

DOHNE PARTNERSHIPS WITH EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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SUMMARY

Muresk Institute is a broker of, and venue for, the delivery of a suite of post secondary qualifications in agriculture and agribusiness from certificate to degree levels. One of the key elements of the brokerage role is the development of partnerships with a range of training providers and industry organisations. Muresk Institute have partnered with the Western Australian Dohne Breeders' Association to host a 200 ewe Dohne Merino flock at the Muresk farm. This flock provides students (in a range of disciplines and courses) with the opportunity to apply their understanding of the theory of animal breeding and selection to a practical situation; to develop relationships with Western Australian Dohne breeders; and facilitates the collection of an independent body of data on the performance of the Dohne in West Australia (WA).

INTRODUCTION

For nearly 90 years, agricultural education has been delivered at the Muresk campus in WA. Commencing in 1926 with the establishment of the Muresk Agricultural College, there have been a number of organisations responsible for the delivery of post-secondary agricultural and agribusiness education at this site. The most recent manifestation is the Muresk Institute, a training provider within the Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development. Muresk Institute is a provider and broker of education and training, especially in the vocational sector. This paper will describe the partnership between Muresk Institute and the Western Australian Dohne Breeders' Association which commenced in July 2015.

Background. On Tuesday 14th September 1926, Muresk Agricultural College opened with 16 students and 2 staff (McLaren 2001). The foundation Principal, Hugh Jason Hughes, considered that students should be trained in '*...the science and practices of farming, in business principles and in rural economy.*' Hughes also perceived a role at Muresk for research trials and the opportunity to capitalise on an identified need within the farming community by offering short courses for working farmers.

For the next 40 years, Muresk Agricultural College operated as part of the Western Australian Department of Agriculture. It became part of the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) in 1969, the first agricultural college in Australia to become part of a larger institution of higher education.

On its 50th anniversary in 1976, Muresk hosted the International Sheep Breeding Congress which attracted delegates from around the world and in 1977 introduced the first undergraduate degree in agribusiness in Australia.

Nineteen eighty seven saw the transition from WAIT to Curtin University of Technology (now Curtin University). In 2012 the responsibility for Muresk's operation was transferred from Curtin University to the State Government.

Since the Department of Training and Workforce Development took over ownership and operations of the facility in 2012, the Muresk Institute has continued to broker and facilitate vocational training and tertiary education (from a range of providers) and continues to be a multi-tenanted, multifunctional training, education and research facility. One of the key aspects to the business of Muresk Institute is the development of partnerships with training providers and

industry organisations.

Muresk Institute, in collaboration with its education partners offers a wide range of courses, including;

- Agricultural Short Courses
- Equine Short Courses
- Certificate IV in Vet Nursing
- Diploma in Agriculture (International)
- Integrated Diploma in Agricultural Technologies
- Degree in Agricultural Business Management

One such partnership with the WA Dohne Breeders' Association, is the subject of this paper.

Location. The Muresk Institute Farm is located approximately 10 kilometres south west of Northam in the Western Australian Central Wheatbelt. Comprising of 898 ha, 56% of the land is arable, whilst 90% is grazable. The farm is home to 1300 Merino ewes weaning, 1500 Merino lambs and 16 rams.

Other resources supporting educational activities on-site include the State Soil Archive and a new sire evaluation site with the Stud Merino Breeders Association of WA to be overseen by the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA).

The partnership. The concept of a partnership between Muresk Institute and the WA Dohne Breeders' Association was initially raised in August 2014. Students in their first year of study of the Charles Sturt University Bachelor of Agricultural Business Management degree attended the WA Sire Day as part of their studies in livestock production. A core component of the learning program is an introduction to animal breeding and genetics. The opportunity to attend the Sire Day allowed students to view first hand the application of breeding and selection theory to practical situations. The Sire Day provided the initial exposure to the Dohne breed and its philosophy for students at Muresk.

The opportunity to build on this initial exposure by providing a demonstration flock to be run at the Muresk Institute is consistent with the development of the breed in South Africa.

The partnership was launched on 29 July 2015 with the donation of 200 commercial Dohne ewes to the Muresk Institute flock and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by the Minister for Training and Workforce Development and the President of the Dohne Breeders. Opportunities created through the partnership include sharing of expertise, work experience and employment opportunities.



Figure 1. Ross Fenwick, Secretary, Muresk Institute General manager Prue Jenkins and Rhys Parsons, President of the WA Dohne Breeders Association at the partnership launch.

Proceeds from the sale of the first wool clip shorn from the Dohne flock have been donated to charity – the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and beyondblue.



Figure 2. Muresk Institute General Manager Prue Jenkins, Ian Hanna and Rachel Browne from the WA Dohne Breeders Association and Reece Morton from Landmark at the wool sale.

Benefits. From an educational perspective, there are a range of benefits to students engaged in learning at the Muresk campus. These include;

- Being able to connect theory with practice in objective breeding methods, including understanding ASBVs
- Hands-on experience of sheep selection
- Performance monitoring of the Dohne flock, and the capacity to conduct trials and assessments
- Build students' professional networks with Dohne breeders
- Participate in industry workshops such as RAMSELECT
- Student/commercial membership of the WA Dohne Breeders' Association

On the flipside, benefits to members include;

- Ongoing exposure of young professionals to the Dohne breed and philosophy
- Opportunities to work alongside students to develop their skills and knowledge in animal breeding and selection
- Opportunities for post-graduate study using data collected on the Dohne flock
- Development of a large body of independent data documenting the performance of the Dohne in WA

CONCLUSION

When agricultural education commenced at the Muresk campus in 1926, perhaps few would have envisaged that 90 years later Muresk Institute would be operating true to the original aims as described by founding Principal Hugh Jason Hughes. Muresk Institute's role as a broker of post-secondary courses in agriculture and agribusiness, as a host for research trials and a venue for

short courses offering accreditation within the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) is supported by the development of partnerships with industry organisations such as the WA Dohne Breeders' Association. This partnership allows the Dohne breed to engage with future industry participants at a formative stage and offers benefits to all.

REFERENCES

McLaren, G. (2001) '75 Years On: A History of the Muresk Institute of Agriculture'. Muresk Institute of Agriculture Curtin University of Technology.