

NSW SMBA Continues Funding for Wool Handler Training

19 September 2008

Following the success of the pilot TAFE NSW Western Institute Wool Handler Training Programme in 2007 the NSW Stud Merino Breeders' Association Trust has made funding available to enable its continuation.

The programme which aims to increase wool returns both immediately and into the future through improved wool handling skills and clip preparation has been hailed by all woolgrowers, handlers and classers involved in the pilot.

The allocation from the SMBA's Trust Fund under its education provision will fund enrolment fees for 75 places in the 2007-08 round of the training programme. Woolgrowers are again invited to support this proactive initiative by hosting a training programme in their shed during shearing.

As a result they can expect

- Improved wool handler skills
- Better preparation of oddment lines (locks, pieces and bellies)
- Removal of short and possibly stained crutch wool
- Effective skirting to maximise wool remaining in fleece lines
- Reduced chance of injury through improved work techniques and awareness of OH&S issues

These aims were achieved in the previous programme and as well, wool handlers improved their efficiency as a result of better teamwork and communication among themselves and with classers.

Woolgrowers who provide training venues will also be providing encouragement to young people to enter the industry. For example following the last SMBA Trust-funded course, four Year 11 and 12 High School students with no other career prospects in their home area, were able to obtain employment in the industry close to home as a direct result of successful completion of the course.

The SMBA's participation is part of a joint funding initiative with the NSW State Government along with TAFE's Western Institute which provides in-shed training of wool handlers to an accredited level. The programme will also utilise resources developed by Australian Wool Innovation as part of the previous programme.

While there is little difference in appearance between this programme and an AWI programme that works with bigger teams, the SMBA Trust funding provides flexibility in targeting a wider range of smaller groups and adds extra training capacity.

Training takes place in a grower's shed during shearing and there is no limit to the number of handlers who can be enrolled.

Training is under way in the new programme and it is hoped that the 75 SMBA Trust-funded places will be filled during the current financial year.

Jim Murray, one of TAFE's registered professional trainers who assists in the programme's delivery said, "There is a need for ongoing maintenance of an accepted standard of clip preparation with continual training of wool handlers to give the confidence back to the market that this high standard brings."

Jim also said that it does not matter how much experience a wool handler has - all benefit from this specialised and up-to-date training.

David Crean, head teacher shearing and agribusiness, TAFE NSW Western Institute said, "The support of the NSW Stud Merino Breeders Association is a key factor in enabling this training for the industry."

Merino woolgrowers who would like to participate in this programme are invited to contact Jim Murray on 0427 460 007 or Jim or David Crean at TAFE's Wellington office on (02) 6845 1844.