

Genetic performance breeds success

Skill, drive and attention to detail are the keys to genetic performance in Armatree sheep producer Jenny Bradley's prime lamb enterprise.

Ms Bradley runs 1,500 Merino ewes and breeds rams from 220 stud Border Leicester ewes for her breeding enterprise. Ms Bradley is fastidious when it comes to monitoring individual performance of her sheep.

"We select rams from Border Leicester ewes with strong maternal instincts and those with multiple birth histories in conjunction with selection criteria using Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs)," said Ms Bradley.

Each Border Leicester Breeding ewe on the property is tagged and Ms Bradley records key information about each sheep's performance.

"Each ewe is tagged and we also keep detailed information about every lamb, recording weight and other details from birth and at regular intervals until classing when the individual sheep is either entered into the breeding nucleus or culled."

Maternal qualities

The emphasis on breeding for maternal qualities is paying dividends, she said, with buyers of first-cross ewe lambs recording very high reproduction rates.

"Some of our buyers are recording excellent lambing percentages. Our repeat buyers are joining these ewes at seven to eight months of age and lambing at twelve months and obtaining lambing percentages above 90% for these first time lambers that are still lambs themselves. The ewes not only have good numbers of multiple births, but importantly, they are such good mothers that a very high proportion survive and thrive," Ms Bradley said.

The wether portion of the first-cross lambs are forward sold through the Tooraweenah Prime Lamb Marketing Co-operative.

"We forward sell all our wether lambs over



The Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual has helped Jenny Bradley assess and re-evaluate her prime lamb enterprise.

was extremely valuable as it helped her to assess and re-evaluate her business practices.

"One aspect of *Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual* that I value is the part which gets producers to assess their strengths and weaknesses," she said.

"We found that with the manual, we could identify our strengths, and more or less put them to one side, but it was understanding our weaknesses that had the real value. One of the weaknesses we identified after using the manual was our wool-selling practice. Although we forward-sell our lamb meat, we have not explored forward-selling our wool."

The manual highlights wool price volatility as the major source of business risk on wool growing farms. Wool price volatility contributed about 80% of the variability of return on equity, while production risk contributed about 20% of the variability. Yet few wool producers

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the hook, aiming for 26 kilos dressed weight," added Ms Bradley.

Strengths and weaknesses

As Director of Tooraweenah Prime Lamb Marketing Co-operative, Ms Bradley says good information and planning is the key to successful operations. One of Ms Bradley's recent management tools is *Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual*, launched by Australian Wool Innovation Limited and Meat & Livestock Australia in January 2008.

Ms Bradley said the information in the manual

have appropriate strategies in place to reduce the risk of low and unprofitable wool prices.

"Forward selling of our wool clip is an area of our enterprise that could do with some real scrutiny," said Ms Bradley.

MORE INFORMATION

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THE MANUAL

Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual contains 11 modules covering a range of management issues, including business planning, marketing, pasture and soil management, protection of natural assets and stock husbandry.

In one handy reference the manual captures the experience of leading sheep producers and technical specialists and the latest recommendations from research and development to help users identify and improve the 20% of decisions that have 80% of the impact on business profitability and risk control.

Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual costs \$65+GST for MLA members and can be ordered from MLA on 1800 675 717 and selecting option 3 or on the program website www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au. Information on *Making More From Sheep* activities, forums and workshops can also be found on the website.

