

# Identify the traits you want

Anyone doubting the production benefits of improving sheep genetics only has to look at the figures, according to genetics expert Richard Apps, MLA Adoption Manager (Sheep).

Increased growth rates and reduced sale age have been documented in the genetics module in *Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual* where the performance of progeny from two sire teams (one selected for high growth and the other for low growth) were joined to similar flocks of ewes. At 16 weeks of age, the lambs from the high growth sire team had 46% of lambs reaching target sale weight (at least 43kg). The low growth sire team had only 11% of lambs reaching sale weight.

Mr Apps said sheep producers can get direct benefits such as these by introducing the genetics that match their production goals.

"It is important that sheep producers identify the markets they believe will bring them the best returns and the key profit drivers associated with those markets," he said. "Then they need to tailor their genetics and production system to best achieve their business goals.

"By clearly identifying the traits they want to see in their sheep, producers can develop their breeding objectives and introduce appropriate genes into their flock so they are getting the traits they want," he said.

While many sheep producers are already aware of the benefits of tailored genetics, there are others who are not sure how to take the first steps. "Sheep producers may not realise just how much industry support is out there for them," said Mr Apps.



*"It is important that sheep producers identify the markets they believe will bring them the best returns and the key profit drivers associated with those markets," said genetics expert Richard Apps.*

"It is genuinely easy for them to get that help. *Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual* is an inexpensive, one-stop reference point for sheep producers. The section on genetics, for example, gives producers both quick access to the fundamentals of good genetics, and more detailed information that allows them to drill right down to specific technical advice," he said.

## Integrated approach

Mr Apps explained a key to developing good genetics is understanding and using Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs), in conjunction with visual assessment, when making selections.

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they are considering for purchase. However, not all traits have an ASBV, so visual assessment is a very important part of genetic selection too."

Mr Apps recommended an integrated approach for producers who would like support in getting their genetics right, combining industry advice and the information in the manual.

"The Sheep Genetics team from MLA and AWI provide ASBVs to ram breeders and the commercial industry. They also support ram breeders and industry advisors with the latest research and developments in sheep breeding. Producers can access this network and learn how to interpret and apply the ASBVs and other genetic technologies," he said.

"The Sheep Genetics website ([www.sheepgenetics.org.au](http://www.sheepgenetics.org.au)) provides a powerful searchable database so producers can search for breeders or for rams by ASBV and index criteria."

## Up-front

"The fastest and most direct way to change genetic traits is through the purchase of suitable rams," said Mr Apps. "In one generation you can introduce the genes you want by careful selection of your sires.

"Although there is an emphasis on the sires, the maternal influence should not be overlooked. Your rams can give you an up-front and quick genetic response, but in the end they are still only half of the gene contribution. Getting the genetic mix right from both male and female breeding stock makes sense.

"In the end, it is a matter of what suits each individual producer and their goals," Mr Apps said.

*Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual* is a joint initiative of MLA and Australian Wool Innovation.

## 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](http://www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au). Information on *Making More From Sheep* activities, forums and workshops can also be found on the website.

