

Red Meat Updates – the power of industry collaboration

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Abstract. Celebrating ten years in 2023, Red Meat Updates uses a unique approach to industry engagement in the Australian extension environment. The Tasmanian conference, focussed on enhancing the profitability and sustainability of the state's red meat sector, is an example of how genuine industry collaboration can support industry-scale change. From its inception, Red Meat Updates has been driven by a producer-chaired working group, comprised of industry stakeholders, ensuring the event has remained relevant, respected and well attended. Industry support has allowed the event to continue each year. What began as a small project grant to extend pasture research findings, quickly became a permanent fixture on the Tasmanian event calendar, providing a forum for awareness raising, knowledge building and networking. The event facilitates Tasmanian producers to take the next step and upskill to enhance business resilience and profitability and has created a strong sense of industry identity, comradery, and aspiration for excellence.

Keywords: red meat, conference, producer-led, industry collaboration

Introduction

Red Meat Updates is an annual, one-day conference providing information, inspiration and connections to the Tasmanian red meat industry. First held in 2013, the event has remained relevant and valued by industry, recently celebrating its tenth annual event on 28 July 2023. Red Meat Updates has consistently attracted over 300 attendees each year, with all places filled (and a wait list established) weeks before the event.

This paper discusses the Red Meat Updates delivery model and aspects of it that have proved critical to maintaining its ongoing reputation as Tasmania's premier red meat industry event.

Red Meat Updates delivery model

Although the event has grown and developed over the last decade, Red Meat Updates has maintained a similar delivery model since its initial creation. The core pillars of the event's delivery model discussed here are the vision, objectives, working group, industry partners and continuous improvement.

A united vision

The Red Meat Updates concept emerged due to a series of reoccurring questions and conversations in the Tasmanian red meat industry. What are other producers doing to make their red meat enterprises more profitable? Dairy producers have high pasture utilisation rates, why aren't we realising this in our red meat enterprises? How can we better connect to research outputs? We have irrigation now; how do we make money from irrigated pasture enterprises? There was a strong desire from industry to create a forum to support the transformation of industry to a progressive, profitable and professional industry that Tasmanian producers wanted to belong to.

In 2012, a small group of producers, consultants and industry stakeholders came together to develop a program for a small industry conference to extend the findings from recent pasture research. Inspired by the rumblings of industry, an aspirational scope of what could be, was developed by the group. It was agreed that success would look like a town hall overflowing with conference attendees, an "overflow" marquee outside with televised content from inside, attendees realising there was significant opportunity for improvement within their businesses, being inspired by what others were doing, wanting to undertake training to build their own skills and make practice changes in their own businesses. This formed the vision for Red Meat Updates, and the group formed the foundation of the working group.

Clear objectives

From day one, Red Meat Updates had clear objectives for how it would support and provide value to the Tasmanian red meat industry. Clarity around what the event aims to achieve has been a driver of success. Decisions around event design, content and partners come back to these core objectives, increasing the transparency and governance of the event.

The event has remained committed to its founding objectives, to:

- better connect individuals and organisations involved in the red meat industry and encourage networking
- raise awareness of red meat research, development and extension programs and projects

- highlight research outputs that have relevance to Tasmanian red meat producers
- share useful and relevant tools and resources that are available to industry
- showcase what is possible (stretch targets) in terms of sustainable and profitable production and motivate producers to want to improve
- highlight examples of what producers are doing to work towards achieving these stretch targets
- signpost activities, programs and projects producers can get involved in to enable them to build knowledge, skills and make meaningful on-farm practice change.

Working group

The Red Meat Updates working group has been pivotal to the establishment and ongoing industry demand for the event. When developing the framework for the working group and how it would function, it was determined that the group would be chaired by a producer. The chairs to date have been well connected, involved in multiple industry committees and have encouraged broader industry collaboration.

The working group membership is comprised of sheep and cattle producers from across Tasmania, along with researchers, industry representatives, advisors and research and development corporation representatives. Producer members who join are committed to best practice farm management, are eager to work collaboratively, and have a willingness to share ideas and contacts to build an event program that is relevant to the wider red meat industry in Tasmania. Membership renewal is an ongoing process, creating a high energy environment, with new ideas and opportunities to explore.

The group operates at a professional level, including a terms of reference, formal agendas and meeting minutes, a workplan and clarity of roles and responsibilities. It is a true team and has benefits to the event itself, as well as personally for the group members. Working group members find value in being involved through:

- increasing their networks
- having their production system and/or interest reflected in the event program
- the opportunity to work alongside other innovative and leading industry peers
- greater exposure and understanding of the range of industry issues, challenges, and opportunities
- increased awareness of industry tools and resources available to producers.

A key role for the working group is to provide direction for the upcoming event's theme and program, and to share feedback after the event.

Industry partners

Since its inception, Red Meat Updates has been supported by organisations across the red meat supply chain in Tasmania and southern Australia. This has been through various means, particularly sponsorship. In the first few years of its operation, the event was underwritten by a local consulting company, which took on the risk and covered the difference between the cost of running the event and the income from event sponsors and partners. Without this level of investment, the event would not have commenced.

Sponsors quickly started to come on board, seeing the value of investing in Red Meat Updates to enable the Tasmanian industry to continue to innovate and prosper. The event has a formal tiered sponsorship model. As Red Meat Updates is a producer and industry driven event, support from organisations ensures the event can meet its objectives of enabling networking and exposure to industry tools, resources and programs to further support the growth and innovation of the Tasmanian red meat sector.

Continuous improvement

An important element of Red Meat Updates has been ensuring the project continues to meet its objectives and deliver value to the Tasmanian red meat industry. The project has adopted a continuous improvement ethos to continue to build upon the success of the event each year and utilise feedback from attendees to improve where needed or continue with successful elements of the event. Throughout the project, communication plans, risk assessments and work plans are utilised to ensure the project remains on track.

To evaluate the success after the delivery of Red Meat Updates each year, evaluation surveys are completed by both attendees and sponsors. The design of the monitoring and evaluation process has been developed to capture success against the awareness raising intentions of the event.

The sponsor survey aims to capture sponsoring organisation's satisfaction with their Red Meat Updates sponsor experience and assists the event coordinators and the working group to ensure

that the event sponsorship prospectus continues to provide value to industry and a positive sponsorship experience.

The working group meet following the event to debrief about the event and share their feedback or they have received from their peers and networks. This sets initial planning for future events in motion and ensures continuous improvement of the event.

Conclusion

The Red Meat Updates delivery model is based on the key success factors of it being producer-driven and through the collaboration of industry members. The producer working group, industry collaboration and support, clear objectives, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, ensures the event continues to meet the needs of the Tasmanian red meat industry.

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