

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 managing for 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. "Its early days as the project runs through to 2014 and this is the first summer for our initial drop of non-mulesed lambs."

"The flocks contain a range of bloodlines with differing flystrike susceptibility, so the challenges faced in managing flystrike in these flocks are similar to those faced by industry".

An outcome of the Information Nucleus flocks will be enhanced knowledge about the genetics of traits that affect susceptibility to flystrike, such as wrinkle, which will assist the development of Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBV's) for these important traits.

The Farm Supervisor at NSW DPI's Cowra Agricultural Research and Advisory Station, Brad Palmer, said an integrated flystrike management approach is proving its worth.

"We currently have 154 seven-month old, mixed-sex, mainly merino lambs on the station that are non-mulesed, with a variety of bloodlines and flystrike susceptibility.

"We're working to a plan that combines existing knowledge and management practises, and it's going well.

"There has been some body and breech strike in the lambs, though it's no more than the district average in mulesed sheep," Mr Palmer said.

He said after considering risk factors and management options, a plan was developed which currently includes a range of practises:

- Using a long-lasting backline anti-fly treatment
- Using Lucitrap fly traps to monitor the activity of *Lucilia cuprina* and other fly species
- Regular monitoring of worm burden
- Drenching as recommended to prevent scouring and dags
- Crutching strategically

"While the lambs are still just seven months old, we can say that so far we have succeeded in controlling flystrike. The management strategies we are using will be further tested as these lambs mature and we have a few more lamb drops.

"With good integrated management based on observation and available methods, and genetic tools coming along, I believe we can manage for flystrike," Mr Palmer 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, fleece rot and conformation; along with other new traits.

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"This information will help us understand the relationships between traits that we know affect susceptibility to flystrike and those that affect production like fleece weight, fibre diameter and reproductive performance.

"This information will be combined with data from other flocks, including those run by AMSEA, AWI, stud and commercial producers and other researchers to give breeders the genetic tools they need to breed sheep with low susceptibility to flystrike."

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 generate genetic information on new and difficult to measure traits related to wool and meat production.

For more information on the Sheep CRC Information Nucleus at Cowra, contact site scientist Gordon Refshauge, on 02 6349 9715, or for general information on the project, see: <http://www.sheepcrc.org.au/INF>

An Information Nucleus Open Day will be held on Thursday, 30 April 2009 at the Cowra Research and Advisory Station.

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