

SEARCH CRITERIA

Model	Model A: Empowerment Model
Industry	Wool
Focus/Level	Industry
Outcomes	Building individual confidence, Building management skills
Special Interest Groups	Other

1. PROJECT TITLE:

Bestprac

2. FUNDERS:

Australian Wool Innovation Pty Ltd (formerly the Woolmark Company),
 Department of Primary Industries, Queensland
 Department of Agriculture, Western Australia
 New South Wales Agriculture

3. PROVIDERS:

Department of Primary Industries, Queensland
 Facilitators, coordinators, administrative support, training
 Department of Agriculture, Western Australia
 Facilitators, coordinators, administrative support, training
 New South Wales Agriculture
 Facilitators, coordinators, administrative support
 Rural Directions
 Facilitator, SA coordinator
 Primary Industries South Australia
 Facilitator
 Devine Rural Consulting
 Facilitator
 Rural Extension Centre
 Evaluation

4. KEY CONTACTS:

Paul Swan, AWI: paulswan@woolinnovation.com.au
 David Sparks, DPI, Qld. David.Sparks@dpi.qld.gov.au
 Kathryn Egerton Warburton DAWA kegerton@agric.wa.gov.au
 David Heinjus, Rural Directions dheinjus@ruraldirections.com

5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY:

Rangelands wool industry targeting profitability of the wool producer business

6. PROJECT CONTEXT:

Bestprac began in 1994 in the Australian rangelands (semi arid lands) to make an attempt to increase profits from wool by 30% in 10% of producers from this part of Australia. By the end of the first phase (November 2001) there were over 200 (6.7%) pastoralists from 33 groups involved. Phase I had a total budget of \$3.2m. where \$1.7m was provided by the Woolmark Company and the remainder by three government agencies. A second phase is being negotiated.

7. PROJECT NICHE (SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES):

The project began with its main objective being to:

Improve the financial efficiency of 10% of rangeland woolgrowers by 30% by the year 2005. This is projected to have a total on-farm benefit of \$16,585 per farm.

However, the intention was that this objective be achieved through a process of continuous improvement. Therefore, the objective was changed to better reflect the intentions of the project. The new objectives were:

- a network of pastoralists who have empowered themselves to solve their own management problems by identifying constraints and then benchmarking their performance against local best practices in rangeland management
- identified potential management packages for the major rangeland vegetation classes which will assist on-farm decision making by pastoralists
- a standardised protocol for evaluating the immediate and longer-term financial benefits of best practice in rangeland woolgrowing enterprises
- a rangeland communications strategy for sharing information between Bestprac grower groups and other pastoralists
- established a contact list of pastoralists and rangeland researchers for ongoing communication with The Woolmark Company (TWC) about Bestprac activities
- developed a positive ethos of continuing change within the wool industry as an opportunity of meeting the challenges of new technologies and the threats of community pressures on the use of the rangelands.

8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:

The philosophical approach in this program was to facilitate the achievement of:

- the preferred future for woolgrowers and their families;
- a profitable industry;
- an industry that is sustainable over the long-term;
- a self-reliant industry ;
- an industry that woolgrowers and their families can be proud of; and
- an industry that continues to support family involvement and values.

9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES:

The resources that this program used were:

A trained facilitator for each group (33 groups) and each group met usually every three months although some met more frequently. Administrative and travel support for each facilitator was also a cost.

Operating funds for each group of \$7 000.

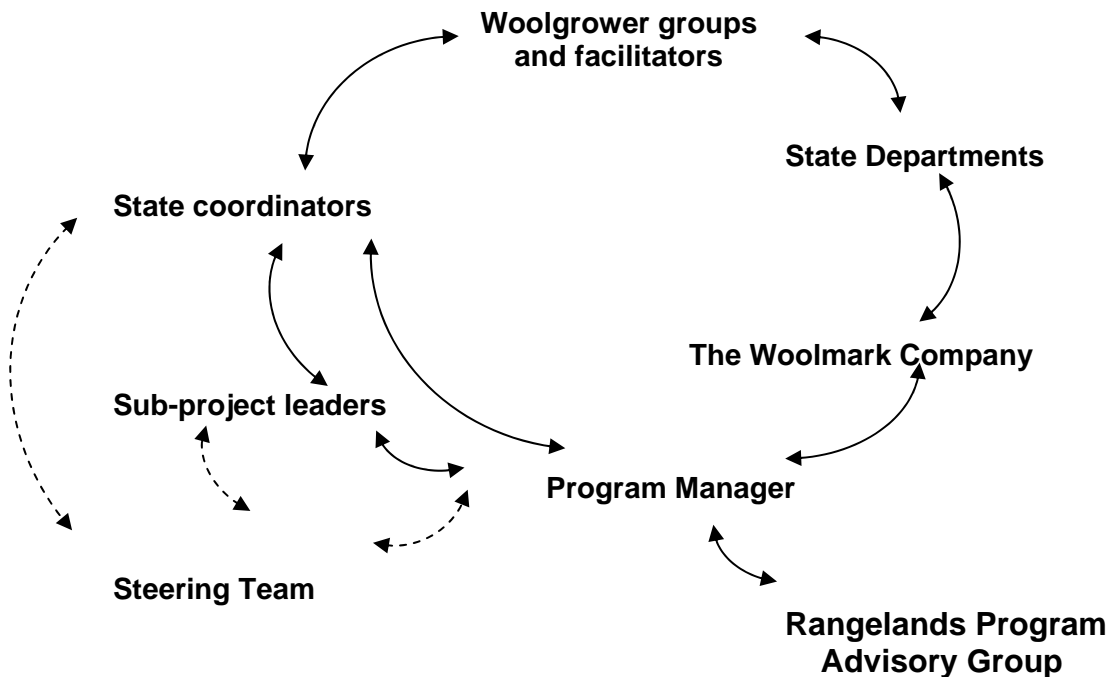
A steering committee that met at least twice a year face to face.

State coordinators for the four states involved (Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia).

A training team; and

An evaluator.

Total costs for the program per annum in the years 1999 – 2001 were approximately \$500 000



This diagrammatic representation of the Bestprac management structure was an attempt to show that it was a flat, circular structure. Not a hierarchy

10. PROCESS/METHODS USED:

Bestprac is a self-directed project in which groups of neighbouring woolgrowers were guided by a facilitator into an ongoing learning program. The learning program followed a six step continuous improvement & innovation (CI&I) process devised by Richard Clark from the Rural Extension Centre (Queensland). This process arises from the action research and action learning literature.

Use of this process helped ensure that Bestprac was owned and directed by woolgrowers and engaged in a process of self learning and review.

The modifications to action research devised by Clark et al. introduced a range of different techniques that could be used to analyse business performance from the planning stage. Benchmarking and identifying and focussing on key practices that would make the greatest difference was another feature of Bestprac.

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

- The Bestprac network currently consists of 4 groups in South Australia, 3 in Western Australia, 16 in Queensland and 10 in New South Wales. There are 202 businesses involved in the network. 30 in South Australia, 16 in Western Australia, 89 in Queensland and 67 in New South Wales. This represents nearly 7% of Australia's rangeland wool producers.

- Network of Bestprac facilitators – the current network involves 21 facilitators in Queensland, 3 facilitators in South Australia, 6 in New South Wales and 2 in Western Australia. There are an additional 5 facilitators in Western Australia, 2 in Queensland and 9 in New South Wales who are trained or currently being trained. This facilitation network has the capacity to expand the current Bestprac network.
- All businesses include husband and wife teams so participation involves 12 – 15 people per group activity. Average group size is 6.7 businesses.
- Producers greatly valued the opportunity to talk to each other about running their enterprises and sharing “real” knowledge rather than ideal statements.
- Evaluation of Bestprac found that profit increases to meet the main objective were made in many cases. Changes producers made to practice came from talking to each other and were largely operational rather than technological innovation. The value of the CI&I process was not being felt as yet because it was a process used by facilitators to guide the groups rather than given to group members.

12. EFFECTIVENESS:

Coverage of target group

Because of the sensitive nature of some of the financial material discussed at the meetings, group membership is closed rather than open. That is to say that members are invited to join the group and there is little opportunity for members of the public to attend ad hoc. The coverage is narrow at this stage but beneficial flow-on effects have been documented for some groups in Queensland.

Ability to create change

Bestprac has already demonstrated that it can create change and do that quickly as producers learn from each other about effective and efficient means of operating. It has an even greater potential to create long lasting change as more producers become familiar with the CI&I process and the tools and techniques associated with it.

Ability to create learning communities

There is no doubt that Bestprac creates long lasting and strong learning communities. That is its charter and in that it has been very successful. Anecdotal evidence from evaluations suggests that the women in the groups play a major role in creating learning environments.

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

Bestprac has created a supportive network for its own members. It has not gone much beyond the direct membership to create support.

13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:

Evaluation reports are available from Australian Wool Innovation

Kathryn Egerton-Warburton and David Sparks, Bestprac: Focused action to impact on performance in the rangeland wool industry, APEN 2001 International Conference Refereed Proceedings, pp76 – 82.

Jordan, D., Morris, N., O’Dempsey, N. and Miller, D. (1997) Bestprac – A learning partnership between producers and QDPI, Second Australasia Pacific Extension Conference, Vol 1, pp 673 – 681.

Copies of the Bestprac newsletter, "The Bestprac Bulletin", are available from the Sheep and Wool Institute (Queensland Department of Primary Industries).

14. ISSUES:

Two main issues face Bestprac. The first is approval for a second phase and the second is a greater awareness by Bestprac members of the process and the tools and techniques that underpin Bestprac.

15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:

Bestprac showed that it was very useful for wool producers supporting each other particularly in times of great adversity such as the drought in South Australia.

It was also very effective in bringing farming families together in learning communities and that has been a great strength for the women in farming when compared to other industries.

16. REVIEW METHODS:

The annual evaluation activities for Bestprac were an evaluation of some of the major activities such as the training and some of the group activities such as the benchmarking. There was also an evaluation of impact. That is to say, what were producers doing differently as a result of being involved in Bestprac.