

factsheet

PEOPLE



Attracting and retaining staff in the southern beef, sheepmeat and pastoral wool industries

Southern pastoral livestock industry profile

Based on the findings of a national workforce survey of the pastoral livestock industry¹, the key features of the southern beef, sheepmeat and pastoral wool industry are:

- Mostly smaller employers with single properties managed by families.
- High percentage (81%) of employees work on small properties employing five or less staff (Figure 1).
- An ageing workforce with nearly half (45%) over 50 years of age (Figure 2).

Figure 1 – Percentage of survey participants by enterprise size

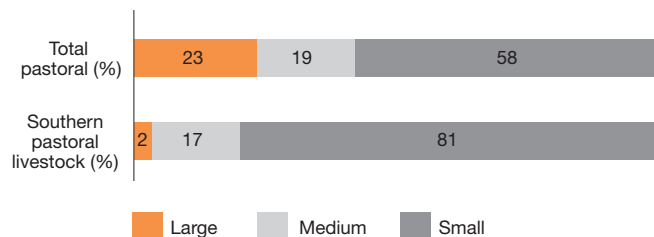
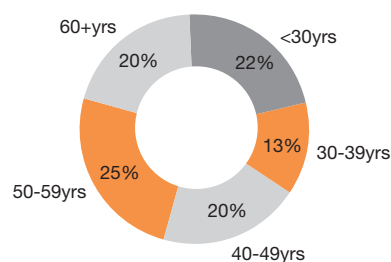


Figure 2 – Age profile



¹ The 2007 Workforce Survey had a total sample of 842 individuals, comprising 136 owners, 155 managers and 551 employees.

Key points

- Southern beef, sheepmeat and pastoral wool industries have a high proportion of smaller family-managed properties operated by an ageing workforce.
- The key attractions for employees across all regions and properties are a family farming background, lifestyle, working with animals and the outdoors.
- When seeking employment, workers' key considerations are the reputation of the employer and job variety.
- Additional considerations depend on enterprise size (based on employee numbers).
- Long-term sustainability of the workforce and enterprise are key challenges.
- Long-term financial security is key; pay by itself does not attract or retain staff.
- Managers play a key part in engaging and retaining their current workforce.



Attracting employees

Key attractions to the pastoral livestock industry

A family farming background, lifestyle, working with animals and working in the outdoors are the top attractions to the pastoral livestock industry, highlighted in these comments:

“Good variety of jobs, lots of fun.”

“Minimum stress, stimulating and diverse duties and the lack of a feeling of ‘going to work’ is priceless.”

Survey participants who had worked in the mining industry returned to the pastoral livestock industry because of the unsuitable lifestyle, social isolation and issues with management practices.

Employer attributes

When seeking employment, workers’ considerations differ depending on the size of the employer’s enterprise.

- Small enterprises (less than five employees) – job variety and working independently are key attractions.
- Medium enterprises (6-14 employees) – quality of the operation, company reputation and career opportunities are key attractions.
- Large enterprises (15 or more employees) – career opportunities, company reputation, pay and benefits are key attractions.

Engaging employees

Employees in the southern pastoral livestock industry are highly engaged. They are satisfied with their job, committed, loyal, proud of working for their farm, have good morale, feel trusted and valued, go the extra mile and believe they have a long-term future with their employer.

Figure 3 highlights that 68% of employees are highly engaged. These results compare favourably with the overall Australian average of 21% of Australian employees who are engaged.²

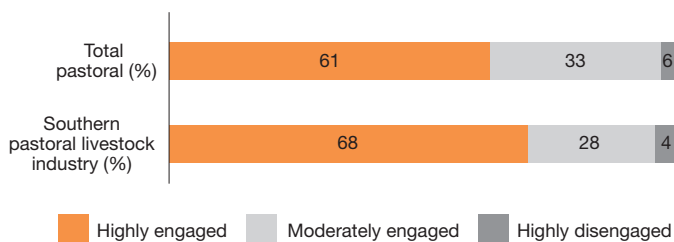


Figure 3 – Level of engagement

Meet employee expectations

The key to engaging employees is meeting their expectations. The top five expectations in order of importance are:



1. Understanding what is expected at work.
2. Feeling trusted and valued as a person.
3. Having pride in working for the farm/station/company.
4. Being open and honest in dealings with each other.
5. Good quality accommodation.

Burnout is a critical issue

Highly engaged employees run the risk of fatigue and burnout when not working in a sustainable manner.

“There is clear evidence that employees working more than 48 hours per week are at significantly greater risk of poor health, safety and social outcomes.”³

Over half of employees (54%) in the southern beef, sheepmeat and pastoral wool industry work more than 50 hours a week. This is exacerbated by the fact that 82% also work between 46 to 52 weeks per year, leaving little time to recuperate. The following comments from the workforce survey clarify this:

“Most employees in agriculture work dreadfully long hours with little time for a life with family etc. Farms need more access to information on work hours for employees, time sheets etc. Managers need to ensure fatigue does not affect employees.”

“It is good working in the beef industry, but for the hours you work, I believe that we don’t get paid for it.”

Succession planning impacts engagement

Although just over a half (52%) of participating

² Gallup Australian Engagement Study, 2006.

³ Professor Drew Dawson from the Centre for Sleep Research, School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia.



properties reported having a succession plan in place, comments from some participants highlight that a lack of proactive planning or contingency planning, leave staff and properties in a vulnerable position, forcing them to look for employment elsewhere. Comments from the survey included:

“Long standing family partnership succession planning failed.”

“Succession planning should have been addressed and fixed beforehand.”

Retaining employees

The key reasons employees leave are:

- better career opportunities elsewhere
- not feeling valued/lack of recognition of achievements
- uncertain future
- poor leadership and communication
- uncompetitive wages

Different sized enterprises have specific retention challenges:

- Small enterprises – there is the potential for burnout in an ageing workforce due to long hours and more working weeks.
- Medium enterprises – long working hours are a challenge for retaining mature and younger workers.
- Large enterprises – unchallenging and boring jobs demotivate younger workers.

Financial security and certainty are basic needs

Financial security and certainty are key motivators for retention. Pay, by itself, is not sufficient to provide financial security where individuals are working in an uncertain environment. Addressing an employee's sense of long-term employment certainty will assist with their retention.

Managers are key in engaging and retaining their current workforce

In southern properties, managers can develop long-term certainty and loyalty through:

1. Engendering pride in their property.
2. Providing clarity of direction and job expectations.
3. Providing attractive employment conditions.
4. Recognising staff contributions and how they achieve the property's vision.
5. Utilising and developing staff skills.
6. Providing equipment and resources to do their jobs well.
7. Developing and promoting community building initiatives on and off the farm.
8. Enabling work-life balance (eg time in-lieu, sufficient annual leave, flexi-hours).
9. Ensuring job tasks provide variety and learning.
10. Ensuring succession planning is done in a proactive manner and includes a number of contingency plans.



Industry support is crucial

Industry-wide initiatives are required to facilitate career choices in the pastoral livestock industry.

Recommendations from the workforce survey included:

1. A campaign to improve the image of the industry, promoting the lifestyle benefits.
2. An industry review of remuneration to identify best practice approaches.
3. An on-line industry-wide hub for career information, employment and training opportunities.
4. A portable skills portfolio for employees which documents their skills and acts as a passport as they move from farm to farm.
5. Professional development and mentoring programs for ongoing development of supervisors and managers.
6. A Gap Year, offering short-term and long-term career opportunities for school leavers and career changers, and linked to qualifications or statements of attainment.



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Further information

The following information on how the beef and pastoral industries can improve staff attraction and retention strategies based on the size of their workforce is available from the MLA web site at www.mla.com.au/publications (for fact sheets) or www.mla.com.au/research (for final reports):

- Final Report: *B.NBP.0370 Attracting and retaining staff in Australia's beef, sheep and pastoral wool industries*
- Fact sheet: *Attracting and retaining staff in the northern beef industry*
- Fact sheet: *Large-scale employers – attracting and retaining staff in the pastoral livestock industry*
- Fact sheet: *Medium-sized employers – attracting and retaining staff in the pastoral livestock industry*
- Fact sheet: *Small employers – attracting and retaining staff in the pastoral livestock industry*

For more information contact MLA phone: 1800 675 717, visit www.mla.com.au or email: publications@mla.com.au

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