Delivery of best weed management practices for meat sheep producers

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Summary Weeds are a major impediment to the production of quality sheep meat. They affect the quality and quantity of the pasture resource base and reduce animal productivity through physical injury and plant toxins consumed in the grazing process. In the past, effective weed control has been achieved through the use of herbicides and regular resowing of pastures. There is a growing realisation that unfavourable economics and environmental impacts now restrict the use of these techniques. The need for integrated strategies is becoming increasingly clear.

This project is aimed at obtaining and validating a producer perspective on the integration and implementation of best weed management practices for lamb and sheep meat producers in Australia.

After several pilot studies, a postal questionnaire targeting 7000 graziers from the meat sheep producing areas of Australia was conducted in January 2004. This survey aimed to identify the general farm characteristics of producers along with the specific weed management strategies they employ. Information on weeds, their impact and their level of infestation was collected. Farm characteristics and control methods will be compared with the reported infestation and impact of weeds to provide a general understanding of successful weed management strategies.

A sample of producers will be selected for on farm validation of the survey results, including ground truthing of weed status and collection of economic information and social indicators. Most importantly an investigation of the use of individual weed control strategies and their integration into the whole farm management system will be undertaken.

The information collected across a number of farms and diverse agronomic areas will allow a deeper understanding of the principles being used by farmers in the adoption and implementation of successful integrated weed management strategies. The findings will ultimately be passed on to sheep meat producers and other graziers to encourage them to implement those best weed management practices which are adaptable to their situation.

Keywords Best management practices, survey, graziers, adoption, questionnaire.