



Final report

Supply Chain Capability Building for Producers – Phase 2

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Abstract

The aim of this project was to develop a simple self-assessment tool for producers to measure and report their sustainability credentials to underpin the Teys brand messaging to customers and consumers. The tool would also support the Australian beef industry's effort to measure and report progress under the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (www.sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au) through enabling value chain data capture.

A first version of the tool was developed and trialled with producers and the findings analysed. The tool was updated based on producer feedback and Australian Beef Sustainability Framework annual updates. It was intended that the second version of the tool be trialled via facilitated workshops with a second round of producers. However due to COVID 19 travel restrictions and border closures and the decision by Teys Australia to finalise the project, this was unable to be completed.

Executive summary

Background

Meat and Livestock Australia are working with the producer sector to engage and educate on sustainability, for instance through their work with initiatives such as Australian Good Meat (www.goodmeat.com.au) and the Carbon Neutral by 2030 Initiative (www.mla.com.au/cn30). However, there is a gap between the producer and food processor chain through to the consumers view about sustainable food, especially with regard to the claim of food being ‘sustainably produced’. The development of the draft Teys Australia Sustainability Self-assessment Tool and trialling of the self-assessment with producers was designed to address this gap.

Objectives

The objective of this project was to develop a simple self-assessment tool for producers to measure and report their sustainability to underpin the Teys Australia brand messaging by:

- Building producer understanding of Teys’ customer’s expectations regarding to sustainability credentials
- Identifying opportunities for continuous improvement in sustainable beef production
- Supporting the Australian beef industry’s effort to measure and report sustainability indicators as part of the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework

Methodology

An advisory board comprised of Teys Australia, Food & Veterinary Services Pty Ltd, a customer and producer representatives (including pilot producers) was established to provide feedback on the development of the Teys Sustainability Framework. A first version of the draft Teys Australia Sustainability Framework and accompanying self-assessment tool was developed. The self-assessment was trialled with pilot producers and the findings analysed. The Framework was updated based on producer feedback and Australian Beef Sustainability Framework updates. It was intended that the updated Framework be rolled out with an expanded group of pilot producers, however due to COVID 19 travel restrictions and border closures and the decision by Teys Australia to finalise the project, this was unable to be completed.

Results/key findings

The draft Teys Australia Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool included an outcomes-based approach to allow producers to demonstrate the actions they are taking to operate sustainability. There is no ‘one size fits all’ when working across diverse operations, production systems and geographic locations. This project demonstrated that an outcomes-based approach is feasible. The self-assessment phase of the project highlighted the need for user-friendly assessment tools due to variations in information technology (IT) access and/or IT literacy.

Benefits to industry

Benefits to the industry from this project and from continued investment in this area include continued development of producer capability in understanding and meeting current and future market requirements for communicating sustainability credentials and a bridging of the gap between producers and consumer requirements and expectations.

Future research and recommendations

- Further development of the sustainability self-assessment tool to align with the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework and reduce complexity and cost of assessment, whilst maintaining integrity of the assessment method.
- Continued development and identification of objective performance indicators that allow progress to be measured are required i.e. this needs to be an ever-developing area of work.

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1. Background

Meat and Livestock Australia are working with the producer sector to engage and educate on sustainability, for instance through their work with initiatives such as Australian Good Meat (www.goodmeat.com.au) and the Carbon Neutral by 2030 Initiative (www.mla.com.au/cn30). However, there is a gap between the producer and food processor chain through to the consumers view about sustainable food, especially with regard to the claim of food being ‘sustainably produced’. The development of the draft Teys Australia Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool and trialling of the tool with producers was designed to address this gap as well as respond to international customer requests on Australia’s sustainability credentials.

2. Objectives

The objective of this project was to develop a simple tool for producers to measure and report their sustainability to underpin the Teys brand messaging by:

- Building producer capability in customer expectation with regard to sustainable production
- Identifying opportunities for continuous improvement in sustainable beef production
- Supporting the Australian beef industry’s effort to measure and report sustainability indicators as part of the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework

The tool was not able to be assessed in the field due to continued COVID 19 border closures and travel restrictions in March - October 2020. Teys Australia decided to finalise the project so the current draft version of the self-assessment tool was unable to be rolled out for further trial and development into a third party accredited and audited standard.

Therefore, the video and webinar listed as part of the final deliverable engagement activities did not eventuate.

3. Methodology

3.1 Advisory board

An advisory board comprised of Teys Australia, Food & Veterinary Services Pty Ltd, an international customer and producer representatives was established to provide feedback on the development of the Framework. Producers representatives included the pilot producers for this project and covered both pasture fed and feedlot operations that were also geographically diverse. The advisory board provided comment and guidance on the development of the first version of the draft Teys Australia Sustainability Framework as well as feedback on revisions and improvements to the Framework to ensure it was producer-led and also practical.

3.2 Framework development

3.2.1 Discovery

Prior to the development of the tool, a scoping exercise was undertaken to determine what standards, certifications, systems, programs and accreditations were already available and in use. Standards identified, that included sustainability outcomes/requirements were:

- Livestock Production Assurance – Level 1 On Farm Food Safety (Integrity Systems Company 2020)
- LPA QA On Farm Quality Assurance Program (Incorporating Cattlecare and Flockcare) (Integrity Systems Company 2020 b)
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle (draft and endorsed version) (Animal Health Australia 2020 a)
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock (Animal Health Australia 2020 b)
- National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme: Standards of Accreditation (NFAS) (AUS-MEAT 2020)
- Pasturefed Cattle Assurance System (PCAS) (Cattle Council of Australia 2020)
- Grazing BMP (Accredited, Advanced Accredited statuses and all criteria) (Grazing BMP 2020)
- Australian Land Management Group's Certified Land Management (CLM) system (ALMG) (Australian Land Management Group 2020)
- the RSCPA's Better Beef Cattle Welfare (RSPCA Australia 2013)

A mapping exercise was also undertaken, mapping existing programs against the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef Principles and Criteria. The mapping exercise was undertaken to identify the alignment of programs and identify areas that required addressing. The discovery stage and tool development was completed prior to the official launch of the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (ABSF) in April 2017. However, subsequent versions of the tool were compared to the ABSF to ensure themes and indicators were captured within the Teys Framework. The self-assessment tool was also designed to be outcome focused to allow assurance of consistent supply of product.

3.2.2 Development of the tool framework outcomes and performance indicators

A framework for the self-assessment tool was developed around 4 key pillars of sustainability. These were:

- Animal production, health and welfare
- Food safety and quality
- Natural resources and environmental management
- People and community

One of the aims of the development of the tool was to avoid multiple systems to comply with or company-by-company definitions as this results in a level of unnecessary complexity, duplications or conflicting requirements and an increased compliance cost. As a result, the outcomes and evidence required were developed to provide recognition of current systems and accreditations being run and to provide equivalence where possible. The outcomes-based approach allows producers to

demonstrate the actions they are taking to operate sustainability as there is no 'one size fits all' when working across diverse operations, production systems and geographic locations.

3.2.3 Development of the self-assessment tool

Following development of the framework, a self-assessment tool was developed. This tool was designed to allow producers to assess their operations and provide evidence to demonstrate their compliance with the performance indicators. The self-assessment tool required producers to answer questions aligned with the performance indicator and to provide evidence (submitted through the text box with each question and/or as attachments within the tool).

A rating scale was also developed as a part of the self-assessment. Based on the response to each question and the evidence provided, a rating (0 – 4) was assigned for each performance indicator. The rating scale was as follows:

0 – No response provided.

1 – The producer does not comply with this element of the Framework but has knowledge of the requirements.

2 – The producer is compliant with this element of the Framework. The producer can explain how they meet the Framework, but no documentation is maintained or has been provided to support their claim of compliance.

3 – The producer is compliant with this element of the Framework. The producer can explain how they meet the Framework and maintains documentation that demonstrates compliance.

4 – The producer is compliant with this element of the Framework. The producer can explain how they meet the Framework and maintains documentation that demonstrates compliance. Monitoring records show feedback/continuous improvement loop.

Some performance indicators required producers to demonstrate compliance with specific targets and outcomes in addition to the documentation, monitoring and continual improvement requirements outlined above. For example, where producers indicated that husbandry procedures such as castration were conducted as a part of their operation, the rating applied took into account the use of pain relief, age of the animal and the method of castration used in determining the rating that was applied.

3.3 Producer pilot and roll out

During phase one of the producer pilot and roll out eight independent producers and the Teys Australia feedlots involved in the project were requested to make comment on the draft Framework and indicators developed and to fill out the associated self-assessment tool. Work instructions on how to use the tool, over the phone and in-person support were provided to the producers.

Due to COVID 19 border closures and travel restrictions and Teys Australia's decision to finalise the project, phase two of producer pilot and roll out with the current version of the self-assessment tool was unable to occur.

4. Results

4.1 Producer pilot

Of the eight independent producers and Teys Australia feedlots involved in the project, the self-assessments were received from seven independent producers and the Teys Australia feedlots. This covered 12 properties including three feedlots. All except one producer started the self-assessment, this producer decided not to answer the self-assessment due to competing priorities, however requested to continue to be included in meetings and updates. Of the 12 self-assessments, three self-assessments were incomplete. This appeared to be due to IT issues with the self-assessment tool. One self-assessment was completed with Food & Veterinary Services Pty Ltd in attendance. When Food & Veterinary Services Pty Ltd went to access this assessment at a later date, it had saved as incomplete. Two other self-assessments were also incomplete. Based on feedback, these were also due to IT issues. While these assessments were incomplete, they have been included in the review as they do provide additional data for some of the questions and responses that did save in the self-assessment.

4.2 Feedback from pilot producers

Feedback from the producers during completion of the self-assessment included:

- The tool needed re-ordering to make it more user-friendly with the easier sections (i.e. sections that producers were more familiar with presented first i.e. animal health and welfare)
- A tool that allowed document upload as well as photos would be better (note: the platform utilised for the pilot allowed photo upload only)
- Re-consideration of the wording of some questions and possibly provide more notes for context on some of the questions

4.3 Assessment of pilot producer responses

The self-assessment was structured with closed questions (i.e. yes/no) to demonstrate compliance with the question, followed by a text box where producers were asked to provide evidence to support their answer. A list of suggested evidence was also provided below the text box to prompt completion of this section and support the producers in providing the required level of response. The quality of the self-assessments provided varied greatly, with some producers just providing yes/no answers through to other producers who providing self-assessments for multiple properties and sent additional attachments as supporting evidence, or used the photo feature within the self-assessment platform to attach photos of their property and relevant documents to demonstrate compliance.

Where responses were provided in the evidence text box and/or additional documentation provided, the following observations were made.

- The level of detail provided in the text box varied greatly, with some only providing a short response that did not sufficiently demonstrate how they complied with the question

- Some producers referenced the names of documents, policies, plans etc. that contributed to compliance with this question, however they did not provide examples of this documentation or explain how the documents contributed to compliance with the question
- One producer sent additional documentation to support their responses, however as this was often not referenced in the self-assessment, it was difficult for a third party to identify in some instances which documents linked to which questions.
- One producer provided feedback through the text box that additional definitions/guidance was needed for some questions (e.g. What constituted 'Sustainably produced feed/supplements?') to allow the producers to adequately answer the question
- One producer used the photo function in the self-assessment platform to provide images of relevant parts of the operation and relevant documentation, however photos of documentation were not of a sufficient size, and were legible when resized.

These observations all supported the feedback received from producers i.e.

- Additional explanation/guidance required to support producers in providing the required level of information to demonstrate compliance when using a self-assessment platform rather than in person audit.
- The self-assessment tool needs to allow document upload as well as photos.

4.4 Self-assessment update

The draft Teys Australia Sustainability Framework was reviewed against the 2019 ABSF Update (note that the 2020 Australian Beef Sustainability Annual Update was released after this component of the project was completed) to ensure that the Teys Australia Sustainability Framework aligned and picked up the key indicators. Those key indicators which were identified as gaps were incorporated into the revised draft Teys Australia Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool.

Taking into account the producer feedback, review of the producer self-assessment and review and analysis of the recent sustainability developments, Food & Veterinary Services redrafted the Teys Australia Sustainability Framework to produce the current version. The changes to the Self-Assessment Tool included:

- Re-ordering the Elements to make the tool more friendly with the easier more familiar sections first i.e. animal health and welfare
- Additional explanation/supporting information and/or resources to provide clear guidance on the level of detail required to demonstrate compliance with the Framework and allow ratings to be applied
- Incorporation of additional key areas into the tool, including Antimicrobial Stewardship (AMS) and biosecurity. These areas needed to be addressed either as additional questions or clearly included in the explanations/supporting information to ensure these are addressed by producers.

With regard to updating the self-assessment tool developed, Teys Australia have moved away from the original platform used during the pilot. Food & Veterinary Services Pty Ltd have compiled the outcomes, performance indicators, self-assessment questions, suggested evidence and rating scale in a single document. This can then be incorporated into the new platform being used.

4.5 Roll-out

The final step in this project was for the draft Teys Australia Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool to be rolled out to 12 – 20 producers, with support provided by Food & Veterinary Services Pty Ltd to ensure level of evidence provided to demonstrate compliance was fully understood. This was initially delayed due to COVID 19 travel restrictions. Food & Veterinary Services considered a number of alternative methods to assess Teys Australia’s selected producers including remote auditing by smart technology however there was still a strong preference for face-to-face, on the ground assessment given this is a new project-based assessment. Due to the continued COVID 19 border closures and travel restrictions and Teys Australia’s decision to finalise the project, the current draft version of the tool was unable to be rolled out for further trial.

5. Conclusion

The draft Teys Australia Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool was completed and is ready for use or further trialling. However, due to the continued COVID 19 border closures and travel restrictions and Teys Australia's decision to finalise the project, the current version of the tool was unable to be rolled out for further trial.

5.1 Key findings

The draft Teys Australia Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool adopted an outcomes-based approach to allow producers to demonstrate the actions they are taking to operate sustainably. There is no 'one size fits all' when working across diverse operations, production systems and geographic locations. This project demonstrated that an outcomes-based approach is feasible when self-assessment tools are developed with producers. The self-assessment phase of the project highlighted the need for user friendly platforms due to variations in IT access and/or IT literacy.

5.2 Benefits to industry

Benefits to the industry from this project and from continued investment in this area include:

- Continued development of producer capability in understanding and meeting current and future market requirements for sustainability.
- Bridging the gap between producers and the consumer requirements and expectations, including the development of requirements by producer led projects, such as this one, that met consumer expectations.
- Empowering producers with increased knowledge to make decisions to ensure maximum profitability.
- Demonstrating to producers and processors how sustainable beef can be achieved and verified.

6. Future research and recommendations

- Further consideration, development and adoption of sustainability standards and certification schemes, that align with the ABSF and are 'fit for purpose' (i.e. recognise the Australian production environment) are required to demonstrate the meat industry's sustainability credentials and sustainability claims.
- Continued development and identification of objective performance indicators that allow progress to be measured are required i.e. this needs to be an ever-developing area of work.

7. References

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1 – DRAFT Teys Australia Sustainability Framework and Self-Assessment Tool (attached separately)