



Butts in the Burdekin Dry Tropics

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Improving Burdekin Beef Profits

By Terry Butts

Imagine 10 years ago (or even two) neighboring graziers sitting around a table not merely discussing their financial details, but scrutinizing their intimate banking and financial statements as well.

While cattlemen from older generations might not believe, and scoff at the thought, such was the case last week in Charters Towers. Where 25 such cattle graziers, from all parts of the district met, not merely to discuss their relative finances, but to compare management strategies and be briefed by a team of modern day experts of the rapidly changing beef growing industry.

It is the modern day approach to cattle producing and the cattlemen are all part of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management and DPI&F project titled Research to Reality - a model based on the highly successful national and award winning concept - the Beef CRC's Beef Profit Partnerships whose initiative is to improve beef business profits by at least five per cent in two years.

Research to Reality, the local version of Beef Profit Partnerships was developed two years ago by Charters Towers based DPI &F Senior Project Officer Brigid Nelson and last week's conference was the celebration of round one. Brigid, the project leader, admits there were teething problems when the idea was first mooted among the beef extension community, but she was at total ease last Wednesday.

The vibes, and very visible camaraderie among the graziers, indicated it's a project well and truly worth the early agonizing and effort.

"The outcomes couldn't have been better," said Brigid as she enthusiastically recounted how the producers had supported each other, and adapted new management strategies in their own backyards.

"The whole idea of the project is to give producers the skills and the capacity to make decisions on their properties so they can improve sustainability and profitability. And help each other."

It is really that simple.

The project, funded by not-for-profit Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM, is divided into three areas, Belyando, Collinsville and Northern Speargrass. Most of the project's graziers, though some severely hindered by the heavy rains in the Belyando River area, made it to the two day conference at which they gave and discussed individual summaries of their enterprise profit indicators over the preceding two financial years.

According to Mrs. Nelson there were some very positive outcomes, with all participants eagerly anticipating round two of the project.

“They're receiving tailored support for implementation of their case study projects. These include innovative property development design for integration of wet season spelling into the beef business, and investigation into animal nutrition for improving first calf heifer performance”, she said.

Grazier discussion also focused on how feeding and breeding patterns between the wet and dry seasons are expected to undergo some change in spite of a feared, but generally expected, hike in the cost of molasses and its transport, particularly to some of the outlying stations.

For more information go to the BDTNRM website www.bdtprm.org.au.