

Making More From Sheep



Media Release

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It's definitely 'ewe time!' in WA

Combining cutting edge genetic technologies with best-practice management strategies is the key to boosting sheep productivity and profitability, according to Merino producer David Thompson.

He, wife Sue and son Hamish run "MOOJEPIN"- a 2,700 head ewe breeding flock near Katanning and produce seedstock Multi-Purpose Merino (MPM) rams.

Since 2004, the family's sheep breeding emphasis has been on high early lamb growth, good muscling, with positive fat and a zero tolerance of skin wrinkles to produce plain-bodied animals with fast growing, quality fine wool that do not need mulesing.



The Thompsons are long term users of the MERINOSELECT genetic evaluation and improvement service and are part of a five-member local Lifetime Ewe Management (LTEM) focus group.

The family regularly utilises Making More from Sheep (MMfS) program information. Mr Thompson said the family strive to stay abreast of and implement latest sheep industry research and technology to advance Merino production. He said the philosophy is that running sheep profitably requires coupling good genetics with good management.

"That is where programs like MMfS and LTEM are really valuable," he said.

"They are based on latest research in genetics and management and show how to implement the knowledge into our sheep operations.

"These tools can really help producers optimise profits to take advantage of the current market conditions."

By adopting genetic information from MERINOSELECT and management information from MMfS and LTEM, the Thompsons have significantly improved whole flock reproductive performance, increased lamb growth rates, muscle and fat and enhanced the quality of their wool clip.

The Merino flock has reached the MMfS lamb growth-to-weaning target of 350 grams/day in the first 200 days.

"With regard to Australian Sheep Breeding Value`s - the most valuable yet the most underutilised tool available to Australian merino sheep breeders - it is a matter of balance. A high growth rate on its own is of no use to the industry, it must be combined with high muscling and positive fat."

Mr Thompson said fat is vital for Merinos as they are a maternal breed and there is evidence that selection for fat helped ewes rear a lamb in tough seasons – a virtual 'haystack on their back' - while higher intramuscular fat improves meat eating quality.

The Thompson`s Moojepin flock is now well ahead of industry standards for growth, muscle & fat. While continually improving the carcass attributes of their MPM Merinos, the Thompsons have simultaneously maintained average flock wool fibre diameter at 18.6 micron and wool cuts at 5 - 5.5kg/head.

Mr Thompson said ewe fertility and reproduction were the major profit-driving traits of a Merino enterprise and he focuses on meeting ewe nutritional requirements, condition scoring sheep and improving pasture and grazing management.

He said following the MMfS and LTEM principles, about 50 per cent of the ewes now produce twins and weaning rates had lifted by 15-20 per cent from a decade ago.

"I attribute much of this to having more knowledge about how to feed my sheep to meet their requirements, how to manage and look after ewes with multiple pregnancies and how to get the most out of readily-available industry genetic information," he said.

The Thompsons split ewe mobs after pregnancy scanning in early July to manage single and multiple bearing ewes separately. For the first time this year they had mated ewe lambs aged about seven months in an attempt to accelerate the re-building of their flock, which had been cut back due to severe drought across southern WA.

"I feel it is important for the sheep industry to stay abreast of all these developments to fast track productivity of the national flock and optimise returns from Merino enterprises," he said.

The upcoming WA 'It's ewe time' forums will be an excellent way to tap into latest MMfS, LTEM and Sheep CRC information.

The forums aim to provide practical information to help producers make every ewe count by running flocks that wean 10 per cent more lambs per hectare, achieve 10 per cent more carcass weight and cut 10 per cent more wool.

'It's ewe time!' events are scheduled for:

- Tuesday 5th July Katanning, WA
- Wednesday 6th July Northam, WA
- Thursday 7th July Dandaragan, WA

- Tuesday 12th July Tamworth, NSW
- Friday 15th July Longreach, QLD
- Tuesday 26th July Bairnsdale, Vic
- Thursday 28th July Cooma, NSW
- Tuesday 23rd August Wudinna, SA
- Thursday 25th August Lameroo, SA

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

For more information: www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au

AWI, MLA and DAFWA are supported by the Event Partners - Sheep CRC, Elders, Landmark and Ruralco; and the Event Supporter - Sheepmeat Council of Australia, to deliver the WA forums.

Making More From Sheep is a best-practice package of information, tools and learning opportunities for Australian sheep producers funded by MLA and AWI. The website contains all the content within the Making More From Sheep program including the producer's manual and CD-Rom, and information about learning activities.

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