

Queensland

REEF WATER QUALITY

Program



Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries response:

DAF 16050: Review– Practice change, Education and Extension in Reef Catchments Project (Final Report June 2017)

September 2017



Foreword

Agricultural industries in the Great Barrier Reef catchments have responded to the challenge of improving water quality in their local rivers by adopting management practices that show economic and environmental outcomes are compatible.

The 2016 Reef Water Quality Science Taskforce recommendations identified that providing support to producers is essential in their endeavours to improve water quality while maintaining profitability and productivity. Sustainable land management needs to adapt and respond to the impacts posed by climate change, and the need for management to increase the resilience of the Reef and farmers.

A 2017 independent review of extension and advisory services across reef catchments consulted over 200 stakeholders during the review, including extension service providers and trainers (government, natural resource management bodies, industry and private organisations) and those who accessed the extension services. The strengths in our extension systems were identified and advice was provided where additional support, collaborations and innovative approaches would be beneficial.

The Queensland Government welcomes the 2017 review and the opportunities and challenges presented in the report. The contribution of over 200 people to the review is greatly appreciated. The interest in enhancing and improving extension and advisory services to producers in the Great Barrier Reef catchments is an indication of the commitment of individuals, organisations and industries to work together to achieve the best possible outcome for the Reef and those who work and farm in its catchments.

The Queensland Government recognises that action needs to be taken to address key gaps identified in the review, particularly in the areas of enhanced regional coordination and integration of services, professional development and increased opportunities for graduates to undertake a career in agricultural extension. This career path needs to be supported by increasing professional standing within and outside the industry. This document outlines the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries response (DEHP/DAF response) to the recommendations of the review.

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Introduction

The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef ecosystem, which stretches approximately 2,300km along the Queensland coast is recognised as a World Heritage property due to its 'natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity.'

The Reef is under increasing pressure from the cumulative effects of climate change, land-based run-off of sediments and pollutants, increasing coastal development, and direct uses. These pressures affect the health of the reef and its ability to recover after disturbances such as cyclones or coral bleaching. Science has identified climate change as the most significant threat to the Great Barrier Reef. However, improved water quality will give the reef the best chance to recover from the current and future impacts of climate change.

The 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan (2017-2022) is the overarching document that outlines the approach to be taken by the Australian and Queensland Governments in order to address the issues identified by the scientific consensus reports. The DEHP/DAF response is delivered under the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program, led by the Office of the Great Barrier Reef within the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries leads the components of the program that relate to the delivery of extension and education programs and projects for primary producers in the catchments. The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan (2017-2022) provides the path forward to achieve the desired outcomes.

Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan (2017-2022) – land management targets by 2025:

90% of land in priority areas under grazing, horticulture, bananas, sugarcane and other broad-acre cropping are managed using best management practice systems for water quality outcomes (soil, nutrient and pesticides)

90% of grazing lands will have greater than 70 per cent ground cover in the late dry season

Active engagement of communities and land managers in programs to improve water quality outcomes is increased

The 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement (SCS) concludes that the greatest water quality risks to the Reef are from water containing too much nitrogen and fine sediment running off in our waterways from the land to the Reef. Pesticides have been found in sediments, rivers, creeks, estuaries and inshore reefs at levels that affect the health of plants and corals.

The SCS recognises that current initiatives on their own are unlikely to meet water quality targets. To accelerate the change in on-ground management, improvements to program design, delivery and evaluation systems are urgently needed. This will require greater incorporation of governance, social and economic factors, better targeting and prioritisation, exploring alternative management options and increased support and resources. However, it will be important to retain those programs that are working well and have demonstrated success in moving towards improved outcomes.

The Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce (2016) recommendation 3 expressed the need to:

- *Invest in more effective, targeted and coordinated extension to support large scale land management practice change through:*
 - *Long term government commitment to resource and rebuild capacity in extension*
 - *Formalise extension networks and define roles and responsibilities for whole-of-farm business approach*
 - *Support ongoing training programs and career development for accredited extension providers*
 - *Make greater use of smarter and more innovative extension approaches*
 - *Partner with the agricultural industry to develop a large scale behaviour change program*
- (Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce Final Report, May 2016, p.53)

In response the Government engaged an independent specialist in extension, agriculture, and reef activities to review the current situation and to ensure that the response was strategic and filled identified gaps (Coutts J&R, 2017). A key objective was to inform the Queensland Government on its development of an Implementation Plan to guide the delivery of funding aligned to the Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Taskforce Recommendation 3. Over 200 stakeholders were consulted, including extension service providers and trainers (government, natural resource management bodies, industry and private organisations) and those who accessed the extension services. A draft Review was released in April 2017, and workshops, forums and follow-up interviews resulted in the final Review Report, Practice change, Education and Extension in Reef Catchments (the Review) was published in June 2017.

Response to recommendations

The Queensland Government has agreed, or agreed in principle, with all of the Review recommendations taking account of the ongoing and planned activities under the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program. It also recognises that the Review has identified activities where total investment is greater than available Queensland Government funding. Many elements of the recommendations are best delivered by other parties, including industry, other jurisdictions or the Australian Government and view this an opportunity for partnerships, collaborative and innovative approaches to achieve the intent and outcomes identified as desirable by the report.

Table 1 addresses the recommendations from the Review, identifying where action is being taken in the short-term (including consultation with partners) as well as where implementation relies on activities at a catchment, regional, state and Australian under wider reef investment programs.

The DEHP/DAF response is reported against the 6 key themes identified in the Review, taking account of proposed actions in 2017-2020.

Implementation

Drawing on the Taskforce funding, the Queensland Government is injecting just over \$10 million to enhance extension services in line with the recommendations of the Review. This builds on the ongoing activities and support under Queensland Reef Water Quality program and other initiatives funded through the taskforce funding.

The Queensland Government will develop a plan for the implementation of action and will engage with regional and industry partners for delivery of recommendations that are best implemented by those bodies.

Recommendations that require specific consultation and liaising with additional stakeholders will be addressed on a case by case basis as appropriate.

The Office of the Great Barrier Reef in the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will be responsible for overseeing implementation of the recommendations and investment.

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Further information:

Practice change, Education and Extension in Reef Catchments Project (June 2017, Coutts J&R) final report can be found at <https://reefextension.couttsjr.com.au/>

GBR Water Science Taskforce Final report and response can be found at www.gbr.qld.gov.au/taskforce/final-report/.
Additional information about investment in agriculture in Great Barrier Reef catchments can be found at <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/agriculture/sustainable-farming/reef>.

Table 1 – Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Response to Recommendations

	Summary of Review Recommendations ¹	Agree/ Disagree	Government Response	Notes on Implementation
Theme 1. Implementing the review				
Indicative funding commitment: \$30,000				
R1.1	Establish a reference group to provide feedback on the process and suggest ways to address barriers and issues emerging.	Agree	The Queensland Government supports the use of an existing group if available for coordinated efforts under the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program with other programs (e.g. sub group of Partnership Committee). Stakeholder oversight and engagement can also occur through existing groups	Immediate commencement
R1.2	Extension delivery survey to assess gains in extension capacity and functioning	Agree	Surveys are currently used as a tool in understanding extension capacity and functioning. Queensland Government will work with partners to support consistent understanding and sharing of knowledge about extension capacity and gaps e.g. 2016 Training skills assessment.	Already commenced. Continue training needs and assessment surveys annually.
Theme 2. Coordination & collaboration				
Indicative funding commitment: \$4.6 million investment (including already committed funds)				
Program Design				
R2.1 R2.2 R2.3	Forums to review and provide feedback on current State and Commonwealth extension and education programs and provide feedback and that funding programs facilitate linkages and cross collaboration.	Agree in principle	Continual review and improvement of funding activities is supported and occurs through ongoing discussion between Governments (State and Commonwealth) and those delivering reef programs. Governments and funding bodies, including those who deliver programs, have regular opportunities to review and provide feedback with respect to funding approaches and adjustments are continually made to improve approaches. Review and feedback will take place in various forums as opportunities arise.	Ongoing

¹ Due to the length and complexity of some recommendations, they have been summarised here, but can be accessed in full at: <https://reefextension.couttsjr.com.au/>

	Summary of Review Recommendations ¹	Agree/ Disagree	Government Response	Notes on Implementation
Regional Extension Coordination				
R2.4	Appoint/extend regional extension coordinators.	Agree	Ongoing and enhanced extension coordination is supported.	Already commenced
R2.5	Establish Regional Extension Coordination Groups.			
R2.7	Develop Regional Extension Plans.			
R2.8	Appoint a cross reef extension coordinator.			
R.4.15	Provide flexible funds for priority cross-program/organisational activities.			
R4.16				
R2.6	Annual grazing research development and extension update.	Agree in principle	Linking organisations working on grazing areas (including NRM bodies, research organisations, peak bodies, and others) will provide benefits and could occur via existing and future forums, such as Beef 2018.	Discussion with partners will explore how to best link organisations, either through presentations at forums, or through a regular communication in industry journals and ebulletins.
Theme 3. Personnel and expertise				
Indicative funding commitment: \$1.46 million				
New Positions				
R3.1	Augment existing services/expertise: - high priority skills gaps (soil conservation, health, hydrology) - other local skill gaps (medium priority) including farming systems (with expertise in water quality), mixed farming extension, grazing, cross BMP and communication	Agree in principle	Knowledge gaps in services and expertise are recognised by the Queensland Government. Responding to regional variations specialist skills gaps may be filled via a number of mechanisms. The Review document identified that ' <i>the new position recommendations are indicative and require further testing</i> '. Therefore, it is proposed to: a) investigate how the high priority skills gaps can be delivered via a service provider/s or alternative mechanism in discussion with stakeholders and b) explore the other skills gaps through further regional consultation to refine and confirm the scope and delivery needs (e.g. through	In the first instance, a pilot training program to address skills gaps in the short-term has been implemented in partnership with the Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (see R4). Communication officers are already employed in Government organisations to work with reef extension programs to promote key activities and communicate consistent key messages.
R3.2				
R3.3				
R3.4				
R3.5				
R3.6				

	Summary of Review Recommendations ¹	Agree/ Disagree	Government Response	Notes on Implementation
			the development of Regional Extension Plans)	
Graduate Program				
R3.7	Pilot graduate program to continue beyond the pilot.	Agree in principle	A pilot graduate, training and mentoring program (QFF 2017-2018) was initiated July 2017, with a program evaluation planned in 2018.	Implementation of this recommendation will occur pending the outcome of the program evaluation.
Existing Contract Positions				
R3.8	Extension program planning should be undertaken on a rolling 5-10 year basis.	Agree in principle	Reef activities and Queensland Reef Water Quality Program are being planned in a 5 year cycle.	
R3.9	Website that tracks and links extension staff, positions held, skills, training and experience, alerts for new projects, programs and positions.	Agree in principle	Such a website would be useful. The Extension and Education coordinators will investigate whether there are existing platforms that are capable of providing this service in collaboration with relevant partners.	Investigate website/platform for extension staff
On-going Extension Roles				
R3.10	The public sector, industry, regional NRM organisations and Landcare have a key role in driving the process and training of on-farm trials and demonstrations for reef water quality improvements.	Agree	The Queensland Government agreed with this statement and is working to undertake this as part of its ongoing activity.	No specific action required or recommended. Training is being delivered under Theme 4.
R3.11	Increase the role of the private sector in providing an environment for one-on-one service and support for producers/growers to better apply and adapt their management practices to those recommended.	Agree in principle.	The private sector has a role to play in providing advice and expertise to assist producers.	A number of existing activities currently support this recommendation. For example, extension officers provide links between producers and private suppliers. Further training of private extension staff will be occurring through a number of the actions identified under Recommendation 4.
R3.12 R3.13 R5.2 R5.4 R5.7	Best Management Practice (BMP) programs are the key to benchmarking, whole farm analysis, identifying management gaps and areas to improve and to capture improvements over time. BMP standards need to continually improve. BMP will play an increasingly important role in providing improved returns for producers through the marketing of sustainable farming and in meeting	Agree.	The Queensland Government strongly supports the industry-led BMP program and the role it can play in developing BMP programs for new and emerging situations and celebrating the success of producers in undertaking BMP programs and accreditation.	Industry led BMP programs are operating across reef catchments. Negotiations are currently being undertaken to extend Queensland Government financial support for these programs beyond 2017 to continue and enhance the work undertaken to date in this sphere.

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	regulatory requirements. Trained and experience personnel are needed. Recognition should be given to growers/producers who successfully achieve audited BMP accreditation.			
R3.14 R5.2	BMP needs to address mixed farming systems / crop rotations to fill the extension gap in nutrient management/water quality practices.	Agree in principle.	Industry is continuously reviewing and adaptively designing BMP program to address industry needs.	BMP programs are industry led and will receive appropriate Queensland Government support when requested.
R3.15	Business management and the economics around recommended practices remains a key area to underpin the efforts towards encouraging management practice change.	Agree.	Under the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program, a regional economics team is undertaking a forward program of work to identify the business and economic benefits of adopting best management practices.	The outcomes of the economics assessments will continue to be made available to relevant stakeholders and extension staff as well as the general public.
R3.16	Research and Development (R&D) Corporations need to continue to lead, provide staff and coordination with research and extension delivery organisations to provide practical production-based technologies while ensuring that water quality considerations are a primary consideration in their application and use.	Agree.	R&D Corporations play a lead role in this area in collaboration with other stakeholders.	Reef Plan R&D coordination group supports integration of programs. Ongoing discussion will also occur with R&D organisations as part of the Queensland wider program (QRWQP, Agriculture RD&E, Advanced Queensland, amongst others) .
Theme 4. Training and capacity building				
Indicative funding commitment: \$3.06 million (including already committed funds)				
Oversight / management				
R4.1 R4.2 R4.3 R4.4	Recruit Senior Training Development Officer. Promote, use and further develop the extension best practice framework Develop training framework including skills, methods and sources. Ensure quality and experienced training delivery.	Agree	A Training Development Manager will be appointed to lead and coordinate: - development of the best practice framework (in association with the local coordinators and managers) - building capacity and finalise and implement the training development and mentoring framework.	It is proposed to scope appropriate location for the Training Development Manager, such as Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges and the expected outcomes for the role will be defined. An evaluation report of the Pilot Capacity Building Project, due early 2018, will provide guidance about the future direction of the Pilot Capacity Building Project.
Core Skills				
R4.5	Define and source/develop training material for core reef extension skills	Agree	Ongoing surveys of extension providers will assist in the identification of core reef extension skills and existing	The annual skills gap survey will continue, driven by the Training Manager, in consultation with the Extension

	Summary of Review Recommendations ¹	Agree/ Disagree	Government Response	Notes on Implementation
			gaps. Tailored regional training will be delivered under the Capacity building project (See 3.7). Core training material is being developed as part of this project. Workshops will be delivered across all reef regions within this project. It is anticipated such training opportunities will continue under the role of the Training Development Manager.	Coordination manager and network. Further development of the training framework and core materials will be leveraged through existing provisions for vocational education and training (VET) in agriculture to enable training providers to better access funding.
R4.6 R4.7 R4.9 R4.10 R4.11	Gain support from organisations to upskill staff in core areas. Utilise website to register training achievements and professional certification system for core reef skills. Provide partial subsidies for training Provide funds for training to suppliers. Define and source specialist courses in extension. Have a system for professional certification in key skill areas.	Agree in principle	Various professional bodies have a responsibility to further develop a professional certification system. This concept will receive support from the Training Manager where appropriate. In addition, supplier bodies, e.g. Fertilizer Australia, will be encouraged to extend their training programs to all suppliers at the local level. Producers will be encouraged to seek services of certified suppliers.	Once appointed, the training manager will initiate discussions with relevant organisations, including professional bodies and industry. Discussions will be held with industry bodies and service providers to standardise training and advisory service skills and support.
R4.8	Provide professional development for program managers and funders so that they better understand farming systems, farm management, extension and behaviour change.	Agree in principle	Currently opportunities exist whereby funders and managers can engage with advisors and producers to understand farming principles.	The Training Manager and the Extension and Education Coordination Manager and extension network will assist in providing feedback in this area.
Mentoring				
R4.12 R4.13 R4.14	Develop a mentoring framework Reward and recognise achievements of mentees and mentors Use coordination network to oversee process	Agree	The Training Development Manager will be responsible for finalising and implementing the training development and mentoring framework in consultation with the Extension Coordination Manager and network.	Yr 1: Deliver and evaluate pilot capacity building project (QFF) including Mentoring framework Beyond Yr 1: extend pilot project(training, mentoring and graduate program) based on evaluation of project
Reef Extension and Education Network				
R4.15 R4.16	Establish a formalised network of reef extension delivery.	Agree.	There is a reef extension network supported by existing extension coordinator positions, which will be enhanced.	Implementation of this recommendation will occur via the E&E Coordinators (see response to Theme 2 – Extension Coordination).
Career Development				

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R4.17 R4.18 R4.19	Opportunities for training/certification to support career advancement Access to professional development opportunities PhD support for 3 places	Agree in Principle	Employers are encouraged to provide and support a wide range of professional development opportunities for all staff, including all levels of formal education.	Employers will be responsible for identifying and securing resources and opportunities for further professional development and training of their staff where appropriate.
Theme 5 – Extension Approaches and Methods				
Indicative funding commitment: \$1 million				
Overall Considerations				
R5.1	Goals relating to understanding attitudes, capacity, motivation and continuous improvement should also be highlighted as project goals.	Agree in principle		No specific action recommended.
R5.3	Landcare groups with the capacity to work directly with growers/producers should be encouraged to apply for funding for extension projects in their areas.	Agree.	All relevant stakeholders, including Landcare groups are encouraged to assist producers in reducing the impact of their actions and therefore improve reef water quality outcomes.	The enhanced Extension and Education Coordinator project will provide information and networks to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including Landcare groups.
Methods				
R5.5	Consider funding long-term peer-to-peer learning. Funding should be available directly to producer groups who select their own facilitator or be accessed by delivery organisations who then work to establish groups for this purpose. This should focus on those producers who have not been engaged through other mechanisms.	Agree	Programs which deliver long-term peer-to-peer learning have demonstrated considerable success. Support for extension mechanisms that successfully lead to practice change will be continued.	The Queensland Government will commit funds over 3 years to implement peer-to-peer learning opportunities and other successful mechanisms. This will be delivered via the Extension and Education Regional Extension Plans.
R5.6	Greater use should be made of extension technologies.	Agree in principle	New and innovative technologies should continue to be explored and current relevant projects should continue.	The Queensland Government will continue to invest in innovative projects through its funding programs.
R5.7 R3.12 R3.13	Sugar shed meetings should continue to occur.	Agree in principle.	Industry and producers are encouraged to continue to use extension methods that work for their specific situations.	These types of extension tools are largely delivered through Productivity boards, grower organisations and other Extension and Education programs.
R5.8	Nutrient management / sediment Plan objectives should include skills in applying the plan.	Agree	Training should be practical and assist producers to change practices on the ground, to ensure that the process is rigorous.	Delivery of these programs and of related training programs currently emphasise the on-ground applicability.
R5.9	Broker/leverage enhanced services through existing	Agree in	Enhanced service provision should be sought through	The success of RP161 (complete nutrient

	Summary of Review Recommendations ¹	Agree/ Disagree	Government Response	Notes on Implementation
	funding programs to encourage private sector delivery services and on ground practice change e.g. RP161.	principle	opportunities to further leverage existing funding programs and the strengthening the role of extension coordination networks in connecting producers with private sector service providers.	management planning for cane farming) and other projects/programs will provide a basis for further investment in similar projects.
R5.10	Enhance distance engagement technologies.	Agree in principle	The use of technology, including distance technologies, is important in enhancing information exchange and access to expertise to complement face-to-face extension methods.	Use of technology/engagement tools is already happening in Beef Extension (e.g. Future Beef) and this is recognised as a good model for other industries seeking to enhance use of technologies to support other extension methods.
Communication				
R5.11 R3.3	Ensure there are sufficient cross-program resources to support communication messages.	Agree		Delivered through R3.3.
R5.12	Rules of Thumb/s developed through consultation with Regional Extension Coordination Groups	Agree	The development of plain English and comprehensive key messages across regions and industries should be considered in consultation with key practitioners.	Delivered through R2.4, R2.5, R2.7 and R2.8.
R5.13	Annual updates to extension staff by researchers and government staff developing new understanding, technologies and monitoring approaches	Agree in principle	Researchers (both government and non-government) should include communication of research and findings as part of research project design.	Opportunities for engagement between extension staff and researchers exist through several delivery forums and these will continue. Further, innovation and science programs and projects require delivery and communication components.
Theme 6. Monitoring and evaluation				
Indicative funding commitment: \$50,000 (in addition to monitoring and evaluation that is occurring as part of projects in other theme areas)				
Overall				
6.1 6.4 6.7	<p>Reef Monitoring and Evaluation Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework (RP150 2016) should be adopted as the 'higher level' guide for reef E&E.</p> <p>Each industry should develop a suite of data collection instruments to gather consistent data.</p> <p>All Reef E&E programs should report against this framework, including BMP programs with</p>	Agree	<p>RP150P Practice Change Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework is being used as a guide for reef E&E and practice change programs.</p> <p>Consistent MERI approaches for reef E&E and practice change projects will include qualitative data.</p> <p>Linkages with MERI approaches for other Taskforce programs being implemented (e.g. Major Integrated Projects) will be an</p>	<p>The development of a MERI Framework for all commitments under the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program will recognise and incorporate the findings of the Monitoring and Evaluation Review for BMP and aligned programs (RP150) and will inform the development of MERI resources.</p> <p>New Queensland Government project contracts also stipulate a requirement for projects to</p>

	Summary of Review Recommendations ¹	Agree/ Disagree	Government Response	Notes on Implementation
	<p>public funding.</p> <p>Use of a common reporting platform would maximise effectiveness.</p> <p>Greater use of qualitative data methods to show the role of different programs in building capacity and influencing management practice change.</p>		<p>important consideration in developing MERI resources for E&E and practice change projects.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will consult with industry stakeholders to develop sample data collection instruments.</p>	<p>have a MERI plan to ensure that adequate consideration of monitoring and evaluation occurs.</p> <p>A common reporting platform is currently being investigated.</p> <p>MERI reef E&E and practice change focus group to engage with industry in developing sample data collection instruments.</p>
6.2 6.3	<p>Comprehensively and accurately benchmark practice levels related to the water quality risk framework (WQRF) in priority areas.</p> <p>The Cross Region Extension Coordination Manager (see should provide leadership and support in relation to M&E methodology in partnership with P2R.</p>	Agree	<p>Benchmarking of practice levels within and across regions is already undertaken, and will continue, led by the P2R Management Practice Adoption team.</p>	<p>Continue regional benchmarking of practice levels and change over time.</p> <p>Continue working with industry BMP programs in collection of P2R data.</p>
6.5	<p>A Synergy Matrix approach should be used to demonstrate where each new program adds value.</p>	Agree in principle	<p>The potential benefits of a matrix approach to help to identify the value of new projects in contributing to practice change objectives is acknowledged.</p> <p>In some cases it may be difficult to attribute practice change to a single program/project due to cumulative influences, therefore qualitative data may be useful in attribution.</p>	<p>Investigate potential for a Synergy Matrix approach to M&E for reef E&E programs.</p> <p>Consider value in conjunction with use of narratives and/or surveys to gauge relative/type of influence of programs.</p>
Reporting				
6.6	<p>Client Management System (CMS) for Grazing BMP/ FutureBeef should be explored.</p>	Agree in principle	<p>A CMS would be a useful addition for Grazing BMP/FutureBeef.</p>	<p>Explore a CMS in conjunction with other data management programs.</p>