

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir

### PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION TO WESTERN QUEENSLAND GRAZIERS

I read with interest Simon Campbell's review of 'Managing Mitchell Grass — A grazier's guide' in Volume 32 of *Tropical Grasslands*. He raised a number of pertinent questions about presentation of information to graziers and reflected on the need for market research to improve the use of this and similar management information.

In October 1996, I sent a survey to 106 graziers in central-western Queensland to find out what livestock nutrition topics they were interested in and how they would prefer that information to be presented. The graziers were selected on their geographical location and previous contact with local DPI officers. Part of the survey asked respondents to 'tick your preferred method or methods of receiving information about these topics.' Their response is recorded in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Preferred methods of receiving information.

Method	Percentage of respondents indicating a preference
Booklet	77
Handouts (loose leaf notes)	42
Full-day Field days	40
Half-day Field Days — morning	15
Half-day Field Days — afternoon	13
Two-day Field Days or Seminars	6
Series of 2 hour Seminars	13
Farm Notes	38
Other	13

The 45% response rate was good for surveys of this type and indicated the importance that graziers placed on receiving more information about livestock nutrition. Most respondents indicated more than one preferred method (avg. 2.5) and this suggests that there may be a variety of suitable methods to deliver information effectively to that audience. The booklet format was clearly preferred (Table 1) with handouts, full-day field days and farm notes favoured by about 40% of the respondents. Two-day field days were

the least favoured, due to the time demands required to attend such events.

Other methods nominated by graziers included: computer programs; discussion evenings on-property; a combination of a seminar with handouts, questions and discussion; radio broadcasts; DPI newsletters; videos; and on-farm 'one-to-one' visits.

Some comments that were made on the survey included:

- Ian Partridge's *Managing Mitchell Grass* and *Managing Native Pastures* are excellent and most useful.
- The *Drought Management Handbook for North Queensland* by DPI is excellent.
- I find it very difficult in attending field days and the idea of a video . . . would enable me to become up to date . . . at my own pace as the time becomes available to me.
- All points (topics) of interest — the 'Time Factor' becomes the problem.

It can be concluded from the survey that paper-based formats are still appropriate, at least for disseminating information on livestock nutrition. Other subject matter may require a different approach, or a combination of written and practical 'hands-on' demonstration may be appropriate. Access is a consideration when investigating CD-ROM and Internet formats, given that Information Technology services and equipment in rural areas are still relatively unreliable (W. Easdown — personal communication).

A series of discussion days were held to collect information from western Queensland graziers about their nutritional management practices. This information has been added to previous DPI research work in a booklet called *Livestock Nutrition in Western Queensland*, to be published in May 1998. It is hoped that incorporating grazier knowledge will encourage other graziers to seek out and read the presented information.

Involvement of the target audience in the process of producing and disseminating information is an important strategy for improving the level of readership and application. Although not a guarantee of success, this involvement ultimately points to the information of greatest

utility to that group and can only improve the chance of producing a 'successful' publication.

Consideration should be given to releasing written material at a discussion or field day such that presenters can guide the target audience through the information, demonstrate the application of that information and enable questions to be handled satisfactorily on the day.

I hope this information is of interest to your readers, goes part of the way to answering Simon's questions and will add to his reflections.

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*Editor's comment:* The data presented certainly suggest that graziers in the target area for *Managing Mitchell Grass* see printed material as an important source of information with a booklet format being a preferred option.

## **Fellows of the Tropical Grassland Society of Australia Inc.**

as at 27/3/98

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