



# MERINO The Top Sire

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Rabobank



Newsletter of The NSW Stud Merino Breeders' Association

September - December 2008

## President's Message

### Greetings to you all.

In my previous message little could we have imagined the impact of the global economic downturn on us as individuals and as an industry. The impact has hit wool prices dramatically. Our industry is not alone as we look at sharply falling grain prices. The fundamental demand for wool appeared to be increasing significantly before the economic downturn so we must remain confident that prices will increase as economies rally worldwide.

I encourage all stud breeders to become active in promoting the Merino industry (the true dual purpose meat/wool animal) wherever and as often as possible. There are young people involved in agriculture who are definitely shaken by low grain prices and high input costs. They must surely be a prime target in promoting Merinos above other enterprises. Certainly we all acknowledge that wool prices are too low, but hopefully that will soon change. In the meantime, the meat equation in the Merino package is still excellent. We must actively promote this package as individuals and not leave it to some other body or person because individual experiences are vitally important - good news stories are everywhere so please try to get the press to print your story (Carol-Ann will be only too happy to hear from you!).

By the time you read this message the AWI board election will be old news. I trust that a sense of corporate unity and purpose will prevail. The disunity that we have witnessed of late can only harm our industry

In recent times we have spent too much effort in belittling our fellow Merino breeders who use different methods to produce their end product. It would appear that some breeders do not mind altering the truth when it comes to advertising which has created tension amongst fellow breeders. However, it would be best if we realised and acknowledged that the "enemy" is not our fellow Merino breeders - Dohnes, Samms, British Breeds etc, but rather synthetics, cotton and animal liberation movements - these are the real "enemies" of what must become an integrated and united sheep industry. Recent research suggests that sheep producers will be in a uniquely strong position when it comes to carbon credits. We have a "clean, green product".

Ram sales have exceeded expectations on almost all occasions and I congratulate vendors on the standard presented. Our ram buyers cannot realistically complain about the progress made in developing the *MODERN MERINO*. Some breeders have different ideas about what constitutes the Modern Merino. However, Merinos are now plainer bodied and more fertile than before - perhaps a simplistic summary of what is evolving.



### \$19,000 High to Langdene

A NSW ram from Gordon, Colleen and Garry Cox's Langdene stud at Dunedoo has blitzed the competition at this year's Hamilton Sheepvention sale by selling for the top price of \$19,000 which was \$10,000 clear of the next best price.

The 16.4-micron ram with a CV of 13.4 and 99.9 CF was sold to a syndicate of buyers who included Frances Elsegood, Bogo, Bookham; Bob Walters, Middle View, Dalgety; Michael Corkhill, Grassy Creek, Rugby; Frank and Lisa Kaveney, Tallawong, Yass; and commercial producer, Neil McDonald of Cootamundra.

It was sired by the ram that sold for \$18,000 to the Rio Pico stud, Argentina at the 2005 Rabobank National Ram Sale in Dubbo.

*The Hamilton sale-topper is pictured above, held by Garry Cox, with Frances Elsegood, Bogo, Bookham and Craig Wilson, Wagga Wagga who put together the successful syndicate. Photo courtesy Wayne Jenkins and Stock & Land*

Kay joins me in wishing you all a happy Christmas and a wonderful and healthy New Year. Special thanks once more to Carol, Mae & Carol-Ann who work tirelessly for our industry.

**Rob Lindsay**  
President NSW SMBA

2009

## SYDNEY ROYAL SHEEP & FLEECE

### 110th Sydney Sheep Show

Wednesday 15 April - Saturday 18 April 2009

Venue - Bruce Pavilion

### 2009 FEATURE BREED - THE POLL MERINO -

#### - Merinos & Poll Merinos -

**Mid-Side Sampling** 9 to 24 January 2009  
**Arrivals** Wednesday 15 April by 12 noon  
**Inspections** Wednesday 15 April - on arrival  
and from 8.00 a.m. to 12 noon

#### Judging Timetable

**Wednesday 15 April** from 1.00 p.m.  
NSW Merino Pair of the Year & Junior Classes  
**Thursday 16 April** from 8.00 a.m.  
**Friday 17 April** from 9.00 a.m. to include Grand  
Champions, Best Merino Ram, Best Merino Ewe, Bruce  
Merriman Memorial Trophy, Otway Falkiner Cup and  
Stonehaven Cup, Supreme Merino  
Judging of Merino Objective Measurement Class  
**NSW SMBA AGM** Friday 17 April from 5.30 p.m.  
**Saturday 18 April** from 2.30 p.m.  
Official Opening and Prize Presentation

**RAS/ASC State Merino Judging Competition**  
Friday 17 April from 1.00 p.m.  
**RAS/ASC State Merino Fleece Judging Comp**  
Saturday 18 April from 8.00 a.m.

**Saturday 18 April** from 5.00 p.m. Departures

#### - Fleeces -

**Delivery of Fleeces to RAS**  
By Friday 27 February 2009  
**Fleece Judging**  
Tuesday 14 April 2009

#### Sheep and Fleece Entries Close Wednesday 11 February 2009

#### Merino Sheep & Fleece Schedule

The Merino Sheep & Fleece Schedule for the 110th  
Sydney Sheep Show is now available on-line at  
[www.eastershow.com.au](http://www.eastershow.com.au)

Copies will only be mailed on request.

*For Schedules and further information contact:*

Pat Cooper, RAS Sheep Section Coordinator,  
ph (02) 9704 1227, fax (02) 9704 1122,  
email [pcooper@rasnsw.com.au](mailto:pcooper@rasnsw.com.au)  
RAS of NSW Locked Bag 4317  
Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127

Copies will also be available at the Great Southern  
Supreme Merinos Show and Sale, Canberra

# Tops of Spring



#### SEVERN PARK'S BIG FINISH

At the final annual sale for Charlie and Fiona Massy's Severn Park stud at Cooma, rams sold to \$16,000, the top price on-property in the season to date.

This follows on the heels of what is believed to be a world record price of \$8600 for a stud ewe at Severn Park's ewe dispersal in June.

Buyers of the top priced ram were Mabel Ryan and son Trevor, Richmond, Quandialla; Peter and Mary Shannon of "Happy Valley", Grenfell; and Neil Williams, Yarong, Forbes.

*Mabel and Trevor Ryan, Peter Shannon, Neil Williams and Mary Shannon are pictured above with Charlie Massy and their \$16,000 purchase.*



#### POOGINOOK SELLS TO \$10,000

*In the second highest on-property sale of the season to date, Pooginook, Jerilderie sold to a top of \$10,000 for 219 rams, averaging \$1357. Stud manager, Jock Campbell holds the ram bought by Steve and Robert Lindsay, Cora Lynn, Peak Hill with John Sutherland, regional manager for Paraway Pastoral Company (centre) and Cora Lynn classer, Allan Clarke, Dubbo (right).*

*Photos courtesy The Land*

# Great Southern preview 2009

The 62nd annual Great Southern Supreme Merino Show and Sale will be held at Exhibition Park in Canberra from 17 to 19 January 2009.

The 2009 event commences with a Field Day on Friday 16 January featuring studs in the Boorowa, Harden and Yass areas which are open for inspection from 8.30 a.m. until 5 p.m. In the Boorowa district, Merryville (at "Geegullalong"), Tara Park, Merrignee and Koonwarra (at "Little Range") and Winyar (at Riverside Park) will be open. On-property in the Harden area will be Demondrille and in the Yass area, Grogansworth and Bogo.

The following day's show has moved to an earlier starting time and is now set to commence at 1 p.m. Sheep will be penned by 11 a.m. with the show continuing on Sunday. Show sheep from all NSW Merino breeding regions as well as Victoria are expected to attend.

Classes in the 2009 show will include Superfine, Fine and Medium/Strong for both horned and poll sheep.

Judges who will officiate at this year's show are:

## **Superfine Wool**

John Crawford, Rock-Bank, Victoria Valley Vic

## **Fine Wool**

John McLaren, Nerstane, Woolbrook NSW

## **Medium/Strong**

Jeremy King, Range View, Darkan WA

The Ram Sale commences at 11 a.m. on Monday 19 January. This year's ram sale saw a top price of \$16,000 with a 79 per cent clearance rate.

GSSM president, Charlie Merriman said, "Rabobank is again the major sponsor of our 2009 event and we continue to receive support from all 2008 sponsors."



## **EGELABRA'S \$9000 SALE**

*Pictured above are Ben Noble, manager of Egelabra's "Eenaweena" ram depot, buyers Oliver and Cassie Wythes, Rockdale, Canowindra, Egelabra general manager, Cam Munro and chairman of H E Kater & Son, Malcolm Kater and the top-priced ram at Egelabra's sale, the third top in the season to date.*

Rabobank has again been confirmed as major sponsor of the 2009 Great Southern Supreme Merino Show and Sale in Canberra. Michael White, senior manager with Rabobank, says the 2009 GSSM event provides the "ideal opportunity to showcase Rabobank's commitment to the food and agribusiness sector in conjunction with some of the best-available Merino genetics in a first class facility".

Mr White says Rabobank remains firmly focused on its agribusiness specialisation and is uniquely placed to leverage vast international resources and networks for the benefit of local clients. "This is supported by the financial strength of the AAA rated global Rabobank Group, the world's leading food and agribusiness bank," he says.

For your accommodation needs the GSSM committee recommends The Parkland Apartments in Dickson. They again offer a discounted room rate to participants and complimentary accommodation for judges. There are family apartments available so bring the family with you during the school holidays and explore the many attractions of Canberra.

The Parkland Apartments can be contacted on (02) 6262 7000, email [reservations@theparklands.com.au](mailto:reservations@theparklands.com.au) or visit their website [www.theparklands.com.au](http://www.theparklands.com.au) Please book by mid December and quote "the GSSM rate" to obtain the special rates.

## *Further information:*

Charlie Merriman, GSSM president, ph (02) 6385 3396 or email [merriman@merrignee.com.au](mailto:merriman@merrignee.com.au)

Tamara Young, GSSM secretary, c/- Binalong Post Office, Binalong 2584 or by email to [tamarayoung@netspace.net.au](mailto:tamarayoung@netspace.net.au)

## **Mudgee and Armidale Events**

### **MUDGEER MERINO FIELD DAYS**

This biennial event visiting the area's studs on-property and at the showground will be staged on Saturday 10 January. For further information, contact Ron Rayner, ph (02) 6374 1124

### **ARMIDALE EVENTS COMBINE**

The Armidale Unhoused Merino Ram Sale in 2009 will be held a month later than previously and will now be immediately prior to the Armidale Annual (housed) Ram Show and Sale.

Dates and contact details for these fixtures are:

Monday 2 February

#### **Armidale Unhoused Merino Ram Sale**

Enquiries to Kim Barnet, ph 0429 772 885

Tuesday 3 February

#### **Armidale Annual (Housed) Ram Show, 1 p.m.**

Enquiries to Tim Bower, ph 0421 704 598

Wednesday 4 February

#### **Armidale (Housed) Merino Ram Sale, 10 a.m.**

Enquiries to Tim Bower, ph 0421 704 598

# Rural sector fundamentals remain strong



Rabobank

The recent months have certainly been some of the most volatile that have ever been seen in financial markets. With the volatility in global credit and share markets, and to some extent commodity markets, it's clear that there has been a severe collapse in confidence.

Rabobank group executive Rural Banking Neil Dobbin says "Where this all ends no one can say for sure, however the coordinated and urgent response by central banks, governments and regulators around the world to free up credit markets and restore confidence will certainly help. Only time will tell if the markets can arrest their recent decline and confidence return."

Agriculture has also experienced the wild ride, with key commodity prices battered by the global crisis.

"Just months ago we looked on with satisfaction at global grain prices more than doubling and in some cases tripling in little more than 12 months.

"Many were confidently predicting a longer-term global boom in soft commodity prices driven by strong demand in developing nations such as China and India, new demand from the energy sector for bio fuels and the emerging realisation that the land, water and other resources required to feed the world's growing population were becoming alarmingly scarce," Mr Dobbin says.

While undoubtedly the recent events have been unsettling for everyone, including farmers, Rabobank remains fundamentally positive about the position and prospects for Australian agriculture.

"No doubt the outlook is now far more uncertain and the boom prices have to some extent disappeared for now. However, we have also seen a big reduction in some key input costs such as oil, fertiliser and interest rates that will certainly help to ease the effects of the current financial crisis for Australian farmers," Mr Dobbin says.

The free floating dollar has also come to the aid of some Australian exporters – although not all are feeling the pain ease.

"Wool has been one sector missing out on the exchange rate advantages for exporters. The slowing world demand for textiles and the tightening in global credit conditions has reduced buyer confidence. The level of Australian wool sales are down compared to last year with high pass-in rates from sellers. Australian wool prices are now trading at levels similar to 2006," Rabobank analyst Adam Tomlinson says.

It is clear that the current crisis cannot be ignored. However, Rabobank believes the positive fundamentals remain in place for Australian farming.

Growth in the agricultural sector will continue to be driven by farmers who are prudently geared and operate high quality and well-managed businesses. These farmers will continue to have the opportunity to prosper through a focus on productivity and growth that delivers scale economies and efficiency.

Importantly, as a major lender to Australian agriculture, Rabobank has not changed its approach despite current market conditions and finance is available to farmers and agribusinesses in Australia.

Mr Dobbin says "Australian agriculture is among the best placed to ride out the worst of the current crisis, and given a return to normal seasonal conditions, is well placed to prosper despite the current crisis."

*Rabobank Australia is a part of the international Rabobank Group, the world's leading specialist in food and agribusiness banking. Rabobank has more than 110 years' experience providing customised banking and finance solutions to businesses involved in all aspects of food and agribusiness. Rabobank is structured as a cooperative and has a AAA credit rating from Moody's and Standard & Poor's. Rabobank operates in 43 countries, servicing the needs of more than nine million clients worldwide through a network of more than 1600 offices and branches. Rabobank Australia is one of the country's leading rural lenders and a significant provider of business and corporate banking and financial services to the Australian food and agribusiness sector. The bank has 80 branches throughout Australasia and 51 branches throughout Australia.*

## EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

2010 AASMB Trade Mission to Europe  
incorporating the  
**8th World Merino Conference**  
Rambouillet - France  
**Departs April 2010**

An informative and interesting programme is being planned to offer benefits to AASMB members

Please register your interest with:

Carol King, Australian Merino Centre

Locked Bag 4317, Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127

Phone: (02) 9763 2744

Fax: (02) 9763 1878

Email: carol@merinos.com.au

## Vale

The NSW Stud Merino Breeders' Association joins the nation's wool industry in mourning the sudden and tragic loss of **Michael Lempriere**, who will long be remembered as a great of the Australian sheep and wool industry.

We also mourn the passing of SMBA member, stud breeder, classer and industry campaigner, particularly in relation to the OJD program, **Peter Westblade** of Pastora Merino stud, Lockhart.

The sincere sympathy of the NSW SMBA goes to the families of Michael Lempriere and Peter Westblade.

# NLIS Sheep Traceability Requirements

Sheep producers are urged to meet the requirements of the current system for sheep traceability. Otherwise, according to the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, they could be forced into a more labour intensive and costly system such as applying a pink post-breeder tag each time stock are sold.

The Australian sheep industry is focused on ensuring suitable traceability in the event of a disease outbreak through the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) and continually improving the system to meet the agreed traceability performance standards.

“Sheep producers have a chance to demonstrate the effectiveness and accuracy of the current NLIS (Sheep and Goats),” says Chris Groves, president of the Sheepmeat Council of Australia.

NLIS (Sheep and Goats) is a flock-based system that uses visual tags printed with each producer’s Property Identification Code (PIC) which stay with the livestock for life. By using these tags in conjunction with Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) National Vendor Declarations (NVD) or other movement documentation, sheep can be traced back to the property where they were born and/or the last property where they lived.

“A key challenge we are facing is to ensure that individual producers who are selling sheep not bred on their property list all their PIC numbers on the LPA NVD form or identify them with a pink post-breeder ear tag,” says Mr Groves.

“If we don’t work on ensuring that the current system provides traceability then our industry will have to implement a more costly and labour intensive program.

“State Departments are monitoring whether producers are accurately completing NVDs or other movement documents – producers must make themselves aware of their responsibilities.”

Producers complying with their responsibilities avoid the risk of prosecution.

“The system relies on producers doing three things before they move or sell sheep,” says Mr Groves.

**One** Check that all sheep born on your property are tagged with a breeder ear tag.

**Two** Accurately and completely fill out the LPA NVD for sheep and lambs including Question 3 regarding ownership of the sheep or lambs.

**Three** If you’re moving or selling sheep that weren’t bred on your property you must list all their PIC numbers on the movement document **OR** identify them with a pink post-breeder ear tag. These tags can be purchased where you buy your breeder tags.

“The NLIS underpins the integrity of Australia’s sheep industry by allowing fast and accurate identification and traceability in case of a food safety issue or an emergency animal disease outbreak,” says Mr Groves.

“It ensures that domestic and export consumers have confidence in Australian lamb and sheep meat product and upholds Australia’s reputation as a producer of safe, quality red meat.

“As an industry we must ensure that the system is accurate and effective. All sections are working together to make this work well and the first link in the chain is producers doing the right thing by accurately filling out their LPA NVDs or movement documents.”

## Blast from the Past

### Wool Promotion and Marketing

Sir - It is regrettable that the most important matters the Australian woolgrower has ever been asked to decide are being clouded by controversy, side issues and confusion.

I am certain that every responsible and fully informed student of the wool industry today acknowledges that wool can no longer find an automatic buyers’ market. It faces keen and wealthy and skilled competition. It must fight to survive using the modern weapons of sales promotion backed by money to do a really effective job.

Dated 27 March 1961, the above is an excerpt from a lengthy letter published in *The Pastoral Review and Graziers’ Record* written by Sir William Gunn, then chairman of the Australian Wool Bureau.

It is often observed that current issues being debated in the wool industry have been around almost as long as the industry and this is never more strongly brought home to your editor than when browsing her collection of this former monthly “bible” of Australian agriculture.

The subjects of wool levies and promotion provide debates that were waged through the pages of the *Pastoral Review* through each decade of its publication last century. Those letters that we see today asking why retail staff are not versed in displaying and promoting the benefits of woollen garments are there too.

### Merino Export Embargo

The same issue carries a lengthy article recording the views of the NSW Sheepbreeders’ Association (now NSW SMBA) on the Merino export embargo, a subject that was dominating the “Letters” pages during that period.

Two months later the association, through George B S Falkiner, defended its position in response to opposing views expressed the previous month.

### First AASMB Flock Register

Elsewhere in the April issue, Mr Falkiner, inaugural president of the Australian Association of Stud Merino Breeders (AASMB), reports on the production of Volume 37 of *The Australian Stud Merino Flock Register* (the first produced by the newly formed AASMB).

### Mulesing

As though part of the current debate, the inventor of the mules operation, J H W Mules submitted a lengthy article for the issue of 16 November, 1938 headed “Why Crutch Wrinkles Cannot be Bred Off Merino Sheep with Profit”.

So as the saying goes, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”.

Expect more ‘blasts from the past’ in coming issues.



After a very rough October, during which the market fell to a three-year low, the second week of November saw the market follow seasonal trends and rise a solid 48 c/kg.

On the demand side, the early stage of the pipeline is dry and very little buying over the recent six months has seen many spinners and weavers forced to reduce production to below 60 per cent capacity.

Downstream demand has been simply dismal as, during the heavy price declines throughout 2008, a severe lack of confidence has dominated the minds of both downstream and upstream participants.

Until now processors believed they could reduce losses by keeping clear of the market as prices got lower and lower. In light of increasing withdrawals and high passed-in rates, we may have seen the market finding the support level from which prices can rebuild.

Supply appears to have dropped below demand, which will support the market and raise prices to a more long-term viable level.

In the current economic environment it however remains important to be cautious and not expect prices to jump to levels seen in late 2007. Only after confidence and stability has resumed on world equity markets can a clear path be seen for the global textile industry.

## Industry Events Listing

Among the services offered by the CRC for Sheep Industry Innovation is email notification of events as well as a free listing service for members of the sheep industry.

Events should have a significant sheep-related component or be particularly relevant to sheep and wool producers, processors, researchers and other service providers.

By visiting [www.sheepcrc.org.au/events.php](http://www.sheepcrc.org.au/events.php) you can

- Subscribe to the automated events notification service and receive an email on the 25th of each month listing coming events for the next month
- List an event
- View events already listed for the coming year

### Sheep CRC Information Nucleus Open Day

Cowra Agricultural Research & Advisory Station

Wednesday 25 March 2009

Contact: Deb Maxwell ph (02) 6779 4262

mantra

PARRAMATTA

(formerly Pacific International Suites Parramatta)

**Reservations - 2009 Sydney Sheep Show**

(Sheep Show - Wednesday 15 - Saturday 18 April)

**Phone: 02 9685 1600**

**Group Booking Name** NSW Stud Merino 2009  
**Group Confirmation No** 805324 (To be quoted )

## Elders Auction Forward

The simplest risk management tool

The Elders Auction Forward allows Australian wool growers the opportunity to manage their price risk in the most effective and simplest way utilising the traditional auction system.

### The Auction Forward:

- ◆ Allows growers to still participate in the traditional auction
- ◆ Achieves full buyer competition and premiums for their wool knowing that they still have a secure price base
- ◆ Provides full transparency and guaranteed convergence between the auction and the hedge as the hedge is closed out the same day as the wool is auctioned
- ◆ Allows grower flexibility to tailor the product to suit their individual needs, including:
  - ◇ Half microns,
  - ◇ Flexible maturity dates, and
  - ◇ The option to lock in up to two years in advance

There are often opportunities in the wool market to take advantage of the Auction Forward and your local District Wool Manager is always available to highlight these opportunities.

Price Risk management using the Auction Forward product is about having a clear strategy and defined pricing points so as to remove uncertainty in an increasingly volatile market.

### Examples of an actual positive

#### Auction Forward result:

Auction Forward hedge summary, Grower 1, October 2008.

\$16,160 added to sale proceeds

- ◆ 99 Bales hedged
- ◆ Levels were above target indicative per bale price of \$1100
- ◆ Elders Auction Forward was used
- ◆ The hedges were settled against a 21mic MPG of 817 c/kg clean
  - ◇ 83 bales were hedged at 955 c/kg clean, adding 138 c/kg clean to the sale proceeds (\$13,800)
  - ◇ 16 bales were hedged at 935 c/kg clean, adding 118 c/kg clean (\$2,360)

Please contact your local Elders District Wool Manager to develop strategies in relation to price risk management using the simplest risk management tool available.



## Does a Sudden Cold Snap Concern You?

**Thermoskin<sup>®</sup>** - a safe, natural spray-on weathershield for sheep after shearing

- ✓ Greatly reduces death from changes in weather
- ✓ Maintains constant body temperature & weight
- ✓ Cost effective protection

*"Having seen the results at minus 5 degrees, I was able to sleep soundly knowing that I wouldn't have to get up in the middle of the night if a cold snap was coming"*

Kim Henderson former NSW SMBA President



**Contact: Henry King 0418 641 645 or your local CRT agent**

## Thank You

Your dollars count in your community



This community makes sure that Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service is there to provide a link in the emergency care chain that helps people get to the right medical care when needed. Your support means that a call for help can be answered and no person will ever have to pay for that service.

We greatly appreciate the generosity of "Nerstane" and "Bungulla" Merino Studs and the McLaren and Capel families for participating in our "Donate A Sheep" initiative.

We also thank Elders and our friends in the farming sector for your ongoing support of the community's own Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service.

To be part of this fundraising initiative please contact Debby Herdegen on 0400 667 787.

[www.rescuehelicopter.com.au](http://www.rescuehelicopter.com.au)  
**1800 155 155**

## SCHUTE BELL

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<b>Contact:</b>	<b>Michael Wright</b>
<b>Robert Ryan</b>	Ph: (02) 9892 0704
Ph: (02) 9892 0700	Mob: 0419 826 301
<b>John Gray</b>	<b>Tony Evans</b>
Ph: (02) 9892 0807	Ph: (02) 49 653 522
Mob: 0408 414 478	Mob: 0427 661 949



2009

## Don Brown Memorial Merino Ewe Competition

Condobolin District

**Monday 23 February & Tuesday 24 February**  
Presentation Dinner - Tuesday 24 February

### Judges

- Roger Polkinghorne, Charinga and Banavie studs, Berrimal, Vic.
- Kim Henderson, Grogansworth, Bowning
- Associate - George Reid, Hay

For coach bookings and information, contact:  
Carol-Ann Malouf, ph (02) 6895 2274/ 0427 119 535

## Welcome ...

To newly registered NSW studs:

- **BUNDEMAR** F No 11  
Tom & Kate Kirk, "West Borambil", Condobolin
- **RAVECCHIA POLL** P F No 1384  
Brendan & Vicki Ostini, "The Trig", Ophir, via Orange
- **CODDINGTON POLL** P F No 1385  
Graham & Sally Coddington, "Eulandool", Dubbo

**THE TOP SIRE – Newsletter of The NSW Stud Merino Breeders' Association Ltd – ABN 95 002 659 896**

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*The opinions expressed in contributed copy in this newsletter are those of the contributor, not necessarily the Association.*

# Can genetics be a permanent solution to breech strike without mulesing?

by JS Richards and KD Atkins, NSW DPI, Orange

The following paper was presented for the first time at the Trangie Agricultural Research Centre INF Open Day on 20 November. It represents many years of work by staff, primarily at Trangie, in developing a clear understanding of flystrike genetics in relation to wrinkle.

Historically, prior to mulesing, breech strike was the main form of fly strike making up 90 per cent of all strikes in a flock. It occurred in all age groups and was especially evident in breeding ewes due to the additional problem of exposure to urine. Studies in the 1930s highlighted that breech conformation had a large impact on susceptibility, where animals scored to be very wrinkly around the breech had a much greater strike incidence (five to ten times) than those recorded as having a plain breech. The other important observation was that a proportion of susceptible sheep had multiple strikes within and across seasons.

The mules operation was introduced to reduce the susceptibility of wrinkly breeches to fly strike. Mulesing reduced the number of strikes and even gave added protection to plain breech animals. It is interesting that a recommendation from the Joint Blowfly Committee in 1940 was that “the mules operation must not be regarded as an alternative to the policy of breeding towards plain breeched sheep.” They suggested mulesing was a valuable means of reducing breech strike to a minimum during the period that would be required to eliminate undesirable breech wrinkles by breeding whilst yet retaining desirable fleece characteristics.

Breeding to eliminate breech wrinkle, if successful, provides a permanent solution to breech strike that is cost effective (since the measurements are not costly and will offset large costs of husbandry and treatment). Genetic solutions have been applied successfully before. A clear example of this is the rapid change implemented by both commercial producers and stud breeders to reduce the diameter of the wool clip by two microns in ten years. The question that arises is how long will it take and at what cost to other traits?

Selection lines run at Trangie (1951-71) confirmed that breech wrinkle is highly correlated with body wrinkle and neck wrinkle, so if animals have a plain breech they will usually have a plain body and neck also. This can be used

to improve the accuracy of scoring the animals through recording multiple wrinkle scores. The experimental proof from this trial of selecting animals ONLY for plain or wrinkly breech showed a decrease (or increase) of approximately one wrinkle score over a period of 10 years. The lines also demonstrated the correlated responses in other traits.

The largest antagonism was with greasy fleece weight where the flock selected for reduced wrinkle was 13 per cent lighter than the control line (6 per cent heavier for the flock selected for increased wrinkle). Clean fleece weight was lower in the reduced wrinkle flock (-10 per cent) but almost unchanged in the increased wrinkle flock (-1 per cent). There was little influence on fibre diameter and body weight in the reduced wrinkle (+0.3µm and +3 per cent) or increased wrinkle flocks (+0.1µm and -1 per cent respectively). There was only a small change in reproduction for the reduced wrinkle flock (-2 per cent). Whereas the high wrinkle flock had a 26 per cent reduction in lambs weaned per ewe joined.

ten years, if the wrinkle score was reduced by 0.8, the opportunity cost to other traits would be approximately 70 per cent. That is, of the total genetic gain possible in production traits, 70 per cent will be forfeited in reducing wrinkle. A Merino14 per cent (reduce diameter and maintain fleece weight) would be about 60 per cent loss of economic gain and a Merino3 per cent (increase fleece weight and maintain diameter) loss of nearly 80 per cent. The main source of loss is due to the antagonism between fleece weight and breech wrinkle.

It is not realistic to focus on reducing wrinkle score this rapidly. If the aim is to reduce wrinkle score by only 0.5 score in 10 years, these opportunity costs reduce to only 20 per cent, 25 per cent and 30 per cent for the Merino 14 per cent, Merino 7 per cent and Merino 3.5 per cent, respectively.

Figure 2 shows the expected changes in production when including breech in an index. As expected, there are small changes in diameter and larger effects on fleece weight, so the larger changes are evident in the low micron premium indexes.

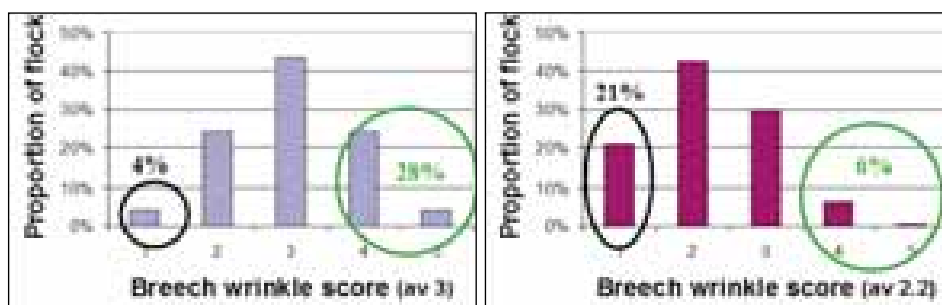


Figure 1. Flock wrinkle score distribution when reducing by 0.8 wrinkle score over 10 years

If we selected entirely on reducing breech wrinkle score using the current scoring system the maximum change that could be achieved over 10 years is 0.8 wrinkle score. This will affect the distribution of scores within a flock by not only increasing the wrinkle score 1 (plain) animals, but also reducing the number of animals in the 4 and 5 score (wrinkly) categories.

Figure 1 shows this change in distribution of scores that would be made over ten years, when starting from an average wrinkle score 3 flock and moving to a 2.2 flock. Obviously though, there would be a trade off in other traits for this response.

Using a Merino7 per cent index (aiming to reduce fibre diameter and increase fleece weight) it is estimated that over

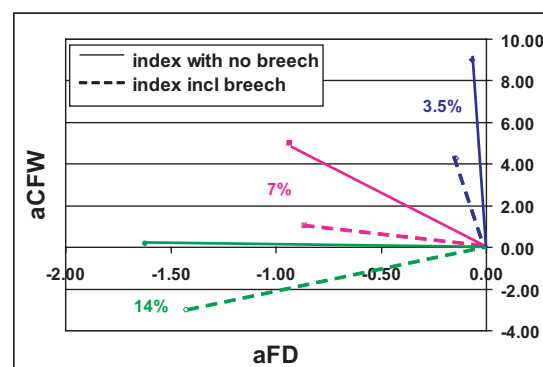


Figure 2. Production changes when including breech in index

The within-flock selection options for the stud breeder to speed up this process of reducing wrinkle are quite costly and limited, but there are many options for the commercial producer. An article covering this information will follow in a future issue.