

Know your audience to increase their rate of practice change – Lifetime Wool as an example

Gus Rose, Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia
Carolyn Kabore, Kazresearch

ABSTRACT

The Lifetime Wool (LTW) project has developed guidelines that will help wool producers increase profit from Merino ewes and their progeny. A survey of wool producers has established a target audience willing to change ewe management. These wool producers are more aware of LTW and its messages and use consultants, sheep producer groups and pregnancy scanners more than those wool producers less willing to change. The most effective way increase the coverage to these willing wool producers is to include consultants, sheep producer groups and pregnancy scanners in the communication of the guidelines.

AIMS

LTW has developed guidelines to manage the nutrition of Merino ewes to meet production targets for themselves and their progeny. These guidelines will increase profit from sheep and increase wool producers' confidence when making ewe management decisions (1). Now that the research is over the priority for LTW is to communicate the benefits of these guidelines to wool producers. Historically the adoption of pasture and livestock assessment skills in Australia has been low (2). To improve the likelihood of adoption of the LTW guidelines the communication needs to target the wool producers that are more willing to change their ewe management. The hypothesis tested in this paper is that by working with wool producers willing to change, LTW can find better ways to deliver the guidelines.

METHOD

A phone survey was done with 1738 wool producers across Southern Australia. All participants surveyed had more than 500 sheep. Participants were asked how willing they are to change five aspects of their management of Merino ewes on a quantitative scale. This willingness to change was used to allocate each wool producer to the categories in figure 1. Those that were most willing to change or have already changed all 5 aspects of their ewe management were allocated to the innovators category (technology enthusiasts). Those that were not willing to change anything were allocated to the laggard category. The target audience for the Lifetime Wool project are the early adoptors and the first 12.5% of the early majority (cautious and pragmatic adoptors); a total of 25%. The early majority are a priority for LTW because these wool producers are willing to change but have not been involved in the project. These wool producers were also asked questions to benchmark knowledge and current practice when managing their ewes. There were also questions about where they get information about sheep management. The target audience does not include innovators because it is likely that they have already had involvement with LTW.

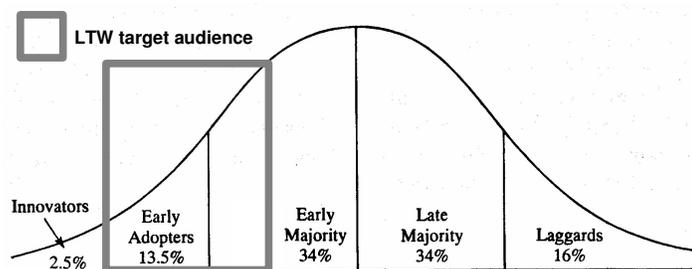


Figure 1. Adopter categorisation based on how quickly an individual adopts an innovation. Innovators are the first and laggards are the last to adopt an innovation (3).

RESULTS

The target audience for Lifetime Wool have more sheep ($p < 0.001$) than wool producers not in the target audience (table 1). They are more likely to use consultants and be a member of a sheep producer group than those not in the target audience (table 1). There are wool producers in the target

audience that are aware of LTW and doing the recommended practices but none of the target audience are doing all recommended practices (table 1).

Table 1. Comparison in the characteristics of wool producers in the LTW target audience and those not in the target audience.

Characteristic	Target audience (n = 448)	Not target audience* (n = 1243)
Average no. sheep	4594	3891
Use consultants	244 (54%)	418 (34%)
Member of sheep producer group	76 (17%)	76 (5%)
Aware of LTW project	235 (52%)	440 (35%)
<i>Knowledge (agree with the statements below)</i>		
You need to put your hands on ewes or weigh them to accurately assess their body condition	323 (72%)	449 (40%)
Improving the condition of a ewe during pregnancy and early lactation can increase the fleece weight in progeny	384 (76%)	936 (75%)
Improving the condition of a ewe during pregnancy and early lactation can decrease the fibre diameter of progeny wool	162 (36%)	286 (23%)
It is profitable to scan for twin bearing ewes and run them as a separate mob	323 (72%)	499 (40%)
<i>Current practice</i>		
Scan ewes for pregnancy	229 (51%)	307 (25%)
Scan ewes for twins and separate into different mobs	138 (31%)	103 (8%)
Weigh, condition score or fat score ewes for targets at joining and lambing and separate based on condition	164 (37%)	150 (12%)
Formal assessment of pasture or pasture growth rate	212 (47%)	222 (18%)

* Not target audience does not include innovators

CONCLUSION

The communication of LTW guidelines will include consultants, sheep producer groups and pregnancy scanners because this will provide better coverage of the target audience. The communication will also emphasise the information that the target audience know less about. For example, only 36% of the target audience are aware that improved ewe condition during pregnancy will decrease the fibre diameter of progeny. LTW is confident that the target audience are in a position to use the guidelines that will help them increase their profit from sheep.

KEY WORDS

Target audience, extension, ewe management, Lifetime Wool

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LTW is funded by AWI, DPI Vic, DAFWA, SARDI, DPI NSW, DPI Tas., Austral Park & Billandri Merino Stud and 120 woolproducers across southern Australia.

Paper reviewed by: Perry Dolling, Chris Oldham and Andrew Thompson.

REFERENCES

- (1) Curnow, M.C., Oldham, C.M., Thompson, A.N. 2006. Lifetime Wool – Ewe management guidelines. Proc Agribusiness Sheep Updates 06 (These proceedings).
- (2) Bell, A.K., Allan, C.J. 2000. PROGRAZE – an extension package in grazing and pasture management. *Aust. J. Exp. Agric.*, 40: 325-330.
- (3) Rogers, E.V. 1995. Diffusion of Innovations. The Free Press, New York