an area that is addressed by PIRD projects.

The Welsman report found that while some PIRD projects break new research ground, it is more often that they test new technology and apply it thus having the effect of making it more acceptable to the wider, more cautious, producers. She also found that PIRD had a very valuable legacy of improved attitude to "new technologies"

Ability to create learning communities

PIRD project create learning communities. The insistence that PIRD projects are group based provides a good environment for the development of learning communities. The Central Tablelands KIT group went beyond a learning community and also created a support group for itself. KIT is an acronym for keeping in touch. Some of the maverick producers in that area found themselves a little on the outer socially because of their innovative ideas and willingness to try what seemed like odd ideas to their friends and neighbours. To ensure that they support each other they kept in touch after the project ended.

Ability to create support of each other in the farming target group

There is no doubt that the PIRD does this not just because of the example of KIT above. Many projects include like minded farmers who enjoy working together on project that suit the farming style and enquiring style.

13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:

Project outcomes are on the website: www.pird.com.au

Centre for International Economics for MLA Evaluation of benefits from MLA programs, 2000.

Collins DJ & BA, 1998, *Assessment of the Economic Impact of PIRDS*, for MRC June.

Lees, Jim, Report of the Assessment of the Performance of PIRD Projects, 1996, 1997, 2000)

MLA On-farm Research in Progress, November 1999

MLA On-farm Research Results – New Products and Services for Beef and Lamb Producers

QDPI Peter Smith, Dominic Marshall, An Evaluation of the PDS Project, June 1996.

Roberts, Kate, 1999a *Project Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines*: Developed for PIRD Projects, The Rural Extension Centre - University of Queensland; Meat and Livestock Australia and The Woolmark Company.

Roberts, Kate, 1999b *Development of an Evaluation Strategy for PIRD Projects*, The Rural Extension Centre - University of Queensland.

Story, Don 2000, MLA PIRD Project Outcomes

Welsman, Sandra 2001, *PIRD Strategic Review*,

14. ISSUES:

Issues that face the PIRD program are the assurance of on going funding and the expansion into other industries. The wool industry contributed to PIRDS for 5 years (1996 – 2001) but then withdrew funding because it was not convinced by either the value of on farm research or the return on investment.

It was hoped that PIRDS would also expand into the dairy industry but that has not happened either. The dairy industry has a number of initiatives such as its regional dairy program that have similar aims with regard to on farm research. The dairy industry is not so focussed on group work.

Issues that farmers raised are to do with the difficulty of applying for funds, of knowing what projects are acceptable, and some find (or did not allow for) onerous the obligation to extend the results of their findings and their research experience to other farmers. I suppose this is understandable when there may have been some cynicism of the experiment in the first place for friends and neighbours.

15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:

The Welsman report found that the PIRD program was worthwhile in terms of helping producers to carry out research on their own farms.

The process of involving farmers in the development of an evaluation strategy helped farmers assess their projects and look at their projects in a new light where they were not just focussed on the objective of their project but also took into account their own

learning as well. This synergistic relationship showed the value of working together (Roberts 1999b)

16. REVIEW METHODS:

The review methods used to date for the PIRD program are:

Economic analyses

Project reviews – internally and by an external reviewer.

An external review of PIRD as a strategy.