## On-farm Demonstrations

## Expression of Interest - Information for Applicants

## (March 2024)

## Background

Agriculture Victoria in partnership with Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), is conducting a producer demonstration program with an opportunity to establish five new demonstrations. The program is aimed at building productivity and competitiveness in Victoria’s sheep and beef industries by supporting groups of livestock producers to conduct local, on-farm demonstrations addressing specific issues relevant to their group and region.

The demonstrations are conducted in collaboration with BestWool/BestLamb (BWBL), BetterBeef (BB) and other producer groups. Demonstrations selected for this program will receive funding and support from Agriculture Victoria and MLA.

***We are inviting Victorian producer groups to submit an expression of interest (EOI) by 13th May 2024 for another round of on-farm demonstrations.***

## Timelines for applications

| **Step** | **Detail** | **Time** | **Due date** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. EOI Release | Call for Preliminary Proposals (6 weeks) |  | 27th March |
| 1. Preliminary Proposal Preparation | Producer groups respond to EOI and submit completed EOI form by **13th May** | 6 weeks | 13th May  closes |
| 1. Agriculture Victoria & MLA Screening | Agriculture Victoria, MLA shortlist and recommend successful proposals (EOIs). | 3 weeks | May |
| 1. Notification | Successful candidates notified and Agriculture Victoria staff assigned to the project to help develop full project plan in accordance with recommendations. |  | 3rd June |
| 1. Full Project Plan | Full project plan due. | 4 weeks | 1st July |
| 1. Agriculture Victoria Review | Agriculture Victoria, MLA evaluate full project plan and make recommendations for revisions. **(2 weeks)** |  | 15th July |
| 1. Final Approval | Final project approval by Agriculture Victoria and MLA. Project delivery plan completed. Contract development. |  | 22nd July |

**How do the demonstrations work?**

Ideas and topics for demonstrations come from members of producer groups. They involve practical, “hands-on” activities that are focused on demonstrating known research outcomes and new management practices, testing commercially available technologies or investigating potential solutions to problems in local grazing systems. The demonstrations are conducted on group members’ farms (preferably three sites per year) and involve participation by all members through group activities, including skill development, monitoring and discussion of results. The learning arising from these demonstrations will help group members to improve the profitability and robustness of their farming businesses. The project will have support from an Agriculture Victoria extension staff member and a budget of $30,000.

**Why conduct on-farm demonstrations?**

This program is conducted in response to strong interest from producers in hosting or supporting on-farm demonstrations within their local groups. Group members understand that local demonstration sites can provide a focus for the group that will lead to solutions to common on-farm challenges.

Previous experience shows that the process of identifying the key on-farm challenges, developing solutions, and trialling them in a local group environment gives producers ownership over the outcomes and increased confidence to make the changes that will enhance their livestock businesses.

**What type of demonstrations will be supported?**

The demonstrations will focus on one or more of the following areas that align with the priorities of Agriculture Victoria and the Southern Australian Livestock Research Council (SALRC). Priority will be given to ensure at least one of the five demonstrations addresses on-farm emissions. We aim to have a spread of demonstrations across the state, with consideration to existing PDS locations.

Demonstrating farming practices or systems to:

1. manage and adapt to a changing climate or specific regional conditions - including feed gaps, forage quality, rotational grazing, fertiliser efficiency, enterprise mix, optimising calving/ lambing time
2. reduce emissions or emissions intensity, which may include;
   * improving livestock fertility and reproductive efficiency
   * improving lamb and weaner survival
   * improving lamb and weaner growth rates
   * use of proven methane reduction strategies\* (including anti-methanogenic species, high productivity pastures, supplementary feed or commercially available feed additives)
   * soil and fertility management to reduce of Nitrous Oxide emissions
   * strategies to reduce Carbon Dioxide emissions
3. manage animal health and welfare risks resulting from increasing/emerging biosecurity threats in a changing climate e.g. management of barber’s pole worm
4. implement on-farm innovations that improve production and management efficiencies – e.g. recent research findings, genetics, ag tech

\*Focusing on strategies to incorporate into diet and/or measuring production efficiencies - rather than measuring methane emissions

**What is Agriculture Victoria’s role?**

Agriculture Victoria will:

1. Provide technical advice.
2. Assist the group with demonstration design, development of a delivery plan, and with conducting, monitoring, and evaluating the demonstration.
3. Where possible, assist with the provision of the equipment required to monitor the demonstration (e.g. livestock scales, and data recording equipment such as RFID tag readers and Walk Over Weighing panels).
4. Facilitate and provide speakers for group activities associated with the demonstration.
5. Provide linkages with other groups to ensure that our producer networks are getting the most out of the full range of demonstration sites.
6. Share the results of your demonstration with other producers and groups during and beyond the life of the demonstration (e.g. conduct field days, news media, prepare case studies).
7. Manage payment of expenses associated with the demonstration.
8. Assist with reporting milestones, quarterly and final reports.

In situations where specific expertise is not available within Agriculture Victoria, an external consultant will be appointed to the project.

**What is Meat and Livestock Australia’s (MLA) role?**

MLA is co-funding the five demonstrations with Agriculture Victoria and assisting in the selection of projects and communication and promotion of results.

**What is the group’s role?**

Each group is expected to take ownership of its demonstration. This includes identifying the issue or topic, design, set-up, data collection and activities around the demonstration. Evidence of strong group participation and a track record of undertaking projects is required for the demonstration to receive funding.

The group should be willing to open up some extension events associated with the demonstration to producers outside the group.

The group will need to nominate a key contact person to work with Agriculture Victoria.

It is preferred that a minimum of three farms host a demonstration site (or implement some aspect of the demonstration) each year of the demonstration. A steering committee of key producer contacts is advised to assist with decision that affect the demonstration.

The host farmers must be willing to hold extension events on the property and have case study material developed around the demonstration.

**What is the application process?**

Applications should initially be made using the EOI form. The EOI form is designed to identify the group and “test” its thinking about the demonstration.

Funding is limited; therefore, EOI’s will be reviewed by Agriculture Victoria and MLA to select the demonstration projects to be funded. Producer groups who are successful at the EOI stage will be asked to develop a full demonstration plan with the assistance of an Agriculture Victoria staff member. Feedback will be provided to all applicants.

Our preference is for three-year projects commencing in winter 2024.

If your group is successful in securing funding to conduct a demonstration, Agriculture Victoria will request that demonstration site hosts provide their biosecurity protocols (as per the Livestock Production Assurance scheme) and sign a landholder collaboration agreement. This agreement will outline the responsibilities of Agriculture Victoria and site hosts in conducting the demonstration.

## What are the selection criteria?

Expressions of interest will be assessed against seven criteria (included in the EOI form):

1. The level of support from the group, including its commitment to developing the skills and productivity of its members (i.e. Is the group well established? How many regularly attend events? What level of support is there for the project? How will group members participate and contribute? Is there a track record for training activities undertaking projects?)
2. The challenge or problem to be investigated (its importance and relevance to the industry)
3. The overall aim of the project and its specific objectives
4. Brief project methodology (i.e. what will the demonstration undertake and how this will provide a solution to the problem? What will you measure and how will you evaluate results?)
5. Communication and extension strategy (i.e. intentions to encourage wider awareness of the demonstration and engage producers outside of the group in understanding the outcomes)
6. Monitoring and evaluation (How will you measure success at the demonstration sites? How will you measure changes made by producers?)
7. Budget breakdown (estimate of operating/ salary/ travel costs) GST exclusive.

**What can the budget be used for?**

Payment of expenses will be managed by Agriculture Victoria.

Operating expenses include:

Feed or soil or other testing fees, field day costs, guest speakers.\*

\*Coordinator’s expenses directly associated with the demonstration, beyond the normal costs incurred with running the group e.g. extra support offered for host producers, additional training sessions held in relation to the demonstration, contribution to project design, set up, monitoring or report writing.

Funding will not cover:

* costs of on-farm labour or for the purchase of animals. The animals and on-farm labour required for running the project are deemed an in-kind contribution from the group members. Direct producer involvement is a key component of skills development among the group members.
* costs of capital items or items that have substantial private benefit. In all cases, commercial partnerships (including sponsorship, equipment loans, etc) are encouraged.

**What happens if you are successful in the EOI process?**

If your group is successful, Agriculture Victoria will support your group to develop a more detailed plan for the three-year project. Once the plan is approved, the aim is to begin projects from July 2024, according to required timing of tasks.

## Contact for further information and proposal submission:

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