

Practical ram selection

EXTENSION

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Key messages

- **Ram selection is important.**
- **A ram must be structurally sound and his progeny must be able to thrive in a tough environment.**
- **Measurement of the big dollar traits is also important to increase profit.**
- **For Merinos MERINOSELECT adjusts the raw measurements so that the figures produced give a better indication of the genetic merit of the animal.**
- **LAMBPLAN does the same thing for the meat breeds.**

Why do the work?

Farmers know that ram selection will affect their profit but many are unsure of how to select their rams and are keen to know what the Australian Standard Breeding Values (ASBVs) presented on rams mean.

Some farmers just select the biggest ram, or the cheapest, or the finest, or the plainest. However, the best choice will not be found by selecting on one trait only or just on how good the ram looks. To make the best decision you will need to use a balance of visual assessment and the key breeding value figures.

The best animal needs to be visually acceptable and also have good genes for the key production traits.

How was it done?

On Eyre Peninsula we ran five workshops on stud breeder's farms. They covered Merino and Terminal Sire ram selection. These workshops were a chance for both breeders and commercial sheep producers to discuss selection options and also to learn more about the ASBVs provided by MERINOSELECT and LAMBPLAN.

What happened?

Four workshops were successful with an average of 10 people attending and lots of questions asked. One workshop was cancelled due to lack of numbers.

Participants gave very high scores indicating that they would recommend the workshop to others and would implement changes to how they select rams. There was a large increase in their confidence to use ASBVs to select rams. One producer said "That was the best sheep industry event I've been to for 40 years!"

A key part of the workshop was for participants to decide their breeding objectives. They listed the things in their sheep that could be improved. These were ranked on their dollar impact and then on their heritability (some are largely influenced by genetics (e.g. micron) and others are mostly affected by management, e.g. reproduction). This process made it easier to decide what they really needed to improve to make more money or to reduce their workload (easy care sheep).

At the workshops the breeders penned sheep for inspection and discussed the important areas of key visual traits to watch out for.

What does this mean?

Commercial sheep producers who attended the workshops will have more understanding of ASBVs and how to use them. This will reward the breeders who provide good figures and who also have visually good rams.

The long term objective is to increase the genetic gain in sheep on Eyre Peninsula and therefore create more profit for producers.

It was stressed at the workshop that it is not desirable to focus only on the figures. They are a very useful tool to help select rams that will make more money. However, they need to be used in conjunction with good visual assessment.

Further work will be needed to see widespread adoption of ASBVs. The demonstration project involving the Minnipa flock will contribute to this (see article 'Extending best practice wool innovations on Eyre Peninsula' in this section).

Acknowledgements

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Workshop locations		
Wharminda	Nantoura Stud	Merino
Poochera	White River Stud	Merino
Yallunda Flat	Teakle Hill Stud	White Suffolk
Cleve	Uralba Stud	White Suffolk
Koppio	Kurrabi Park Stud	Suffolk & Romney



Livestock