

## case study

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### Using information to stay ahead, and afloat

Dirranbandi grazier, Don Perkins, is achieving his dual-targets of increasing lambing percentages by up to 25% points and simultaneously lowering his adult Merino ewes' average fibre diameter by around 1.5 microns.

His formula? Don Perkins believes making full use of a key industry information resource and adjusting the farm calendar has helped get the most from his flock.

He says switching to joining ewes off-shears and selecting rams for key productivity traits are paying dividends, even after the biggest flood the family has ever experienced on their Dirranbandi property "Nelyambo".

Mr Perkins and wife Belinda run 7,000 sheep on their 8,100ha holding, and during March and April its eastern and western portions were under water, and all their stock were "boxed up in the middle" on higher ground.

Lamb shearing finished on June 3, and Mr Perkins is pleased that despite the post-flood feed flush, the across-flock wool clip looks like averaging out at 18 microns.

He says new genetics and using a Making More From Sheep management approach have helped him achieve his targets of a lambing percentage of 110-115% and an adult ewe clip averaging 19-20 micron; up from a 90% lambing and a 21-micron clip average 10 years ago.

Mr Perkins says it's important to keep the economics of sheep production in perspective and set targets accordingly.

Graziers can attend a Making More From Sheep 'Its ewe time!' forum to tap into the latest information; the forums are aimed at providing producers with a suite of practical 'take home and do' information to make every ewe count. The forums are full day events and will be held at key centres:

- Tuesday 13 July: Dubbo, NSW at the RSL Club
- Thursday 15 July: Goondiwindi, QLD at the RSL Memorial Club

To book a seat at your closest forum call MLA on 1800 675 717.

Mr Perkins advocates using the Making More From Sheep information to keep up with best practice.

“We are aiming to produce a plainer bodied sheep that can produce a reasonable wool clip in the 19-20 micron range and a lamb capable of being turned off to the meat trade.

“Our ewes are now plain enough and the micron is about right, so now it’s about folding the edges in. By sourcing the correct genetics we can maintain a good constitution while slowly increasing the wool cut and lambing percentage.”

As part of the target to increase lambing percentages, instead of a June shearing, ewes now make a trip into the shed in March so they can then be joined off-shears for a September drop.

“Before, we were joining ewes with eight or nine months wool on them and we’d get getting around 90% lambing percentages. But joining off the board has certainly helped get the rates up to another level.”

The Perkins’ join their cull and oldest ewes to Poll Dorset rams, and sell all their wether lambs direct to the meatworks.

To maximise the number of lambs weaned, the Perkins’ use a sheep-weighing crate to monitor ewe weight gains – especially maidens.

“Breeding sheep is about setting your objectives, finding the appropriate genetics and getting the nutrition right – and that’s where the scales come in.

“As we aim to get our maiden ewes to 50kg for their first joining, they need to be 35kg in winter at nine or 10 months old; by weighing them we know if they’re on track.”

It’s the useful information in the Making More From Sheep forums and manual that Mr Perkins describes as “great to have” to ensure managers get the most from their ewes.

Now that the floodwaters have receded, the biggest current challenge for Mr Perkins is staying on top of the worm problem; Making More From Sheep’s ‘Healthy and Contented Sheep’ module contains some worm management guidelines.

"In really good pasture years like this, sheep tend to use a part of the paddock where the feed is short, which means we're having a fair problem with worms at the moment.

"We're monitoring and testing regularly and trying to get on to any worm burden before it gets too high."

For more information on The Making More from Sheep 2010 Forums go to [www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au](http://www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au) or call MLA on 1800 675 717 to register.

*Photo caption: Don Perkins, ready for some yard work at "Nelyambo" (image attached to email).*

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