

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Final report for AWI project CM137

March 2004

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Note: * denotes either fully or partly funded by woolgrower levies, directly by AWI or its predecessors.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Executive Summary

Technology based Decision Support System (DSS) tools have continued to increase in prominence in all forms of business over the past several years. Agribusiness, including the wool industry, has been no exception to this.

There are currently many DSS tools available to wool producers. The purpose of this scoping study is to identify and assess DSS tools that are either currently available, under development, or in the planning stage. A total of 80 DSS tools are assessed.

These DSS tools vary widely in terms of benefit to wool producers, development, and usability. These DSS tools can be categorised as:

- Business Management
- Livestock Management
- Market Information
- On Farm Fibre Measurement
- Processing
- Production
- Weather

Potential exists for future work to be carried out in the areas of a single market information service, production with an emphasis on benchmarking and weather forecasting and prediction.

Conversely, the areas of Business Management, Livestock Management and On Farm Fibre Measurement have an abundance of DSS tools and are reaching saturation point. Based on reduced sheep numbers and wool enterprise profitability, it is likely that several service providers in these areas will cease to operate in the near future, unless costs are significantly reduced or spread over other industries.

A major obstacle preventing many DSS tools making a positive contribution to the wool industry is lack of awareness by wool producers, leading to low levels of adoption and utilisation.

To improve this situation, recommendations are made to establish a service for wool producers to provide information on existing DSS tools by grouping together tools of a similar nature, promoting their benefits and directly comparing them. Furthermore, it will be important to raise the general awareness of the benefits that DSS tools can have on the broader industry as many commercial service providers are only targeting the 'top 20%' of wool producers. AWI should assess it's role in promoting DSS tools in general to the remainder of the industry with the aim of increasing industry awareness of their benefits and in turn increasing industry viability.

1 Introduction

Utilisation of technology by Australian businesses has grown rapidly over the past several years, with the majority of Australian businesses now enjoying varying levels of efficiency gains achieved through the use of some type of technology.

Agribusiness in many ways has had the most to gain from the introduction of technology, as services that were previously provided on a consultancy or face-to-face basis are now available with the use of Internet or PC based technology. This has provided vast improvements in terms of access to services and the speed at which information can be analysed.

Specifically, wool industry agribusinesses now have access to a vast range of technology based Decision Support System (DSS) Tools. These DSS tools are either Internet or PC based computer programs that analysis business data and present it to the user so as business decisions can be made more easily

The aim of this scoping study is to identify and document all current and potentially available decision support system tools that are available, either directly or indirectly to wool producers.

As such the scoping study follows on and includes information from two previous studies commissioned by AWI:

1. Scoping Study on Web-based Producer Tools (EC624), Ben Swain, BCS Agribusiness Solutions (2003), which placed particular emphasis on wool pricing decision tools.
2. Decision Support Systems – Software for On Farm (EC396), Mark McDonald, Mac Stats and Analysis (2003), which placed particular emphasis on farm management software that could operate with input from any of the OFFM systems.

From this scoping study, AWI will have complete and up-to-date information on current and potential DSS tools for wool producers. This will assist AWI in determining how existing and potential DSS tools could be supported in the future, as well provide information that will help AWI consider the future establishment of a DSS centre.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

2 Format

This scoping study identifies and assesses all known currently available and planned DSS tools that are available to wool producers. These include web-based, CD-based and PC-based programs. Due to the large number of such tools, the assessment of each is provided in summary form to enable direct comparisons. Tools of similar nature are grouped together.

Each DSS tool is assessed against the following:

- Type
- Availability
- Wool Producer Benefit
- Target Audience
- Current or Expected Usage
- Required Skill Level
- Presentation
- Development Platform
- Stability
- Type of Support
- Level of Support

3 Decision Support System Tools

SECTION 1

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

The section covers decision support tools that are related to Business Management. They include Financial Calculators, Processing Calculators, Whole Farm Planning Tools and Gross Margin Calculators.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 1

Name: Business Support Tools
Supplier: Holmes Sackett & Associates
Type: Business Management
Availability: Free to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients

Wool Producer Benefit: A range of primary production business support tools ranging from business risk calculators, business plan assistance, debt safety assessment and economic valuation models.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients.

Required Skill Level: Knowledge and skills in Microsoft Excel.

Presentation: Basic.

Development Platform: PC based Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: The simple nature of the system results in good stability.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Holmes Sackett & Associates consultants.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, low support only is needed.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 2

Name: Farm Budget Planners
Supplier: ANZ Banking Group
Type: Budget Planner
Availability: Free via the ANZ website

Wool Producer Benefit: A variety of enterprise planners, including one for wool, are available that perform a variety of functions from preparation of annualised cash budgets and estimating costs of a new loan to obtaining key performance ratios.

The planners would prove useful in analysing a producers current operation, planning next season or looking at "what if" scenarios.

Target Audience: All primary producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free delivery model.

Required Skill Level: Moderate Internet skills are required.

Presentation: Very professional. ANZ bank has sophisticated skills in this area.

Development Platform: Web based. Database structure not available.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Online FAQs available.

Level of Support: Low level of support available given the free nature of the product. Support is provided to ANZ clients through their account management structure.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 3

Name: Farm Productivity
Supplier: The MacKinnon Project
Type: Farm Production and Finance
Availability: By subscription to www.paddock.com.au

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists users in conducting their own farm production and financial analysis. These reports have many roles including assessing business and enterprise profitability and productivity. All users' records are maintained in a confidential database and the user is able to revisit their data at any time.

Target Audience: Top 20% of wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Several hundred subscribers have access to the service.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required. Majority of clients currently using the tool receive ongoing training and consultative services.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Most likely Microsoft Visual Basic. Incorporates a web-based questionnaire.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Directly by The MacKinnon Project staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 4

Name: Gross Margin Calculator

Supplier: Sheep CRC

Type: Gross Margin

Availability: Currently under development consideration

Wool Producer Benefit: Assist in the calculation of gross margins for various business enterprises.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Will depend on how it is delivered. Internet delivery should generate a moderate level of usage.

Required Skill Level: It would be likely that a low level of skill would be required. Basic Internet skills should be sufficient.

Presentation: Unknown.

Development Platform: Unknown. Should be Internet based.

Stability: Unknown.

Type of Support: Unknown depending on delivery model.

Level of Support: Unknown depending on delivery model.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 5

Name: Sell or Feed Analysis Tools
Supplier: Sheep CRC
Type: Financial Calculator
Availability: Currently under development consideration

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists wool producers to calculate profitability comparisons between selling sheep for mutton or keeping for wool.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Depending on delivery model.

Required Skill Level: It would be likely that a low level of skill would be required. Basic Internet skills should be sufficient.

Presentation: Unknown.

Development Platform: Unknown. Should be Internet based.

Stability: Unknown. As a web based product, stability should be reasonable.

Type of Support: Unknown depending on delivery model.

Level of Support: Unknown depending on delivery model.

SECTION 2

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

The section covers decision support tools that are related to Livestock Management. They include Breeding, Pasture Management, Parasite Management and Drought Management tools.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 6

Name: Drench Decision Tool (WormMaster)

Supplier: Sheep CRC (with AWI)

Type: Parasite Management

Availability: Currently under development. Will be available freely November 2004

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists wool producers to decide the appropriate drench for their location, type of sheep and time. Will also provide a useful information source for sheep internal parasite control.

Target Audience: Graziers, advisors and veterinarians

Current or Expected Usage: Given it will be provided free, expected usage should be high.

Required Skill Level: Designed as a very simple point and click system. Basic Internet or PC skills should be all that is required.

Presentation: Unknown. It is envisaged that a professional product is established.

Development Platform: Both web-based and CD-based versions will be available.

Stability: Unknown at this stage.

Type of Support: Unknown at this stage. It is envisaged that support will be provided by AWI.

Level of Support: A low level of support is expected to be required.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 7

Name: Drought Management Tools
Supplier: Holmes Sackett & Associates
Type: Drought Management
Availability: Free to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients

Wool Producer Benefit: A range of spreadsheets designed to help wool producers make as good a decision as possible during drought by determining the best possible strategy in terms of feed requirements and feeding versus selling.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients.

Required Skill Level: Knowledge and skills in Microsoft Excel.

Presentation: Basic.

Development Platform: PC based Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: The simple nature of the system results in good stability.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Holmes Sackett & Associates consultants.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, low support only is needed.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 8

Name: Genetics

Supplier: Sheep CRC

Type: Breeding

Availability: Currently under development consideration

Wool Producer Benefit: A range of tools that would allow wool producers to better utilise genetic gain enhancers. These would be similar to those currently utilised in the beef industry.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Depending on delivery model.

Required Skill Level: It would be likely that a low level of skill would be required. Basic Internet skills should be sufficient.

Presentation: Unknown.

Development Platform: Unknown. Should be Internet based.

Stability: Unknown. As a web based product, stability should be reasonable.

Type of Support: Unknown depending on delivery model.

Level of Support: Unknown depending on delivery model.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 9

Name: Grazing Crop Budget Calculator
Supplier: Holmes Sackett & Associates
Type: Pasture Management
Availability: Free to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists in calculating total returns from a grazing crop and can be adapted for any mix of grain and livestock.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients.

Required Skill Level: Knowledge and skills in Microsoft Excel.

Presentation: Basic.

Development Platform: PC based Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: The simple nature of the system results in good stability.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Holmes Sackett & Associates consultants.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, low support only is needed.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 10

Name: Lamb Lot Feeding Calculator
Supplier: Holmes Sackett & Associates
Type: Livestock Management
Availability: Free to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows wool producers to calculate from current prices and basic assumptions the breakeven price required for lot feeding lambs. Margins from a range of higher and lower sale and buy prices are also included.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients.

Required Skill Level: Knowledge and skills in Microsoft Excel.

Presentation: Basic.

Development Platform: PC based Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: The simple nature of the system results in good stability.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Holmes Sackett & Associates consultants.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, low support only is needed.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 11

Name: Merino Genetic Services
Supplier: University of New England
Type: Breeding
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides flock recording functionality for genetic evaluation purposes. EVBs and selection indexes for both wool and lamb production. Allows benchmarking between flocks. Was developed from original LambPlan that was developed solely for lamb production.

Target Audience: Breeders and producers

Current or Expected Usage: Used widely in lamb production. Use by wool producers is beginning to grow.

Required Skill Level: Relative simple system to use with extensive reporting functionality.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: PC based. Database structure unknown.

Stability: A product that has a long history of stable operation.

Type of Support: Technically supported by the LambPlan program (MLA).

Level of Support: Ongoing to commercial clients.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 12

Name: Mutton versus Wool Calculator
Supplier: Holmes Sackett & Associates
Type: Livestock Management
Availability: Free to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients

Wool Producer Benefit: Can be used to determine the minimum future sale value of wool producing sheep, which is required to achieve a target profit.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients.

Required Skill Level: Knowledge and skills in Microsoft Excel.

Presentation: Basic.

Development Platform: PC based Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: The simple nature of the system results in good stability.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Holmes Sackett & Associates consultants.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, low support only is needed.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 13

Name: PAM2000
Supplier: Fairport Technologies
Type: Livestock Management
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists in the recording of animal production and farm management details and records.

Target Audience: All livestock producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Several hundred users Australia wide. Largely cattle industry based at this stage with expansion into the wool industry growing.

Required Skill Level: Users require training in use.

Presentation: Very professional system.

Development Platform: Based on PC software with the option of Palm Pilot devices for field recording.

Stability: Appears a very stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by Fairport and regionally located Fairport agents.

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 14

Name: Pasture Improvement Calculator
Supplier: Holmes Sackett & Associates
Type: Pasture Management
Availability: Free to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients

Wool Producer Benefit: Evaluate returns from improving pasture at different rates. Both internal rates of return and cashflow are calculated. Analysis is based on results for 12 years. An analysis can be done on any method of improving pasture from restoring or just fertilising to improve productivity.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to Holmes Sackett & Associates clients.

Required Skill Level: Knowledge and skills in Microsoft Excel.

Presentation: Basic.

Development Platform: PC based Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: The simple nature of the system results in good stability.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Holmes Sackett & Associates consultants.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, low support only is needed.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 15

Name: Raceside Classer
Supplier: NSW Agriculture (with Sheep CRC)
Type: Breeding
Availability: Under development

Wool Producer Benefit: A real-time selection indexing tool design to be used as part of an overall sheep classing strategy. Aimed at increasing genetic gain within a flock by selecting superior animals.

Target Audience: Specialist wool producers and consultants.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown.

Required Skill Level: It is envisaged that the system will require low level PC skills.

Presentation: Unknown.

Development Platform: It is envisaged that the system will be PC based.

Stability: Unknown.

Type of Support: Unknown. It is envisaged that technical support would be provided by NSW Agriculture

Level of Support: Unknown. It is envisaged that support would be provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

Decision Support Tool # 16

Name: Rampower and Object
Supplier: NSW Agriculture
Type: Breeding
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Breeding tools that allows for the calculation of selection indexes (Rampower) and to determine breeding objectives (Object). Aimed at increasing genetic gain within a flock by selecting superior animals.

Target Audience: Specialist wool producers and consultants.

Current or Expected Usage: Not widely used as original software. Rather other groups tend to incorporate the public sector IP into private DSS tools such as Top Stud, WoolPak and WoolPlus.

Required Skill Level: Low level PC skills are required.

Presentation: Very basic.

Development Platform: PC based.

Stability: Reported as a very stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by NSW Agriculture

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 17

Name: Stockbook
Supplier: Practical Systems
Type: Livestock Management
Availability: Commercially available from \$330

Wool Producer Benefit: Focused on individual animal data to provide a broad range of functions such as progeny testing, selection indexes and production factors.

Target Audience: All livestock producers and advisors.

Current or Expected Usage: A relatively small number of producers currently utilising the system.

Required Skill Level: Different levels of functionality are available so that the required skill level is from very low to relatively high.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: PC based. Database structure unknown.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technically supported by Practical Systems via a toll free phone support line and email for a cost of \$220 per year.

Level of Support: High level support to commercial clients with a support agreement.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 18

Name: StockPlan®

Supplier: NSW Agriculture

Type: Drought Management

Availability: Available free with funding from AWI as part of a 1 day workshop

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists to explore management options in the early stage of (and during) a drought by aiding the decision making process so that decisions minimise the environmental and financial impacts of drought.

Target Audience: Graziers of all livestock in NSW.

Current or Expected Usage: Free access to the workshop / software has only recently been made available to wool producers. At this stage several hundred NSW producers have been trained. Assuming that the funding continues, usage should continue to increase.

Required Skill Level: To access the software users must complete a full day workshop. This provides users with the skills necessary to effectively use the software.

Presentation: Reasonably presented product that focuses more on practicality than bells and whistles.

Development Platform: PC based using predominantly Microsoft Excel Macros.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Supported on an as needs basis by regional NSW Agriculture Livestock Extension officers.

Level of Support: To date only a low level of support has been required.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 19

Name: TopStud

Supplier: MGA

Type: Breeding

Availability: Commercially available from \$340

Wool Producer Benefit: Breeding program with functions for flock reporting, genetic selection and progeny testing.

Target Audience: Stud breeders and specialist commercial flocks.

Current or Expected Usage: Currently only a small number of individual breeders are utilising the service.

Required Skill Level: A good knowledge of PC technology is required.

Presentation: Professional system with many standard reports included.

Development Platform: PC based.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by MGA.

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 20

Name: WoolPak
Supplier: Allstock
Type: Breeding
Availability: Commercially available (\$1095)

Wool Producer Benefit: Covers all aspects of the stud merino business. Allows the recording and importation of wool fibre test results, calculates values and estimated breeding values, has export facilities to other service providers such as Rampower and incorporates a client recording system.

Target Audience: Stud merino breeders and commercial breeders breeding their own rams.

Current or Expected Usage: One of the most common stud recording tools in use. Used by several hundred clients.

Required Skill Level: Good PC skills are required to operate the system.

Presentation: Very professional product.

Development Platform: PC based, operates off a Microsoft Windows platform.

Stability: Reported and tested as a stable product.

Type of Support: Phone, fax and email support.

Level of Support: 1 year commercial support after purchase. Additional support can be purchased after this time.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 21

Name: WoolPlus
Supplier: Allstock
Type: Breeding
Availability: Commercially available (\$545)

Wool Producer Benefit: Used to collect, store and analyse information including breeding details, test results, classing information and reproductive histories. The program provides the ability to report and analyse various details including sire summaries, averages of test results for different groups, and evaluations of AI programs (including introduced sires).

Target Audience: Commercial merino breeders.

Current or Expected Usage: Widely used by large and innovative commercial breeders. Exact numbers were not available.

Required Skill Level: Good PC skills are required to operate the system.

Presentation: Very professional product.

Development Platform: PC based, operates off a Microsoft Windows platform.

Stability: Reported and tested as a stable product.

Type of Support: Phone, fax and email support.

Level of Support: 1 year commercial support.

SECTION 3

MARKET INFORMATION

The section covers decision support tools that are related to Market Information and Price discovery. They include Pricing Calculators, Price Risk Management, Trading Services, Benchmarking Tools, Production Planners and Market Information Services.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 22

Name: AMIRS Wool Appraisal
Supplier: Agricultural Market Information Resource Services
Type: Pricing Calculator
Availability: Provided free to registered users

Wool Producer Benefit: Prices wools from a wide range of types and microns. Added benefits are the inclusion of a basis calculator for use with forward contracts and a price benchmarking system that allows wool producers to see where their particular lot fitted in to an overall market of similar types on the same sale day.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Details were not available.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Exact details were withheld. Information made available suggests that the system is fully XML based.

Stability: The platform and system appear stable.

Type of Support: Technical and market support is provided online.

Level of Support: A low level of support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 23

Name: AWEX Online

Supplier: Australian Wool Exchange Ltd

Type: Market Information Service

Availability: Commercially available. Prices from \$6,325 / annum

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides little direct benefit to the majority of wool producers who receive information via a current service provider such as a broker or the media. Indirectly it will have benefits for wool producers, as the service will provide access to faster market information for their service providers.

Target Audience: Major wool trading / brokerage / information businesses.

Current or Expected Usage: Has only a handful of users after 12 months of operation. The market for this type of product is quite small and does not include growers.

Required Skill Level: Uses point and click technology and therefore requires only a moderate level of skill.

Presentation: Moderately professional. Fairly basic in this area.

Development Platform: Utilises Microsoft SQL database and Crystal Report web enabled reporting tools.

Stability: To date, reports suggest that the service is very stable.

Type of Support: AWEX Operations support the service. Most support is via phone.

Level of Support: A high level of support is provided whilst a current licence is held.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 24

Name: eclipse™

Supplier: Australian Wool Exchange Ltd

Type: Trading System

Availability: Currently under development, may be released late mid 2004

Wool Producer Benefit: The main focus of the service will be as a trading service to AWEX members. It will benefit wool producers by providing a further alternative to the auction system. Pricing capabilities will also be incorporated, allowing wool producers, through their broker, access to independent pricing advice.

Target Audience: Trading members of AWEX, including brokers, exporters, private treaty merchants and processors.

Current or Expected Usage: Currently under development. AWEX would hope that all AWEX trading members utilise the system.

Required Skill Level: Unknown at this stage. It would be envisaged that ongoing training would be required for the efficient usage of the system.

Presentation: Unknown at this stage. However, AWEX products are usually of a professional standard.

Development Platform: Commercially confident. Most likely built on a Microsoft SQL database structure with a Microsoft Visual Studio front end.

Stability: Unknown at this stage.

Type of Support: AWEX Operations would be expected to provide support to the system.

Level of Support: A high level of support would no doubt be provided given the critical nature of the service.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 25

Name: Elders Internal Pricing System

Supplier: Elders Limited

Type: Pricing Calculator

Availability: Free to Elders clients as part of selling services

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides pre-sale valuations for reserve setting purposes.

Target Audience: Wool producer clients of Elders.

Current or Expected Usage: Used on all Elders pre-sale lots.

Required Skill Level: Nil. Producer is presented with report.

Presentation: Nil. Presented as part of overall selling service.

Development Platform: Incorporated into Elders internal brokerage software and Portfolio Management software and is not web enabled. There is currently a large amount of manual manipulation of price tables in order to reflect the actual market. This manipulation is carried out internally by a team of Elders staff.

Stability: Wool producers see the service as stable as they don't interact with the technology.

Type of Support: Nil.

Level of Support: Nil.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 26

Name: e-wool™ Forward Pricing
Supplier: Bell's Line Pty Ltd
Type: Pricing Calculator
Availability: Free via e-wool™ website

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides forward prices to wool producers on their entire clip by utilising Macquarie Bank prices to calculate forward prices up to three and a half years out for any particular delivery date.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free delivery model.

Required Skill Level: Very basic system that requires very little skill to operate. Basic Internet skills are the only requirement.

Presentation: Professionally presented with clear operating instructions.

Development Platform: Mixture of Microsoft SQL and Microsoft Access databases and Microsoft Visual Basic front end.

Stability: A relatively new system. Appears stable at this stage.

Type of Support: Online support is available.

Level of Support: Offers low level of support. However, the service is very easy to use and is provided at no charge.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 27

Name: e-wool™ Spot Pricing
Supplier: Bell's Line Pty Ltd
Type: Pricing Calculator
Availability: Free via e-wool™ website

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows online pricing of a wide range of wools using independent market information. Prices are provided on a spot basis, or as per the current market.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free delivery model. Anecdotal evidence suggests that current usage could be quite large with e-wool™ experiencing good publicity over the last several years.

Required Skill Level: Very basic system that requires very little skill to operate. Basic Internet skills are the only requirement.

Presentation: Professionally presented with clear operating instructions.

Development Platform: Mixture of Microsoft SQL and Microsoft Access databases and Microsoft Visual Basic front end.

Stability: Been in operation for several years and has proved to be very stable.

Type of Support: Online support is available.

Level of Support: Offers low level of support. However, the service is very easy to use and is provided at no charge.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 28

Name: e-wool™ Wool Production Plan
Supplier: Bell's Line Pty Ltd
Type: Production Planner
Availability: On a commercial basis to e-wool™ clients

Wool Producer Benefit: Encompasses both clip analysis and production components. The aim of the production plan is to give the client a better overall perspective of their wool growing business. By using previous clip results, adjusted for seasonal changes, management decisions and clip preparation goals, a likely wool clip analysis is created. This plan can be commenced 12 months from shearing and can be updated throughout the production year.

The outputs from the production plan system can then be integrated with the pricing systems to give continual feedback on spot and forward prices. This provides the producer with the confidence that is required to enter forward arrangements.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Provided on a consultancy basis to e-wool™ clients. e-wool™ currently has a reasonable number of clients that access this service.

Required Skill Level: Given it is distributed directly as a hard copy report, users do not require any skills to access the service.

Presentation: Professionally presented report and is quite detailed in it's nature.

Development Platform: Microsoft SQL, Microsoft Access databases and e-wool™ CAPP software. Some manual intervention and checking is used prior to reports being published.

Stability: Given this service has no user front end, stability is not an issue. Database stability is reported as sound.

Type of Support: Clients are supported in their technical use of the service by e-wool™. Training programs are also run to develop understanding of the product.

Level of Support: Commercial support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 29

Name: Landmark Internal Pricing System

Supplier: Landmark Limited

Type: Pricing Calculator

Availability: Free to Landmark clients as part of selling services

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides pre-sale valuations for reserve setting purposes.

Target Audience: Wool producer clients of Landmark.

Current or Expected Usage: Used on all Landmark pre-sale lots.

Required Skill Level: Nil. Producer is presented with report.

Presentation: Nil. Presented as part of overall selling service.

Development Platform: Incorporated into Landmarks' internal brokerage software and is not web enabled. There is currently a large amount of manual manipulation of price tables in order to reflect the actual market. This manipulation is carried out by a team of Landmark staff.

Stability: Wool producers see the service as stable as they don't interact with the technology.

Type of Support: Nil.

Level of Support: Nil.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 30

Name: Market Indicators Portlet

Supplier: Department of Agriculture – Western Australia (Wool Services Desk)

Type: Market Information

Availability: Free via Wool Services Desk website

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows the user to produce a chart of historical prices for a selection of Australian regional and micron indicators. The user selects the period of interest and also the currency from a list of options. Up to three price series can be chosen at a time.

Target Audience: All wool producers, although a specific focus for Western Australian wool exists.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine due to free access.

Required Skill Level: Good Internet skills are required.

Presentation: Professional.

Development Platform: Details unknown. Most likely simple web charting software.

Stability: The system is report as stable.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Wool Services Desk staff.

Level of Support: Low level limited support.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 31

Name: MarketCheck Wool Return Monitoring System (RMS)
Supplier: AgRisk Management Pty Ltd
Type: Production Planner
Availability: Commercial basis via Brokers aligned with Agrisk Management.

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows MarketCheck grower clients to keep track of the value of their clip via the futures market value of wool. With the assistance of an accredited wool broker, wool producers can have their clip forecast and marketing plan entered into the system. The system then provides a report showing the futures market value of the clip and documenting any action taken to manage the clip. This report can be accessed via the Internet, or can be emailed to the client on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Target Audience: Wool producer clients of brokerage clients.

Current or Expected Usage: A widely used service, particularly in NSW with many brokers retaining the services of Agrisk Management.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills to access service online. None required to receive by email.

Presentation: Extremely professional service.

Development Platform: Basic Microsoft Excel and reporting tools.

Stability: The non-technical nature of the system results in high stability.

Type of Support: Client liaison provided as needs by Brokers.

Level of Support: Low level.

Decision Support Tool # 32

Name: Mill Specification Portlet
Supplier: Department of Agriculture – Western Australia (Wool Services Desk)
Type: Pricing Calculator
Availability: Free via Wool Services Desk website

Wool Producer Benefit: Queries a database of Australian wool sold at auction between July 1998 and the most recent sale. It determines how much wool matches the specification queried, and what the average price was for that wool. Results are displayed in graphical format, by way of two charts. The first shows the average price by month for each specification and, by way of reference, the Eastern Market Indicator over the same period. The second chart shows the volume (weight) of wool by month that matches each specification. By making changes in turn to a number of the inputs (specifications), the sensitivity of supply and price can be examined.

Target Audience: All wool producers, although a specific focus for Western Australian wool exists.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine due to free access.

Required Skill Level: Good Internet skills and knowledge of specifications is required.

Presentation: Professional.

Development Platform: Details unknown. Most likely simple web charting software.

Stability: The system is report as stable.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Wool Services Desk staff.

Level of Support: Low level limited support.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 33

Name: Position Statement
Supplier: The MacKinnon Project
Type: Price Risk Management
Availability: By subscription to www.paddock.com.au

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides a summary of physical production and an estimated valuation of the next wool clip. The summary also outlines the hedge contracts that are in place and the amount of wool hedged. The model conducts a 'what-if scenario' analysis of the consequence to the wool clip from a range of different wool prices.

Target Audience: Top 20% of wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Several hundred subscribers have access to the service.

Required Skill Level: Quite complicated in terms of use. Clients currently using the tool receive ongoing training and consultative services.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Unknown. Most likely Microsoft Visual Basic.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Directly by The MacKinnon Project staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tool # 34

Name: Price Benchmarking Portlet
Supplier: Department of Agriculture – Western Australia (Wool Services Desk)
Type: Benchmarking
Availability: Free via Wool Services Desk website

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows actual price to be plotted against micron for individual sale lots sold over a short period of time. This allows the wool producer to see how their wool sold relative to others during the same period, and to identify if they were discounted relative to the frontier (non-discounted) price.

This is a very useful tool in demonstrating to wool producers that there may be a possibility of achieving better results through the improvement of one of more characteristics of their clip. Whilst it doesn't provide the answer to what this may be, it is designed as a tool to prompt the wool producer to seek further information from other sources such as their broker or consultant.

Target Audience: All wool producers, although a specific focus for Western Australian wool exists.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine due to free access.

Required Skill Level: Good Internet skills are required.

Presentation: Professional.

Development Platform: Details unknown. Most likely simple web charting software.

Stability: The system is report as stable.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Wool Services Desk staff.

Level of Support: Low level limited support.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 35

Name: Pricemaker
Supplier: The Woolmark Company
Type: Pricing Calculator
Availability: Free via AWI website

Wool Producer Benefit: Enables wool producers to value Merino fleece wool, download schedules for the premiums associated with each wool characteristic as well as provides useful information on wool pricing and management practices that may be utilised to maximize price.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine due to free access. It is reported that approximately 1,000 wool producers use Pricemaker on a continual basis. However, this figure would seem to be on the high side.

Required Skill Level: The ability to access and negotiate the Internet are the only skills required. The pricing calculator is very straightforward in its use and could be used by any computer literate user.

Presentation: Clear and concise. Pricemaker offers a very professional front end designed to make the experience a simple one.

Development Platform: Utilises SAS, automatic interpolation and manual editing to establish a series of regional micron / style prices and national premium and discount tables. Results are displayed via a web enabled front end, most likely visual studio based.

Stability: The product appears to be stable and has been in operation for some time.

Type of Support: Online help information, including a glossary is supplied within Pricemaker. An email contact is also provided.

Level of Support: Offers low level of support. However, the service is very easy to use and is provided at no charge.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 36

Name: Primaries Grower Enquiry Service

Supplier: Primaries of WA Pty Ltd

Type: Market Information

Availability: Free to Primaries of WA clients as part of selling services

Wool Producer Benefit: Clients can view their lot results as well as gain current and continually updated market valuations linked to Primaries brokering system. The integration of forward prices using Macquarie Bank prices is currently under development.

Target Audience: Wool producer clients of Primaries of WA.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required.

Presentation: Unable to view system.

Development Platform: Unknown.

Stability: Reported as stable.

Type of Support: Supported as required by Primaries of WA staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 37

Name: Risk Profiler

Supplier: The MacKinnon Project

Type: Price Risk Management

Availability: By subscription to www.paddock.com.au

Wool Producer Benefit: Analyses the producers risk profile and then helps determine if the clip should be hedged.

Target Audience: Top 20% of wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Several hundred subscribers have access to the service.

Required Skill Level: Quite complicated in terms of use. Clients currently using the tool receive ongoing training and consultative services.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Unknown. Most likely Microsoft Visual Basic.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Directly by The MacKinnon Project staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 38

Name: Talman PC Brokerage System
Supplier: Talman Pty Ltd
Type: Pricing Calculator
Availability: Commercially available to wool brokers

Wool Producer Benefit: Very little direct benefit to wool producers. Benefits in relation to improved pricing functionality for brokers may be passed on to wool producers.

Target Audience: Australian wool brokers.

Current or Expected Usage: Approximately 50% of Australian wool brokers utilise Talman software.

Required Skill Level: A reasonable level of skill is required to operate the system. Ongoing training is provided.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Entirely built on Microsoft Visual Foxpro (VFP) technology.

Stability: The product has been available for several years and has been through various upgrades over this period. Like most constantly changing programs, stability has in the past been a concern for users.

Type of Support: Talman provides technical and customer support at all levels.

Level of Support: A high level of commercial support is provided to current clients.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 39

Name: Talman Web Brokerage System

Supplier: Talman Pty Ltd

Type: Pricing Calculator

Availability: Planned for development when commercial demand is high enough

Wool Producer Benefit: Would allow wool producers to price all types of wool online.

Target Audience: Potentially could be all wool producers and wool related businesses

Current or Expected Usage: Depending on delivery model.

Required Skill Level: It would be likely that a low level of skill would be required. Basic Internet skills should be sufficient.

Presentation: It is envisaged that the system would be presented very professionally.

Development Platform: Either Microsoft Visual Foxpro (VFP) 8.0 web enabled technology or a Microsoft SQL database structure and Microsoft .net front-end technology.

Stability: Unknown. As a web based product, stability should be greater than for the PC based product

Type of Support: Depending on delivery model it would be envisaged that Talman would provide support at all levels.

Level of Support: Depending on delivery model it would be envisaged that Talman would provide ongoing support to users.

SECTION 4

ON FARM FIBRE MEASUREMENT

The section covers decision support tools that are related to On Farm Fibre Measurement. They include both operator and producer operated tools as well as many that incorporate some aspect of livestock management.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 40

Name: FibreSoft
Supplier: Australian Fibre Testers
Type: OFFM (including Livestock Management)
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides OFFM reporting for both Laserscan and OFDA, selection indexes, progeny testing and clip preparation.

Target Audience: Producer and service provider versions available. Both groups are targeted.

Current or Expected Usage: A small number of users currently utilise the service.

Required Skill Level: Training is required in the use of the system.

Presentation: Moderate professional presentation.

Development Platform: PC based. Database most likely Microsoft Access.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support via either WA or QLD Australian Fibre Testers.

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 41

Name: Fleecescan
Supplier: CSIRO Textile and Fibre Technology
Type: OFFM
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides Laserscan and Fleecescan operators with OFFM reporting tools and combines OFFM results with fleece weights.

Target Audience: Wool producers and OFFM service providers.

Current or Expected Usage: Largely limited to Fleecescan and Laserscan operators.

Required Skill Level: Users require training in use.

Presentation: Very basic system.

Development Platform: PC based with Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by CSIRO TFT.

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 42

Name: InShedAssessor
Supplier: The MacKinnon Project
Type: OFFM
Availability: By subscription to www.paddock.com.au

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists in determining the economic benefit of fibre testing hogget replacement ewes for selection purposes.

Target Audience: Top 20% of wool producers. Specifically, those wool producers who use OFFM technologies to make genetic and sheep selection decisions in their flock.

Current or Expected Usage: Several hundred subscribers have access to the service.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Unknown. Most likely Microsoft Visual Basic.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Directly by The MacKinnon Project staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 43

Name: Laserscan

Supplier: Australian Wool Testing Authority Ltd

Type: OFFM

Availability: Commercially available to Laserscan operators

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides Laserscan operators with a direct Windows interface for Laserscan and a real-time interface for third party DSS systems.

Target Audience: Laserscan operators (laboratory and mobile).

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to Laserscan operators.

Required Skill Level: Users require training in use.

Presentation: Very basic system.

Development Platform: Based on Microsoft Windows (PC based) Laserscan with Microsoft Access for DSS capture.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by AWTA IT.

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 44

Name: Micron Man

Supplier: Micron Man

Type: OFFM (including Livestock Management)

Availability: Commercially available service. Software not available.

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides OFFM reporting, selection indexes and clip preparation tools. Not a producer version.

Target Audience: Local (WA) stud breeders and larger commercial flocks.

Current or Expected Usage: Currently only a small number of local individual breeders are utilising the service.

Required Skill Level: Nil, as reports are generated for the client.

Presentation: N/A

Development Platform: PC based, including some DOS

Stability: Reported as stable.

Type of Support: Nil as not used by clients. Micron Man will establish reports for clients.

Level of Support: Nil as not used by clients.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 45

Name: Midwest Shearing Services
Supplier: Midwest Shearing Services
Type: OFFM (including Livestock Management)
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides OFFM reporting, selection indexes, logistics and clip preparation tools.

Target Audience: Laserscan operators.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to a relative small number of local Laserscan operators.

Required Skill Level: Users require training in use.

Presentation: Professional with advanced functionality.

Development Platform: PC based on Laserscan. Databases utilise Microsoft Access, Microsoft Visual Basic and Microsoft Excel Macros.

Stability: Reported as stable.

Type of Support: Technically supported by Midwest Shearing Services.

Level of Support: Ongoing to commercial clients.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 46

Name: OFDA2000
Supplier: Interactive Wool Group
Type: OFFM (including Livestock Management)
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Interprets raw data measurements from OFDA2000 to generate a wide range of reports for use in sheep and wool management decisions including selection indexes, clip preparation, marketing and production factors.

The software generates detailed graphs, tables and charts that provide easy-to-read snapshots of the test group, which assist the grower or classer to make management decisions.

Target Audience: OFDA2000 service providers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to OFDA2000 service providers.

Required Skill Level: Users require training in use.

Presentation: Professional system.

Development Platform: PC based.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by IWG.

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to service providers.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 47

Name: Primaries addition to OFDA2000

Supplier: Primaries of WA Pty Ltd

Type: OFFM

Availability: Free to Primaries of WA clients as part of selling services

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides wool producers with reports based on OFDA2000 data including selection indexes, clip preparation and marketing functions.

Target Audience: Wool producer clients of Primaries of WA.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown.

Required Skill Level: Reports provided are in both hard copy and electronically. Can also be provided through the Primaries online system where basic Internet skills are required.

Presentation: Unable to view system.

Development Platform: Linked to brokerage system. Unknown

Stability: Reported as stable.

Type of Support: Supported as required by Primaries of WA staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 48

Name: Riverina Fibre Testers

Supplier: Riverina Fibre Testers

Type: OFFM

Availability: Available to Riverina Fibre Testers clients.

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides wool producers with OFFM reporting, selection indexes, clip preparation and logistics tools.

Target Audience: Wool producer clients of Riverina Fibre Testers.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown, expected to be quite small.

Required Skill Level: Basic email and Internet skills required.

Presentation: Unable to view system.

Development Platform: PC based. Databases Microsoft Access and Microsoft Visual Basic.

Stability: Reported as stable.

Type of Support: Technically supported by Riverina Fibre Testers.

Level of Support: Ongoing to commercial clients.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 49

Name: Riverina Fibre Testing

Supplier: Riverina Fibre Testing

Type: OFFM

Availability: Available to Riverina Fibre Testing clients.

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides wool producers with OFFM reporting, selection indexes and clip preparation tools.

Target Audience: Wool producer clients of Riverina Fibre Testing.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown, expected to be quite small.

Required Skill Level: Reports provided directly to clients. No skills required.

Presentation: Unable to view system.

Development Platform: Unknown

Stability: Reported as stable.

Type of Support: Due to nature of service, no support is required.

Level of Support: Due to nature of service, no support is required.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 50

Name: ShearExpress

Supplier: ShearExpress

Type: OFFM

Availability: Dependent on future development of ShearExpress.

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides wool producers with OFFM reporting, selection indexes, clip preparation, marketing and logistics tools.

Target Audience: Unknown due to present ShearExpress situation.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to present ShearExpress situation.

Required Skill Level: Training in system would be required.

Presentation: Unable to view system.

Development Platform: PC based.

Stability: Unknown.

Type of Support: Unknown.

Level of Support: Unknown.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 51

Name: The Classer

Supplier: The MacKinnon Project

Type: OFFM

Availability: By subscription to www.paddock.com.au

Wool Producer Benefit: Outlines the profitability of objective wool classing, based on individual fibre diameter measurements. Requires the user to enter prices for various micron ranges. The tool produces four possible outcomes of 1, 2, 3 and 4 lines respectively. Each outcome reports a total net difference in revenue.

Target Audience: Top 20% of wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Several hundred subscribers have access to the service.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Unknown. Most likely Microsoft Visual Basic.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Directly by The MacKinnon Project staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 52

Name: Trans Classer
Supplier: Agricultural Market Information Resource Services
Type: OFFM
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: An OFFM support product that can track each fleece shorn via the animals tag number and allocate the fleece to its own category for allocation to a bale. The system can also direct link with the AMIRS Internet site and provide latest market appraisal based on the estimated results at shearing time.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Details were not available. It would be thought that limited numbers of wool producers would be actively using the service.

Required Skill Level: Specific training in the software is necessary.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Exact details were withheld. Information made available suggests that the system is fully XML based.

Stability: The platform and system appear stable.

Type of Support: Technical and market support is provided to users.

Level of Support: Commercial support is provided to users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 53

Name: Virtual Classer
Supplier: NSW Agriculture
Type: OFFM
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Assists in the determination of clip preparation strategies. Used with other OFFM tools.

Target Audience: Specialist wool producers, consultants and OFFM operators.

Current or Expected Usage: A commonly used product, particularly by brokers as a part of client services.

Required Skill Level: Low level PC skills are required.

Presentation: Very basic.

Development Platform: PC based.

Stability: Reported as a very stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by NSW Agriculture

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 54

Name: WoolClass
Supplier: Mid-Murray Spraying Services
Type: OFFM (including Livestock Management)
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides OFFM reporting, selection indexes and clip preparation tools.

Target Audience: Local (Mid-Murray) wool producers and other OFFM service providers.

Current or Expected Usage: Limited to a relatively small number of local individual producers and local OFFM service providers.

Required Skill Level: Users require training in use.

Presentation: Professional with advanced functionality.

Development Platform: Mainly PC based. Databases utilise Microsoft Access, Microsoft Visual Basic and Microsoft Excel Macros. Web front end also available.

Stability: Reported as stable.

Type of Support: Technically supported by Mid-Murray Spraying Services or other OFFM service providers.

Level of Support: Ongoing to commercial clients.

SECTION 5

PROCESSING

The section covers decision support tools that are related to Processing. They include Processing Calculators and Predictive Modeling Tools.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 55

Name: AMIRS Processing Calculator
Supplier: Agricultural Market Information Resource Services
Type: Processing Calculator
Availability: Provided free to registered users

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows processing performance to be calculated for lots entered. This could be an entire clip or specific lots. Estimations for Hauteur, CVH%, Romain, Noil and wastage are provided.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Details were not available. It is envisaged that limited numbers of wool producers would be actively using the service.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Exact details were withheld. Information made available suggests that the system is fully XML based.

Stability: The platform and system appear stable.

Type of Support: Technical and market support is provided online.

Level of Support: A low level of support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 56

Name: Hauteur Calculator
Supplier: Department of Agriculture – Western Australia
Type: Processing Calculator
Availability: Under development. Delivery date unknown

Wool Producer Benefit: Could provide tools for production, marketing and processing.

Target Audience: Department of Agriculture – Western Australia advisors and their clients.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown.

Required Skill Level: Unknown.

Presentation: Unknown.

Development Platform: Most likely PC based.

Stability: Unknown.

Type of Support: Unknown.

Level of Support: Unknown.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 57

Name: Micron PC
Supplier: Australian Rural Software
Type: Predictive Modeling Package for Greasy Wool Sale Lots
Availability: On a commercial basis to ARS clients

Wool Producer Benefit: Predicts technical and financial outcomes of potential interlotting of greasy wool sale lots based on measured characteristics and price analysis.

Target Audience: Large wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: A small number of users are currently utilising the service.

Required Skill Level: Designated operators are trained in the systems use. A moderate level of skill is required.

Presentation: Very professional software package.

Development Platform: Microsoft PC based software, utilising Microsoft Visual Basic, Microsoft Access and Microsoft Excel Macros.

Stability: The system is reported as being very stable.

Type of Support: Designated operators are supported technically by developers.

Level of Support: Commercial support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 58

Name: Top Spin
Supplier: Australian Rural Software
Type: Processing Calculator
Availability: On a commercial basis to ARS clients

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides benchmarking capability, which can be used by wool producers, topmakers and spinners to evaluate the effects of the many variables that determine the quality of top and yarn.

Target Audience: Essentially a product for topmakers and spinners, however could be used by larger wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: A number of users, predominately in the processing sector are currently utilising the service.

Required Skill Level: Designated operators are trained in the systems use. A moderate level of skill is required.

Presentation: Very professional software package.

Development Platform: Microsoft PC based software, utilising Microsoft Visual Basic, Microsoft Access and Microsoft Excel Macros.

Stability: The system is reported as being very stable.

Type of Support: Designated operators are supported technically by developers.

Level of Support: Commercial support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 59

Name: TopSpec/FIcSpec
Supplier: CSIRO Textile and Fibre Technology
Type: Processing Calculator
Availability: Commercially available

Wool Producer Benefit: Performs lot building and processing prediction tasks.

Target Audience: Processing sector and to a lesser degree specialist wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Largely limited to processors.

Required Skill Level: Users require training in use.

Presentation: Very basic system.

Development Platform: PC based with Microsoft Excel macros.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technical support provided by CSIRO TFT.

Level of Support: Provided on an ongoing basis to commercial users.

SECTION 6
PRODUCTION

The section covers decision support tools that are related to Production. They include Cost of Production Calculators, Benchmarking Tools and Pasture Management Tools.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 60

Name: AMIRS Cartage Calculator
Supplier: Agricultural Market Information Resource Services
Type: Cartage Calculator
Availability: Free via the AMIRS website

Wool Producer Benefit: Designed to allow producers to calculate cartage cost on a per bale or cents per kilogram basis.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine due to free access.

Required Skill Level: Low level Internet skills only required.

Presentation: Professional.

Development Platform: Exact details were withheld. Information made available suggests that the system is fully XML based.

Stability: The platform and system appear stable.

Type of Support: Due to the ease of use, support is not necessary.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, support is not necessary.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 61

Name: AMIRS Clip Benchmarking Tool
Supplier: Agricultural Market Information Resource Services
Type: Benchmarking Tool
Availability: Provided free to registered users

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows average clip details to be benchmarked against other clips from the same Wool Statistical Area. Characteristics that can be compared are Micron, VM, Yield, Length, POB and Strength.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Details were not available. It would be thought that limited numbers of wool producers would be actively using the service.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Exact details were withheld. Information made available suggests that the system is fully XML based.

Stability: The platform and system appear stable.

Type of Support: Technical and market support is provided online.

Level of Support: A low level of support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 62

Name: AMIRS Cost of Production Calculator
Supplier: Agricultural Market Information Resource Services
Type: Cost of Production Calculator
Availability: Free via the AMIRS website

Wool Producer Benefit: An easy to use, simple cost of production calculator.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine due to free access.

Required Skill Level: Low level Internet skills only required.

Presentation: Professional.

Development Platform: Exact details were withheld. Information made available suggests that the system is fully XML based.

Stability: The platform and system appear stable.

Type of Support: Due to the ease of use, support is not necessary.

Level of Support: Due to the ease of use, support is not necessary.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 63

Name: Elders Cost of Production Calculator

Supplier: Elders Limited

Type: Cost of Production Calculator

Availability: Free via the Elders website.

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows wool producers to calculate their cost of production.

Target Audience: All wool producers, particularly Elders clients.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free delivery model.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required.

Presentation: Very basic.

Development Platform: Unknown.

Stability: Stable in current format.

Type of Support: Online instructions provided.

Level of Support: Offers low level of support. However, the service is very easy to use and is provided at no charge.

Decision Support Tool # 64

Name: e-wool™ Cost of Production Calculator

Supplier: Bell's Line Pty Ltd

Type: Cost of Production Calculator

Availability: Free via the e-wool™ website

Wool Producer Benefit: Allows wool producers to calculate their cost of production. Commonly used in conjunction with other e-wool™ tools.

Target Audience: All wool producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free delivery model.

Required Skill Level: Knowledge and skills in Microsoft Excel and the ability to download files from the Internet is required.

Presentation: Very basic spreadsheet format.

Development Platform: Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Stability: Very stable in current format.

Type of Support: Online instructions provided.

Level of Support: Offers low level of support. However, the service is very easy to use and is provided at no charge.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 65

Name: Farmwi\$e

Supplier: Horizon Agriculture Pty Ltd (CSIRO)

Type: Production Planner

Availability: Currently under development. Delivery late 2004.

Wool Producer Benefit: Designed to assist decision-making in the biological complexity of mixed farming in the highly unreliable weather environment of southern Australia. FarmWi\$e will improve profitability and provide estimates of environmental and financial risks associated with alternative management strategies.

Target Audience: Graziers, specialist consulting firms, research organisations and intensive agriculturists.

Current or Expected Usage: Most likely be similar to other CSIRO developed programs and receive moderate usage.

Required Skill Level: It is expected that good PC skills will be required.

Presentation: Very well presented software.

Development Platform: It is envisaged that the software will be PC based and will operate on Microsoft Windows platform only.

Stability: Unknown at this stage.

Type of Support: Unknown at this stage

Level of Support: Unknown at this stage

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 66

Name: Farmbook
Supplier: Practical Systems
Type: Farm Management
Availability: Commercially available from \$775

Wool Producer Benefit: Focused on whole farm approach and provides a broad range of functions such as stock records, production and environmental factors and marketing.

Target Audience: Primary producers and advisors.

Current or Expected Usage: A relatively small number of producers currently utilising the system.

Required Skill Level: Different levels of functionality are available so that the required skill level is from very low to relatively high.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: PC based. Database structure unknown.

Stability: Reported as a stable product.

Type of Support: Technically supported by Practical Systems via a toll free phone support line and email for a cost of \$220 per year.

Level of Support: High level support to commercial clients with a support agreement.

Decision Support Tool # 67

Name: Feed Cost Calculator
Supplier: NSW Agriculture
Type: Feed Calculator
Availability: Free via the NSW Agriculture website

Wool Producer Benefit: Compares the value of feeds on an energy and crude protein basis. The user selects a range of common feeds and is then provided with estimated values for energy, protein and dry matter. The user is encouraged to change these values if they have obtained their own feed test values. The user is able to enter a price per tonne for up to four different feeds. The program then calculates the value of the feed on an energy and crude protein basis.

Target Audience: All graziers.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine given it's free distribution.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills are required.

Presentation: Very basic presentation.

Development Platform: Web based.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Online instructions are provided.

Level of Support: Low level of support is provided given the ease of use.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 68

Name: Fertcalc

Supplier: The MacKinnon Project

Type: Pasture Management

Availability: By subscription to www.paddock.com.au

Wool Producer Benefit: Determines the level of fertiliser required on grazing land in South-East Australia

Target Audience: Top 20% of wool producers within applicable area.

Current or Expected Usage: Several hundred subscribers have access to the service.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills required. Majority of clients currently using the tool receive ongoing training and consultative services.

Presentation: Very professional.

Development Platform: Unknown. Most likely Microsoft Visual Basic.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Directly by The MacKinnon Project staff.

Level of Support: Commercial support to all client users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 69

Name: GrazFeed
Supplier: Horizon Agriculture Pty Ltd (CSIRO)
Type: Livestock Production Calculator
Availability: Commercially available for \$385

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides estimates of animal production (weight gain, wool growth, milk production) from available pasture for any breed of sheep or cattle. It is also possible to test the effect of supplements in the animals diet with any combination of concentrates and roughages.

Target Audience: All primary producers, advisors and educators.

Current or Expected Usage: A large client base currently exists.

Required Skill Level: Good PC skills are required.

Presentation: Very well presented software.

Development Platform: PC based. Operates on Microsoft Windows platform only.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Technical support is provided by Horizon with the backup of CSIRO specialists.

Level of Support: A high level of support is provided to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 70

Name: GrassGro
Supplier: Horizon Agriculture Pty Ltd (CSIRO)
Type: Production Planner
Availability: Commercially available for \$1350

Wool Producer Benefit: Uses information about soils, climate, animals and pasture species to predict the quantity and quality of feed and animal production, which can be expected in a particular paddock. It will assess the risk of different combinations of pasture and animals for different soil and climatic conditions.

Target Audience: Specialist consulting firms and research organisations.

Current or Expected Usage: Very limited.

Required Skill Level: Good PC skills are required. A two-day training program is also required and is included in the package.

Presentation: Very well presented software.

Development Platform: PC based. Operates on Microsoft Windows platform only.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Technical support is provided by Horizon with the backup of CSIRO specialists.

Level of Support: A high level of support is provided to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 71

Name: Pasture Growth Rate Feed Calculator
Supplier: The Farmshed (Jointly developed by CSIRO, Department of Agriculture WA and Department of Land Administration).
Type: Pasture Management
Availability: Free via the Farmshed website

Wool Producer Benefit: This service provides estimates of pasture growth rate (PGR) for selected Western Australian and eastern Australian shires, measured using satellites. This pasture information can assist producers with management decisions such as grazing rotations, feed budgeting, fertiliser application and other precision agriculture techniques for the grazing industry.

Target Audience: Primary producers in areas that the services incorporates.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free access method. Due to technical nature of the service it is envisaged that utilisation would not be high.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills and knowledge of pasture growth rates is required.

Presentation: Moderately professional service.

Development Platform: Web based service utilising satellite imagery.

Stability: Appears a stable product.

Type of Support: Online support provided through information provision and step-by-step guide.

Level of Support: Low level of support provided.

Decision Support Tool # 72

Name: Quality Over Time Portlet
Supplier: Department of Agriculture – Western Australia (Wool Services Desk)
Type: Benchmarking Tool
Availability: Free via Wool Services Desk website

Wool Producer Benefit: Generates a chart showing the 25, 50 and 75 percentiles for a range of raw wool characteristics (diameter, length, strength etc.) over a user-selected period of time. The user also chooses their desired region.

A useful tool to allow wool producers to benchmark their business against other producers.

Target Audience: All wool producers, although a specific focus for Western Australian wool exists.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine due to free access.

Required Skill Level: Good Internet skills are required.

Presentation: Professional.

Development Platform: Details unknown. Most likely simple web charting software.

Stability: The system is report as stable.

Type of Support: Provided as needs by Wool Services Desk staff.

Level of Support: Low level limited support.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 73

Name: Rain and Aussie GRASS

Supplier: Department of Primary Industries Queensland – The Long Paddock

Type: Pasture Management

Availability: Free via the Long Paddock website

Wool Producer Benefit: Rainfall and rainfall percentile maps give some idea of pasture production. However, the effectiveness of total rainfall over a particular period depends upon previous seasonal conditions, within seasonal rainfall distribution, rainfall intensity, temperatures, soil and pasture types, grazing pressures and time of year. This service provides a series of maps showing simulated pasture growth, which should provide a more accurate picture of seasonal conditions.

Target Audience: All primary producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine given it's free distribution. Given that the information provided is quite general, it is not thought that the service would be heavily used.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills are required to access the information. Knowledge and ability to analysis pasture growth rates are also required.

Presentation: Basic presentation.

Development Platform: Web based.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: No advertised support is provided.

Level of Support: No advertised support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 74

Name: Sheep Transport Cost Calculator
Supplier: NSW Agriculture
Type: Transport Calculator
Availability: Free via the NSW Agriculture website

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides a simple-to-use aid to calculating the cost of transporting stock on a 'per kilogram' basis, a 'per head' basis and a 'total cost' basis. The 'per kilogram' costs will be either on a 'liveweight' basis or a 'dressed weight' basis, depending on the user choice.

Target Audience: All graziers.

Current or Expected Usage: Difficult to determine given it's free distribution.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills are required.

Presentation: Very basic presentation.

Development Platform: Web based.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Online instructions are provided.

Level of Support: Low level of support is provided given the ease of use.

Decision Support Tool # 75

Name: TIMERITE®

Supplier: AWI

Type: Parasite Management

Availability: Under development. Available free via AWI website and AWI telephone helpline from July 2004.

Wool Producer Benefit: This information package predicts a date that producers can use to spray their paddocks for control of redlegged earth mite. Spraying pastures on the date determined by TIMERITE® reduces the pest populations for the next season, thus improving the yield and clover content of pastures, and the effective use of pesticides.

Target Audience: Primary producers in areas that redlegged earth mite problems exist (largely southern Australia).

Current or Expected Usage: Exact numbers could be provided. The number of producers who have used the service is said to be approaching 1,000.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills will be required.

Presentation: Professionally presented information.

Development Platform: Web based with SQL backend.

Stability: Given no producer version, not highly relevant.

Type of Support: Information package provided supports service.

Level of Support: Low level of support provided.

SECTION 7

WEATHER

The section covers decision support tools that are related to Weather. They include Weather Forecasting and Weather Recording tools.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 76

Name: Australian Rainman

Supplier: Department of Primary Industries Queensland – The Long Paddock

Type: Weather Forecasting

Availability: Commercially available at varying rates from \$125

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides users with historical monthly and daily rainfall for locations throughout Australia as well as historical streamflow data. This historical information gives the user the ability to analyse these records for individual location for seasonal, monthly and daily patterns and to forecast rainfall based in the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) or Sea Surface Temperature (SST).

Target Audience: All primary producers, particularly those interested in managing climatic risk.

Current or Expected Usage: Low levels of commercial users currently. A recent introductory offer has provided free evaluation copies to several hundred users. As long range forecasting becomes more accepted, products such as this will become more commonly used.

Required Skill Level: Basic PC skills are the only technical skills that are required to operate the program. Knowledge and ability to analysis climate data is also required.

Presentation: Very professional package.

Development Platform: PC based. Operates in Microsoft Windows platform.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Phone support is provided to commercial users.

Level of Support: A moderate level of support is provided to registered users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 77

Name: HowOften

Supplier: APSRU (Research unit of DPI Queensland)

Type: Educational Aid

Availability: Free via the APSRU website

Wool Producer Benefit: Explores long-term rainfall records to find how frequently rainfall events occur. Some examples of applications include how often planting opportunities occur, seasonal rainfall fluctuations and value of SOI and comparisons between districts.

Target Audience: All primary producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free distribution method. Low levels would be expected.

Required Skill Level: Basic PC skills are the only technical skills that are required to operate the program.

Presentation: Moderately professional presentation.

Development Platform: PC based. Operates in Microsoft Windows platform.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: No advertised support is provided.

Level of Support: No advertised support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 78

Name: HowWet

Supplier: APSRU (Research unit of DPI Queensland)

Type: Educational Aid

Availability: Free via the APSRU website

Wool Producer Benefit: By using farm rainfall records HowWet estimates how much rain has been stored as Plant Available Water, how much Nitrogen has been mineralised in soil and how much erosion was caused by runoff water.

Target Audience: All primary producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Unknown due to free distribution method. Low levels would be expected.

Required Skill Level: Basic PC skills are the only technical skills that are required to operate the program.

Presentation: Moderately professional presentation.

Development Platform: PC based. Operates in Microsoft Windows platform.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: No advertised support is provided.

Level of Support: No advertised support is provided.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 79

Name: MetAccess

Supplier: Horizon Agriculture Pty Ltd (CSIRO)

Type: Weather Forecasting

Availability: Commercially available for \$395 plus weather databases

Wool Producer Benefit: MetAccess software allows users to rapidly extract useful information from long-term daily weather records supplied by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology. It gives users simple and flexible ways to examine the likelihood of weather events and to summarise, as tables or graphs, meteorological data.

Target Audience: Graziers, specialist consulting firms, research organisations and intensive agriculturists.

Current or Expected Usage: A small number of specialist firms are currently using the system.

Required Skill Level: Good PC skills are required.

Presentation: Very well presented software.

Development Platform: PC based. Operates on Microsoft Windows platform only.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: Technical support is provided by Horizon with the backup of CSIRO specialists.

Level of Support: A high level of support is provided to commercial users.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

Decision Support Tool # 80

Name: SILO
Supplier: Bureau of Meteorology
Type: Weather Forecasting
Availability: Via subscription at varying rates

Wool Producer Benefit: Provides a range of weather records and forecasting for centres around Australia. Seasonal outlooks can play an important role in primary production and this service provides access to the benchmark outlook. Information on Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) and historical records are also provided to assist producers make informed management decisions.

Target Audience: All primary producers.

Current or Expected Usage: Largely unknown due to many services being provided free to users. A moderate number of subscribers actively use the fee for service areas.

Required Skill Level: Basic Internet skills are required. More importantly an understanding of weather reporting and forecasting is needed. Many of the services provided are worthless without skills in this area.

Presentation: Very professional. It would appear a large amount of resources have been applied to this service.

Development Platform: Web based. Database structure not available.

Stability: Appears very stable.

Type of Support: A large amount of online information is provided to help users understand the service. An online feedback system is also available.

Level of Support: Low level of support available to the areas of the service that can be accessed freely. Commercial support is provided to subscribers.

4 Gap Analysis

In information technology, a Gap Analysis refers to the study of the differences between two different information systems or applications, for the purposes of determining how to get from one state to a new state.

In this scoping study, a Gap Analysis has been undertaken to determine potential areas of future work in the area of DSS Tools that may be under catered at the present.

There is little doubt with almost 80 DSS tools assessed as part of this scoping study, Australian wool producers have a large quantity of DSS tools of which to utilise. These DSS tools, for the purpose of the study have been categorised into the following groups.

DSS Tool Type	Number Assessed
Business Management	5
Livestock Management	16
Market Information	18
On Farm Fibre Measurement	15
Processing	5
Production	16
Weather	5

Business Management tools made up only 6.3% of all tools assessed. These tools were either very simple or overly complicated. Budgeting, financial planning and whole farm analysis are functions that are difficult to perform using a 'generic' process as individual agribusinesses have different characteristics and needs in this area.

For this reason, most of the tools in this area are used as supporting services to traditional consultancy services and not as standalone products. It is doubtful whether technology based DSS tools will ever surpass the importance of independent advice and consultancy in this area. Whilst it can be argued that a gap does exist in this area, service providers will continue to develop tools as they see necessary to complement their own businesses and therefore standalone products would be unlikely to be successful.

20% of tools assessed were related to **Livestock Management**. One of the reasons that this area is so well serviced is that many of the products are also used in other animal industries and have either been converted to sheep production or are subsidised by their use elsewhere. The majority of these products are commercial products supplied under license. With reduced sheep numbers and wool enterprise profitability, this area is reaching saturation point and it would be expected that several service providers will cease to operate in the near future unless costs can be significantly reduced or spread over other industries.

The majority of these products are of excellent quality and many offer 'one-stop-shop' service provision for all livestock requirements. There is no requirement for further products in this area.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

The largest area of DSS tools available to wool producers is in the area of **Market Information**, with 22.5% of all tools falling into this category. Whilst there are some excellent tools in this area, the provision of an independent single service provider for market information and pricing is required. This gap has previously been identified by BCS Agribusiness Solutions (2003) in 'Scoping Study on Web-based Producer Tools' defined as the "The Ideal Pricing Tools Set". An extract of those conclusions is provided below:

"The ideal pricing tool set is seen as one that offers a variety of tools that may be used at any time within the production and marketing cycle. Specifically, pre-shearing, pre-sale and post-sale.

Prior to a wool producer making informed decisions based on the outcomes of a pricing tool, they must firstly be able to determine whether or not the price that is likely to be achieved is in fact a profitable one. Therefore, the first tool to be included in the set is a cost of production calculator.

Once the cost of production is known, the second tool that may be utilised is the pricing calculator itself. This should price wool in both spot and forward markets as well as be able to demonstrate historical prices.

Thirdly, once the wool is sold, it is important for the wool producer to benchmark themselves against other wool producers within their area or producing a similar product. To carry out this role a benchmarking tool needs to be included in the set."

Some of the capabilities discussed here also refer to Production. Whilst this is the case, the cornerstone of the product is Market Information.

On Farm Fibre Measurement has been a key area for growth over the last three years with producers exploiting the previously available premiums in the fine wool market. This area currently accounts for 18.6% of the tools assessed. With these premiums being non-existent at this stage, the focus for this area has moved to fulfilling breeding requirements in the way of selection indexes.

Depending on future demand associated with the availability of micron premiums, this may be an area that will require further resources. However, in the absence of such financial incentives, these programs will continue to be used only as selection tools, and with many Livestock Management tools heading down this track as well, an oversupply of these tools and service providers is likely.

Processing tools only account for 6.3% of the tools assessed. At this stage many wool producers have little or no knowledge in this area and therefore Processing tools are of little use to them. Further work in this area is not warranted until producers in general have a better understanding of wool processing. Something that can only be gained through extension services and removing some of the information barriers that are present throughout the wool pipeline.

Production is an area that DSS tools should be making a positive impact on wool producers. Whilst 20% of the tools assessed did fall into this category, many of them related to similar themes and performed the type of functions that could be carried out on a calculator. The exception to this is the area of benchmarking. However with only two of the tools focusing on this function, benchmarking presents an opportunity for future development. Again, this gap has previously been identified by BCS Agribusiness Solutions (2003) in 'Scoping Study on Web-based Producer Tools' and has been outlined above.

Decision Support Tools for Woolgrowers

There are many wool producer groups around Australia that have their foundations in benchmarking and as a result have achieved above average productivity gains. For the industry to benefit from these same gains on a broader basis, suitable tools that allow for the collection and analysis of benchmarking information will be required.

Weather forecasting and prediction is rapidly gaining acceptance as a valid decision support mechanism. At this stage only 6.3% of the tools assessed relate to weather. Whilst a gap does currently exist in this area, the number of these tools will increase as technologies available for this purpose are developed and refined. Whilst the wool industry could invest resources in this area, it may result in duplication with current organisations whose core focus is in this area. These organisations, such as the Bureau of Meteorology, are making rapid gains in this area for the benefit of all primary production industries.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This scoping study reveals that there is an abundance of technology based Decision Support System (DSS) tools available to wool producers. In general, these DSS tools meet the needs of wool producers in most areas.

Through the Gap Analysis several areas have been identified as having potential for future work. These include a single market information service, production with an emphasis on benchmarking and weather forecasting and prediction.

Whilst not a focus of this scoping study it is clear that for a number of reasons the majority of wool producers will never utilise technology based DSS tools. These include complacency in their current mode of operation, hesitation to use technology and lack of interest in the business aspects of wool production. Regardless, there is certainly a level of demand for such services from a number of highly focused wool producers that needs to be met.

To meet this demand, it is recommended that a service be provided to wool producers to provide information on existing DSS tools by grouping together tools of a similar nature, promoting their benefits and directly comparing them. This could be provided by a number of means with a web-based system being the most efficient.

By no means does this suggest re-inventing those products that are already available merely to have a standard development platform that could be controlled by AWI. The majority of products that currently exist are highly developed and it would take considerable resources to develop and market them as a competing service provider.

It is also important to raise the general awareness of the benefits that DSS tools can have on the broader industry. Many commercial service providers target the 'top 20%' of wool producers, as they are likely to be more financially lucrative. It is recommended that AWI assess its role in promoting DSS tools in general to the remainder of the industry with the aim of increasing industry awareness of their benefits and in turn increasing industry viability.