

SHEEP HEALTH AND WELFARE UPDATE

WOOLPRODUCERS
AUSTRALIA

GENETIC SOLUTION TO A MAJOR PROBLEM

In late 2000 Cliff Harding, a wool grower from Mingenew Western Australia, decided something drastic had to be done to his wrinkly Merino flock. The incidence of breech and body strike was extremely high and even mulesing was of little benefit. Cliff was faced with the decision do something different or get out of Merinos.

On advice from Ken Duxson of "Glendamar", Cliff was convinced that he could reduce wrinkle and produce a thin skinned plain bodied sheep as quickly as he had bred the wrinkles into his sheep.

"My breeding objectives were to reduce the incidence of breech and body strike; reduce the time and cost of treating flystrike and increase productivity," Cliff said.

To achieve this Cliff began culling all ewes with a high wrinkle score and replacing them with ewes bred under the Soft Rolling Skin (SRS) and Multi Purpose Merino (MPM) genetic selection system. Additionally, Cliff artificially inseminated 1,000 ewes per year using MPM genetics.

Cliff began noticing dramatic improvements in his flock over the next few years and found low body and breech wrinkle to be very heritable. By 2005 Cliff had not only been able to cease mulesing on his farm but he also improved the productivity of his flock.

"The average micron of my flock decreased from 22.5um to 19.5um and my sheep were cutting 5kg of wool every 8 months. Lambing percentages averaged 125% and by 2009 reached an all time high of 142% marked and weaned – the state average was 80%" Cliff said.

"Improving the quality of the carcass has also been very important and I am now getting cross bred prices for my Merino wether lambs."

Following a series of very dry years Cliff was concerned that the true ability of his flock to withstand the pressure from flies had not been tested. However, the past 12 months has seen a return to normal seasons and subsequently significantly blowfly pressure. "The results speak for themselves with only 2 struck sheep out of 6,000," Cliff added.

In summing up Cliff has been very surprised how quickly he saw results. "I now breed a fly strike resistant sheep that does not require mulesing or the application of fly control chemicals. My sheep have a better quality fleece and carcass and lambing percentages have increased dramatically." For the first time this year Cliff used the Te Pari Docking Iron and found it to be an excellent tool to remove the tail and create a bare area around the tip.

Cliff Harding runs a mixed farming operation on his 6,132ha property in the central wheat belt of WA. He crops 3,500ha and ran 2,800 ewes pre drought – this has been reduced to 1,850 head.



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the spring edition of the WoolProducers Australia (WPA) sheep health and welfare update. We hope you enjoy receiving our publication and catching up on the latest national sheep health and welfare news.

WPA is the peak national body for the wool producing industry in Australia. We are the national voice on behalf of producers, advocating their interests to the Commonwealth and industry stakeholders in Australia and abroad.

WPA develops and advocates policy, and represents the industry on issues as diverse as trade, animal health and welfare, research and development, marketing, accountability of grower funds, taxation and compulsory levies, climate change and industrial relations.

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Below left: Before – Cliff's wrinkly ewes
Below: After – Cliff's ewes today

