



# Information Exchange

The newsletter of the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network

No. 51 – April 2010

## Annual F'ewe'ture Farming conference

MARK JUNE 23 in your diary as the date for this year's BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB F'EWETURE Farming Conference at the Bendigo Exhibition Centre.

The conference will feature high-profile speakers and interactive concurrent sessions on a range of interesting topics. Speakers will include:

- San Jolly from Productive Nutrition on optimising lamb production systems and the economics of grazing crops;
- Mark Ferguson from WA Ag on breeding the Merino ewe of the future;
- Kate Sargeant from DPI



**Chris Cordiner, Norm Tozer and David Rendell at last year's F'EWETURE Farming Conference.**

- on selecting the right lime, dolomite or gypsum;
- Robert Suter from DPI on the causes of ewe deaths; and
- John Webbware and Peter Vandeleur on the management costs and market rewards of not mulesing sheep.

Each session will be run three times so people can attend six of the 12 on offer.

A dinner at the All Seasons Bendigo will be held before the conference on June 22. It will feature Andrew Marvin from Swifts Meats.

Admission to the conference is free to group members, \$30 for associate members and \$50 for general admission. People who sign up for free associate membership on the day will only pay \$30.

Registration is essential, so please phone (03) 5355 0531 to book your place. ■

## Leadership scholarships for wool and lamb industry

BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) are making four scholarships available for the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program.

The scholarships are a major investment in the development of leadership skills in the sheep, lamb and wool industry.

BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB is offering two scholarships to its

members, while two Bill Easton Rural Leadership Scholarships are on offer to prime lamb producers through the DPI Meat & Wool program.

All four scholarships cover the full cost of participation in the program, including accommodation and meals.

The Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program has a strong reputation in the agricultural and

agribusiness sector, attracting support from a range of industry and rural community groups.

The industries represented include livestock grazing for meat and wool, broadacre summer and winter cropping, dairy production, poppy production, cotton production, horticulture, apiarists and agribusiness.

There is an average of 30 participants per course, and

there are now more than 450 program graduates across Australia, including BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB chair Jason Trompf.

The program is an intense five-day workshop conducted on the College campus at Geelong. The 2010 program will run from Sunday, June 27 to Friday, July 2.

*If you are interested in applying, phone on 5355 0531 or e-mail [annette.taylor@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:annette.taylor@dpi.vic.gov.au)*

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# Sheep stack up for Trevor

BEING A member of the Nullawil prime lamb BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB group is paying handsome dividends for Trevor Poyner.

Trevor and his wife Leanne farm 1,020 hectares north of Nullawil and have always been focused on cropping, but now run a productive flock based on 400 Merino ewes as a side to the cropping enterprise.

"I don't really like sheep," Trevor said, "but financially they've become a great asset. If we hadn't had the sheep over the past four years we'd be in a totally different situation.

"A lot of the famers around here have become cropping specialists and have got rid of their livestock. They're now finding sheep are another source of income but are getting too expensive to buy in."

## Optimal production

The sheep have made a significant contribution to the farm's bottom line in the past few dry years and Trevor is determined to make his livestock enterprise as productive as possible using techniques learnt through his involvement in the Nullawil group.

This includes managing ewe nutrition in the lead up to lambing, scanning pregnant ewes and managing single and twin bearing ewes differently, minimising fox predation and optimising ewe management during lambing.

"We used to run a few sheep, but cropping was always our main priority and the sheep weren't as productive as they are now," he said.

"Being involved in the group has been really good. I've learnt a lot and our sheep are far more profitable.

"I used to buy in mixed sex lambs, with the aim of growing them out, but I've changed all that since I've been involved in the group."

Trevor's direction changed in spring 2008, when the season tightened early.

"The crops had had it, so I bought 400 young Merino ewes at Wycheproof and joined them to top Poll Dorset rams," he said.

"It was a way of securing an income from wool and lamb sales if the crops failed."

The move has proven to be a winner.

This season the ewes cut \$35 a head in wool at the March shearing and the first cross lambs sold for more than \$100 a head. The first draft of 325 woolly lambs averaged \$103, while the second run of 85 shorn lambs averaged \$140.

"When you get those sorts of returns, sheep suddenly look pretty good," he said.

"You also start looking at everything you

can do to maximise the number of lambs you can get."

The economic value of the sheep means management is now geared towards optimal productivity.

Ewes are fed barley to ensure they are on a rising plane of nutrition before joining to maximise ovulation rates and are scanned before lambing.

At the most recent scanning, before this year's April lambing, Trevor's ewes scanned 146% in lamb.

The twin-lambing ewes are separated from the single-lambing ewes, so that they can be fed appropriately.

The farm is baited with Fox Off in the weeks leading up to lambing and Trevor will be trying alpacas with the ewes for the first time this year to further minimise losses to foxes.

"In 2009 the ewes scanned 140% in lamb and we sold 112% lambs – before we got involved in all this through the Nullawil group we would have only ever marked about 85% lambs," he said.

Trevor puts self-feeders with the lambing ewes as this causes far less disturbance to the sheep than trail feeding, which can result in mismothering.

"The self-feeders cost \$1,200, but when you think that if this approach can save 12 lambs, then you've paid for the feeders," he said.

## Challenges

There are challenges in running the two enterprises. Trevor keeps on top of fly problems by jetting his ewes with Vetrazin twice – once in November before harvest and again in January.

Ewes are shorn in early March and given a shot of Eweguard off the board, which is six weeks before lambing.

Finding labour – especially good shed hands for shearing – is one of the biggest challenges of running the sheep enterprise.

Trevor grazes his ewes on stubbles and then drills in a small area for sheep feed over winter and spring. This year he plans to sow six hectares of a forage rape, along with a paddock of vetch and barley for grazing.

The Nullawil group is trialling strip grazing this season and Trevor may try this in the future.

"The group has been great for learning new things, and we meet every four to six weeks," Trevor said. "You come back from meetings with new ideas and, as a result, we are doing a much-better job with our sheep." ■

## AT A GLANCE

### NFF Innovation Awards

The National Farmers Federation (NFF) is calling for nominations for its second annual National Innovation in Agriculture Awards, recognising and encouraging excellence in modern farming.

The awards cover three categories (sustainability, value adding and new technology) and are open to all farmers who are full financial members of NFF member organisations – be they state farm groups, commodity or associate member groups.

The 2010 Innovation in Agriculture Awards entry guide, which provides details and examples of each award, the criteria for entry and guidance on entry format, is available from <http://congress.nff.org.au/awards.html>.

Nominations close on Monday 31 May 2010

### Host a city family on FarmDay

Farmers are being sought to host a city family for this year's FarmDay.

Established in 2006 by Victorian sheep producer Deb Bain, FarmDay has led to more than 1,000 city families experiencing a day on a working farm.

The FarmDay initiative allows city families to get involved on a real farm and return to the city with a greater understanding of farming life, while also becoming advocates for Australian farmers.

A survey following FarmDay in 2008 showed that 97% of city participants said they would be more understanding of people from the country, and 98% said they would be more likely to 'Buy Australian'.

FarmDay 2010 will be held on May 29 and 30.

The popularity of FarmDay has grown with each subsequent year, but this means there is a growing need for more farmers from all enterprises to register to host a city family for a day.

If you would like to get involved, you can register at [www.farmday.com.au](http://www.farmday.com.au)

For more information, contact Deb Bain, FarmDay, phone 1300 367 036 or e-mail [deb@farmday.com.au](mailto:deb@farmday.com.au)

### Schroder clocks 500

Long-time co-ordinator Peter Schroder recently conducted his 500th BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB meeting.

Peter is based in Western Victoria and is the co-ordinator of five groups.

# Ram breeding becomes best practice

LOOKING OVER the fence has taken on a whole new meaning for members of the Triple M BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB group.

Instead of taking a trip to see what was happening in other districts, the group decided to focus on the achievements of three members who have decided to breed their own Merino rams.

The group visited members Shane Arnold, Mathew Crawford and Peter Hayes, who have all opted to breed their own rams to ensure they get the type of sheep they want and at the most affordable price as quickly as possible.

All three have taken slightly different approaches in terms of sourcing genetics, paddock mating and AI use, but all believe good genetics and performance recording are the keys to making their sheep more productive and profitable.

"I strongly believe that breeding your own rams should be seen as part of current best practice for woolgrowers," said Triple M group facilitator Peter Schroder.

"If you breed your own rams you end up with better rams than if you were buying in flock rams, and the rams you breed will be more affordable.

"If you breed your own rams you use the pick of the drop, where as if you buy flock rams you are well down the list.

"An AI home-bred ram might cost you \$300, while purchased flock rams could be 10 generations behind the best in the stud and could cost several thousand.

"There are several different approaches members have taken in breeding their own rams. The results differ, but they are better off and are making faster rates of genetic gain in their flocks than if they were relying on bought in rams.

"There is no doubt that if you are prepared to put the time in and performance record, you will breed better rams and make higher rates of genetic gain."

## Hayes experience

Peter Hayes farms between Dunkeld and Hamilton and joins around 2,200 superfine Merino ewes a year.

His grandfather started breeding Merino rams in the 1950s, with Peter taking over the family tradition in 1991.

"Our ram breeding today is very different to how it was done in the past, when everything was bred using traditional visual assessment," Peter said.



Peter Hayes (left) looks over rams with other Triple M group members.

"We breed 50-70 rams a year, with the sole purpose of having a group to supply our own requirements."

The nucleus of Peter's breeding program is a flock of 180 ewes with performance-recorded pedigrees with Estimated Breeding Values going back 10 years.

The main traits that are recorded are clean wool cut, micron, staple length, staple strength, body weight and worm egg count.

All measurements are taken from sheep at nine months of age at their first shearing.

The results of selecting for performance have come through as increased productivity in the flock.

"The farm traditionally ran Saxon-type Merinos that averaged 19 microns and cut 3kg/head greasy. With low stocking rates and native pastures, we were producing 18kg/ha greasy," Peter said.

"Now we are running 16-18 DSE/ha on improved pastures and have sheep cutting an average of 3.1-3.2kg/head clean and averaging between 16.7-17.2 microns, which equated to more than 45kg/ha clean.

When Peter took over the ram breeding program he bought in performance-recorded rams from outside studs.

The nucleus flock are all single sire joined for 4½ weeks to lamb in spring and are scanned for single or multiple lambs.

All nucleus ewes are lambed down in their small joining groups, with lambs matched to mothers and the ewes identified for failing to rear a lamb, rearing a single or rearing twins.

## Selection pressures

Peter uses 30 rams with his commercial ewes each joining. Half his ram team is made up of new young rams selected according to their EBVs, conformation and visual appearance from the 70-odd ram lambs bred each year.

Young rams that do not make the joining team are sold over the hooks as ram lambs.

"The young rams should be better than the older rams, so it pays to bring a significant number of young rams into the ram team each year," Peter said.

"The high selection pressure, combined with the high generational turnover in the rams has resulted in a 4% average rate of genetic gain a year. In recent years the annual rate of genetic gain has topped 6%."

Most of this gain in recent years is largely due to selection pressure within the flock, according to Peter.

"We usually buy in fewer than one ram a year and we've stayed away from using artificial insemination because of the high costs and low conception rates," he said.

"Breeding our own rams has averaged about \$108 a ram over the past three years, but has ranged from \$35 to \$195 a ram. Processing all the performance-recorded figures costs about \$500 a year and there are the costs associated with micron testing of mid side samples taken at shearing.

"The main labor input is at shearing and in mothering up lambs." ■

# Opportunities for improvement

DURING OUR recent co-ordinators' conference we discussed the opportunity for groups to tap into available funding streams to help deliver a quality program.

The \$1,500 Farm Ready Producer Funding is one resource available to enhance your business' ability to respond to the ever-changing environment we operate in.

The conference was also linked with the Sheep CRC updates to strengthens our ties with it and to make its programs more available to our network.

Our flagship event, the F'EW E'TURE Farming Conference will be in Bendigo on June 23, following a pre-conference dinner on June 22.

The conference will feature an exceptional line up of speakers, some of whom have been mentioned in this newsletter.

Another feature of this newsletter is the opportunity to



**Jason Trompf,**  
chairman,  
**BESTWOOL /**  
**BESTLAMB**

nominate for the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Program.

Almost 10 years ago I was fortunate enough to be sponsored by BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB to participate in this course and highly recommend you consider applying. We are extremely keen to support the development of leadership in the sheep industry.

BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB has also been developing opportunities for our groups to be more involved with sheep industry research.

Both the University of Melbourne and LaTrobe

University are interested in having stronger relationships with BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB and this will provide opportunities to work with students to deliver on-farm research.

We will be distributing university project ideas to our network for comment and possible interaction, as well as taking ideas from our network to the universities.

Another component of the on-farm research is the MLA Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS).

BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB has two PDS up and running and we are developing a process for groups to submit project concepts annually. PDS support groups can examine an on-farm issue or area of interest, which is a great opportunity for the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network.

I look forward to seeing you all at our annual conference in June.

## Australian Fleece Competition

THE AUSTRALIAN Fleece Competition will celebrate its 10th year at the Australian Sheep & Wool Show in Bendigo on July 16-18.

Entries are open for fleeces from all major wool types produced by commercial woolgrowers, stud breeders, agricultural colleges and schools.

Fleeces will be competing for 45 prizes valued at more than \$13,000. All fleeces must be delivered to Landmark in Brooklyn, Victoria, by Friday, June 4.

The Leukaemia Foundation is the National Charity for 2010 and no entry fee applies to donated fleeces.

Contact Landmark Wool staff for assistance or Athol Frederick, the convenor of Australian Fleece Competition at Landmark Wool Bendigo, on mobile 0428 510 518 or e-mail [athol.frederick@landmark.com.au](mailto:athol.frederick@landmark.com.au)

## SMOKO

### Wishing you were here

A SCOTTISH couple decided to go to Spain to thaw out during a particularly icy winter. They planned to stay at the same hotel where they had spent their honeymoon 20 years earlier.

Because of hectic schedules, they were unable to travel together, so the husband left Glasgow and flew to Barcelona on Thursday, with his wife flying down the following day.

The husband checked into the hotel. There was a computer in his room, so he decided to send an e-mail to his wife. However, he accidentally left a letter out in her e-mail address and without realising his error sent the message.

Meanwhile, in Blackpool, a widow had just returned home from her husband's funeral. He was a minister who had died following a heart attack.

The widow decided to check her e-mail, expecting messages from

relatives and friends. After reading the first message, she screamed and fainted.

Her son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor and saw the computer screen which read:

To: My Loving Wife  
Subject: I've Arrived  
Date: Feb 16, 2010

I know you're surprised to hear from me. They have computers here now and you are allowed to send e-mails to your loved ones.

I've just arrived and have checked in. I see everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow.

Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.

P.S. Bloody hot down here!



BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB is a co-operative program for wool and lamb producers seeking to boost their farm profit and productivity.

For information about the BESTWOOL / BESTLAMB network, phone (03) 5355 0531, e-mail [bestwool.bestlamb@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:bestwool.bestlamb@dpi.vic.gov.au) or visit [www.bestwoolbestlamb.com.au](http://www.bestwoolbestlamb.com.au)