

Graziers advance through rangeland studies

By Renee Golding

The support and guidance of Rangeland Champion Bob Shepherd has led to four northern graziers enrolling in rangeland management courses to increase their knowledge and reinforce their credibility as rangeland managers. These courses, developed by Rangelands Australia (RA), are offered by The University of Queensland.

The graziers doing the courses are actively involved in many organisations, such as landcare, and have participated in a number of industry courses. Many of them had considered tertiary studies too difficult given their age, previous educational experience and remoteness from education facilities.

However with Shepherd as their mentor, they decided to take the plunge and begin studies this year. One of these students is grazer Raymond Stacey. After having worked on the family property at Richmond in north-west Queensland, Stacey owns and manages his own property near Charters Towers.

"I am passionate about the land base, grazing ecology and production," he says. "Doing this course will give me the ability to thoroughly understand it.

"I think I will gain a huge amount of experience and knowledge, bridging the gaps in my current knowledge and also gaining an insight into other systems outside of my region."

In Shepherd's eyes, Stacey's grazing business experience coupled with his ability to take on new information and be involved in the industry makes him the perfect candidate to participate in an RA course.

This course gives people living and working in the rangelands the opportunity to not only have their years of experience and knowledge formally recognised, it also opens doors to new ideas and increases their involvement in the industry.

Shepherd has known Stacey for many years through his work as senior extension officer at the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries office at Charters Towers.

"Raymond is very innovative in his property management," Shepherd says.

"He used a spraying method to control prickly acacia on the family property at Richmond in the 1980s, which was hard work and fairly unheard of at that time.

"He is focused on looking after, and improving, the resource base on the property and is involved in Agforce, landcare, and has completed and coached RCS programs. Having people such as Raymond completing formal tertiary education will boost the profile of the industry and strengthen our future."

Stacey became interested in the RA program after picking up a brochure at a field day in early 2007 and discussing it with Shepherd. To gain entry into the program, they put together a resume of recognised prior learning.

This took into account Stacey's Diploma in Rural Business, his

Cotton BMP now a marketable skill

Cotton growers with certified Best Management Practice (BMP) farms can now have their skills recognised as formal qualifications.

The Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) has successfully completed a FarmBis-funded program to align national competencies with the cotton industry's best management guidelines.

National cotton training co-ordinator with the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Queensland, and Cotton Catchment Community CRC, Mark Hickman, was engaged by the CRDC to implement the program.

He says it was a landmark achievement for the industry's future workforce.

"The program established that current skills used to set up and maintain a farm's BMP certification was equivalent to a Diploma of Agriculture (specialising in Cotton Production)," Hickman says.

"This industry-endorsed qualification is referred to as a Certified BMP Farm Manager due to its alignment with BMP. However, just because a farm has BMP status, it doesn't mean the cotton manager is automatically granted a diploma.

"We use stringent Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment criteria that have been tailored to the cotton industry to confirm individual qualifications. This project shows how skill sets can be developed by implementing science practices via the cotton BMP process.

"The RPL assessment now provides cotton managers with a mechanism to further advance their careers both within and outside the industry.

Hickman says formal recognition of skills has important implications for the industry's future workforce.

"If we are to continue rolling out BMP across Australia's cotton industry, we must have the means to access, educate and retain a skilled workforce," he says.



Current skills used to set up and maintain a farm's BMP are equivalent to a Diploma of Agriculture (cotton production)

Find out more:

Mark Hickman, (07) 4688 1206



Raymond Stacey has added to his property management skills via a Ranglands Australia course and mentoring from Bob Shepherd.

years of industry involvement and experience and his innovative management style. After gaining entry into the Rangeland Management course, he attended a 'Getting Into Further Study' short course held by RA.

This course is to give future students confidence and prepare them for the challenges of tertiary study. Twelve months down the track, Stacey is completing his first course, 'Sustainable Rangeland Production'.

"I am gaining a different perspective on things and learning a lot about the many different regions of Australia through my fellow students," he says.

"We have a diverse group studying together from all corners of Australia.

"I am coming to understand the huge and diverse number of stakeholders involved in the rangelands. Although they have the same underlying principles, they have many conflicting ideas and interests. I think this course is enabling me to understand that better.

"One example of this is the realisation that the footprint of our actions impacts far wider than our property boundaries. What we do here impacts on the Barrier Reef and other downstream users of water and land resources.

"Stakeholders include our neighbours, Government and its departments and the general community, both local and further removed.

"Some of these groups are very indirect as stakeholders, but they can impact on what we do and the environmental outcomes. My vision is that my country, family and community shall be better for my involvement in this program."

For Shepherd, seeing Stacey and other students successfully completing these studies is rewarding.

"I am glad that people of the rangelands are grabbing this opportunity with both hands," he says.

"My hope is that they can recognise the value of this program at an enterprise, industry and national level and also inform their friends and neighbours of this value. Rural and remote individuals are an untapped resource of refreshing ideas."

Find out more:

RA, (07) 5460 1662, www.rangelands-australia.com.au



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