

Managing for flies at Sheep CRC sites

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Special insights into managing non-mulesed sheep for flystrike control are being gained at the Sheep CRC's Information Nucleus (IN) flock sites across Australia.

After deciding in 2008 to cease the practise of mulesing, the Sheep CRC is successfully managing blowfly strike in the eight flocks using integrated programs tailored to local climate and management requirements.

Sheep CRC CEO, Professor James Rowe, said a significant amount of data and practical information will come from the work. "It's early days yet as the project runs through to 2014, though this is the first summer for our initial drop of non-mulesed lambs."

"The flocks contain a range of bloodlines with differing flystrike susceptibility allowing our researchers to identify genetic traits and how heritable they are. Developing Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBV's) for inherent strike resistance will be a key outcome of this work into the next two years," he said.

Turretfield Research Centre Farm Manager, John Evans, is confident that an integrated approach will overcome flystrike problems in non-mulesed sheep. A total of 220 merino and 290 crossbred mixed-sex 2008 drop lambs at weaning are involved in the study.

"They have variable susceptibility to fly strike - some sheep you would expect to be more susceptible with their heavy wrinkling, but at this stage, we're going well.

"To manage the fly risk, we considered the risk factors and available management options, and developed a plan which is based on using techniques that are already available to us, such as: crutching, using long-acting fly repellents, worm egg count monitoring, appropriate drenching and close monitoring.

"It's been an eye-opener: we've had minimal fly problems even though there were ideal fly conditions during December with rainy periods and milder weather.

"The next test will come at the autumn break when the probability of scouring increases and the fly pressure increases. I then expect we'll see the impact of genetic differences," he said.

Professor Rowe said "The data to be collected at each site will include important traits such as body and breech wrinkle, breech cover, crutch cover, wool colour, staple structure and conformation; along with other new traits.

"This information will be combined with data from other flocks, including those run by AMSEA, AWI, stud and commercial producers and other researchers," he said.

The IN flocks are being used in a national collaborative effort to test key industry sires for an extensive range of traits in differing environments, and to generate genetic information on new and difficult to measure traits related to disease and parasite resistance, wool and meat production.

An Information Nucleus Open Day will be held at Turretfield on Thursday April 2nd, 2009. For more information on the Sheep CRC Information Nucleus, see: www.sheepcrc.org.au/INF

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