

THE SHEEP AT SCHOOL

The Science of Sheep and Wool

Event Report

Stakeholders

Australian Wool CRC
Department of Agriculture, Government of Western Australia
University of Western Australia
University of Tasmania
Department of Education, Western Australia
Staff and Students, Shenton College, Western Australia
Businesses and enterprises operating in the Western Australian primary industry sector

Participants

Staff and Students, Shenton College, Western Australia
Some 500 students, and 30 staff were involved in various parts/ activities on the day. Activities continue through to September. The focus was on year 8 students, with university activities targeting students in the Gifted and Talented Program.
Students engaged in science, maths, English, art and society and environment studies.
Staff attended a program planning breakfast with a speaker from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. The Dean of the faculty, Prof. Alistar Robertson gave introductory comments about the state of agriculture in WA and nationally. He stressed the importance of educators the promotion of R&D and employment opportunities in primary industry.

University of Western Australia
A lamb BBQ was followed by laboratory sessions relating to Sheep nutrition.

Businesses and enterprises operating in Western Australian primary industry
Dowdell White Suffolk Stud, breeders Heather and Peter Dowdall from Narrogin, WA brought sheep: ewes, rams and lambs to explain a specialist breeding program.
Bioclip Wool Harvesting, Bioclip contractors, Mike and Anna Naisbitt from Lake Grace, WA demonstrated and explained the Bioclip process.
Rick Derickz, Bioclip Australia explained the technical details of the Bioclip process
Simon Leaning from **Marionvale Working Dogs**, gave demonstrations and taught students the art of working the dogs and sheep.
Peter Trefort of **Q Lamb, Hillside Quality Meats**, Narrogin, WA provided lamb steaks and lamb sausages for the BBQ.
Primaries of WA Pty Ltd, provided lamb fleece for sheep sculpture and grading activities.

Media Coverage

Participants were interviewed by Jane Grieve for ABC 'Countrywide' which was aired on ABC Regional (WA) and again on ABC Radio National.
News articles and pictures were published in The Western Suburbs Weekly, The Stirling Times, Albany Advertiser, UWA News, Narrogin News, White Suffolk Association's Newsletter and the Shenton College Newsletter.
Stakeholders were acknowledged in communication.

Media copies are available on request

Feedback

Director General of Education Paul Albert said the 'Sheep at School' program would spark the interest of students in an area that was growing in popularity among city students.

He was very impressed with what he saw on the day.

Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences Prof Alistar Robertson said 'this is fantastic stuff'

The Principal of Shenton College said this was a truly motivating experience for students and exemplified education in a real context.

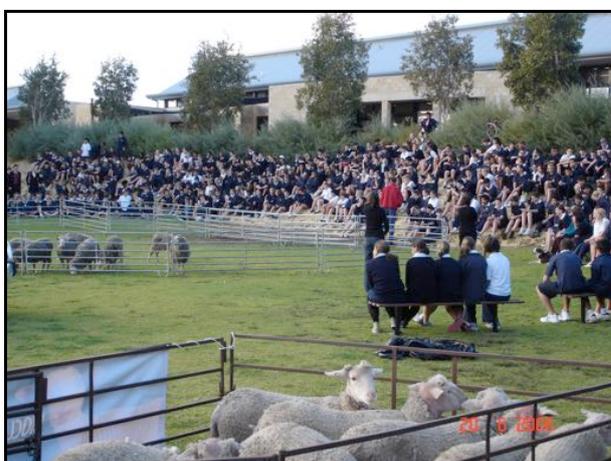
From the Bioclip contractors, Mike and Anna Naisbitt: 'We had an extremely satisfying day.....a great team effort.....we would like to say a huge THANK YOU'.
From a staff member: 'I never realised how fascinating and important the sheep industry is.
Finally from student Felix 'I love sheep. I want to take one home' and student Theo: 'BBQ lamb is great'.

Evaluation

Putting science learning into a context that is meaningful to students (family members and the broader community) does promote science careers in primary industry. It is worth noting that programs such as this exist through national cooperation and partnerships of R&D corporations, primary industry, universities and schools.

Feedback from other state (education partners) reflected a similar positive response to this style of science education as found after the *Sheep at School* day in WA. Comments from students, parents, teachers and industry participants indicate an appetite for this type of program as having value in Australia's education system.

Programs such as this help in the development of future scientists and industry professionals who are such an important resource in maintaining Australia's place in world markets.



Sheep visit Shenton College

Shenton College students had a real taste of the country life when they are greeted by flocks of sheep on the school oval.

Farmers, sheep and dogs all visited the school as part of the 'Sheep at School' program aimed at increasing students' knowledge and understanding of science and primary industry.

Department of Education and Training director general Paul Albert said the 'Sheep at School' program would spark the interest of students in an area that was growing in popularity among city students.

"Recent trends show a huge increase in the number of students from urban areas and non-traditional farming families enrolling in the Department of Education and Training's agricultural colleges," Mr Albert said.

"Public schools are catering for all students by providing programs such as this that offer a range of career options."

Students saw demonstrations from sheep dogs, met Fyfe the 150kg stud ram, listened to information sessions from farmers and participated in a range of learning activities. Learning activities included observing and interacting with farmers and industry representatives including sheep dog trials, White Suffolk Sheep and Bioclip wool harvesting. At UWA they met Professors and PhD students and participated in laboratory activities,

The day provided students with the opportunity to broaden their knowledge about primary industries and to put learning into a real context.

Having the sheep at school took the learning outside the classroom, allowing students to become involved in a more hands on approach to education.

Students will listened to talks from farmers and participated in activities to show how primary industry relates across a range of subject areas including science, english, maths and art.

Farmers from as far across the State as Lake Grace and Narrogin travelled to Shenton College for the day with 35 Merino and White Suffolk sheep, and three sheep dogs.

They will provided information sessions for students on a range of new initiatives that have led to the Australian agricultural industry becoming increasingly sophisticated, through breeding programs and using innovations in science and technology.

Students will leart about the evolution of the White Suffolk sheep (developed from black sheep) that can grow at up to one kilogram a day, and the Bioclip process where sheep are injected with natural protein that allows them to shed wool in 28 days, providing farmers with higher quality wool. Bioclip was developed by the CSIRO.

The 'Sheep at School program' is a joint initiative with The University of Western Australian and has been funded by the Australian Sheep Cooperative Research Council (CRC).

20 June 2006. Article for Shenton College Newsletter.

