

producer case studies

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Victoria: Andrew Dufty (wool)

The release of *Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual* – will be a timely and great boost for the industry according to Western Victorian merino producer Andrew Dufty.

Making More From Sheep is a joint initiative of Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI) and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and was developed with the input of nearly 250 leading sheep and wool producers and technical experts.

Mr Dufty is a producer advocate for Making More From Sheep who runs 5000 ewes in a self-replacing flock of 13,500 18.5-micron merinos on his Melville Forest district property northeast of Coleraine and last year produced more than 300 bales. He joins most of his flock to Barrama stud merino sires while remaining 1000 ewes are joined to Coopworth sires.

Mr Dufty believes Making More From Sheep will further reinforce the needs for woolgrowers and sheep producers to realise the benefits of benchmarking and planning for the future.

“Benchmarking was a key part of the Bestwool/ Bestlamb program and benchmarking is a good tool if the producer does it right,” he said.

He said the Bestwool project encouraged producers to work from the ground up in their enterprises, however the modules that comprise *Making More From Sheep – A sheep producer's manual* could carry this intent and ability to self-analyse further.

“There will be certain modules each advocate will have strengths in and those modules will be the ones that those advocates will speak to while endorsing the need for greater understanding of the balance of the material contained in the manual,” Mr Dufty said.

“All woolgrowers will be able to pick up something from the manual. Determining which modules are applicable to individual's positions will be the key to the take up,” he said.

The total area of his holding is 1450 hectares, however the effective area is 1254 ha. The remainder of the property includes native vegetation, plantations, woodlots, and fenced off creeks. The property is predominantly perennial pasture, however there are some native species in his pastures. The average rainfall is 670mm and during the last three years he has recorded 655mm in 2007, 370mm in 2006, and 419mm in 2005. The soil types are grey sandy loams over orange clay.

The enterprise also includes a cropping program that in recent years has planted up to 400 hectares.

“But we've cut back to about 200 hectares a year as there are production and associated financial risks with cropping,” Mr Dufty said.

Mr Dufty said in the case of sheep enterprises the financial risks were low and the inputs are easy to identify and control.

For example in Mr Dufty's enterprise the gross margin per hectare during the past financial year (06/ 07 – a drought year) for canola was a lowly \$15/ ha while his wool returned \$219/ ha. (Note we have currently forward sold some Canola at \$635/ t which will swing the GM/ha figures more in line with what we would expect however high input costs will limit the cropping upside.

“This swings wildly about and it is the risk associated with cropping that swings our enterprise towards having a sheep bias,” Mr Dufty said. He said the gross margin result for canola in 2006-07 was the result of frost damaging the crop as well as poor advice from the local DPI.

Mr Dufty has always been positive in his outlook for the potential of merino and sheep breeding. In fact he has a program of trying to expand his operation in terms of increasing numbers of breeding ewes. His aim is to run 15,000 grown sheep that cut 50 plus kilograms of clean wool per hectare.

Not only a sheep and wool producer he was also a committee member for six years on the Bestwool/ Bestlamb project - an initiative of AWI, MLA and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries.

Mr Dufty is well regarded in the wool industry and was recently judged as the winner of the inaugural Raising the Baa competition – another initiative of AWI, MLA, CRC for Sheep Industry Innovation and Grain & Graze and supported by Kondinin Group and Rural Press.