



Kristin Lefroy with his father Bruce, selecting rams for progeny testing at 'Cranmore' Merino Stud, Western Australia. Kristin believes progeny testing is the most accurate way of measuring the breeding potential of a ram.

Pathways to profits

The recent AWI program The Sheep's Back brought together woolgrowers from the Dalwallinu–Moora region in WA, who showed there can be many paths to becoming a progressive, profitable woolgrower. Three growers are taking differing approaches to achieving the same ultimate goal

By Tracy Gillam

Kristin Lefroy – 'Cranmore' Merino stud, Walebing

Narrowing profit margins have been the catalyst for Kristin Lefroy to move his business towards creating synergies between the different farm enterprises – including growing pulse crops such as faba beans and field peas, which provide nitrogen to the soil and have high summer feed value for his flock.

The value of pulse crop stubble for lambs is part of a push at 'Cranmore' for increased growth rates in lambs, better lambing percentage and improved lamb production – a strategy taken from AWI's Lifetime Wool project. Kristin is also aiming to increase his stocking rate from 7.9 DSE/ha to 9.24 DSE/ha, through increased stock numbers combined with increased crop area. This increased stocking rate will be fed under rotational grazing systems in winter and over perennial fodder crops and stubbles in summer. Kristin has shifted his attention from focusing on minor cost drivers to the main driver of stock enterprises – stocking rate.

Ewes are fed lupins for two to three weeks pre-joining and for the first two to three weeks of joining to maintain condition score at 3.0–3.5. This high early-summer condition score means some condition can be lost over summer without affecting the ewe's reproductive capacity. From The Sheep's Back program, Kristin has learned it is too expensive to increase ewe condition score through supplementary feeding when there is no available green feed. Ewes need to be in good condition at the start of the dry summer autumn period.

Over the past 10 years Kristin and his father Bruce have concentrated on increasing fleece weight per head through selection for longer staple length without compromising fibre diameter (18 micron) or variation (CV) of fibre diameter (less than 20 per cent).

Faecal egg count has also been reduced through selection for rams with lower FEC and plainer bodies. Kristin believes these priorities have led to a significant improvement in the enterprise's foundations.

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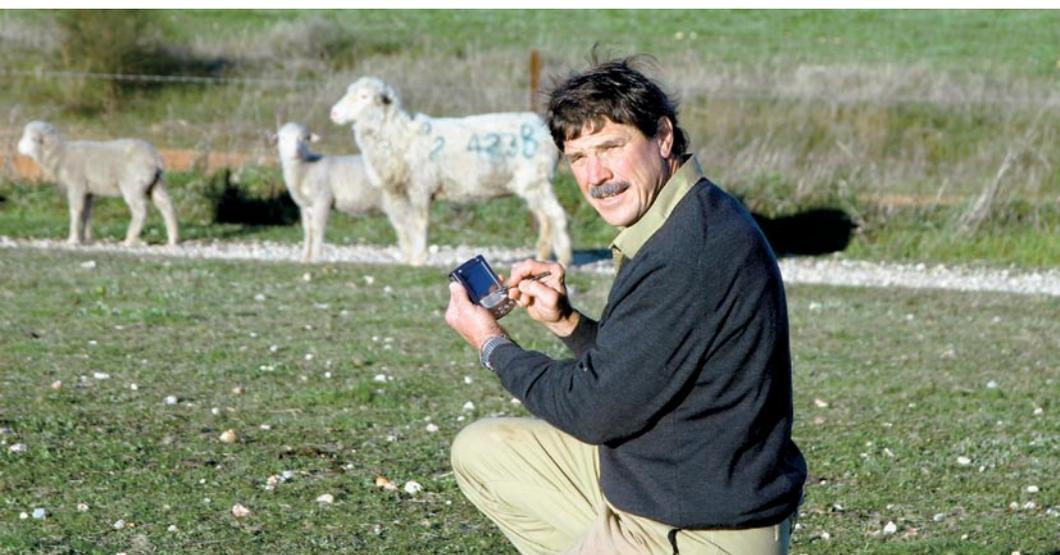
Phil Gardiner – 'Edale' Merino stud, Moora, WA

Phil Gardiner has a clear vision of the aims of his sheep enterprise: to produce quality wool with a secondary focus on meat.

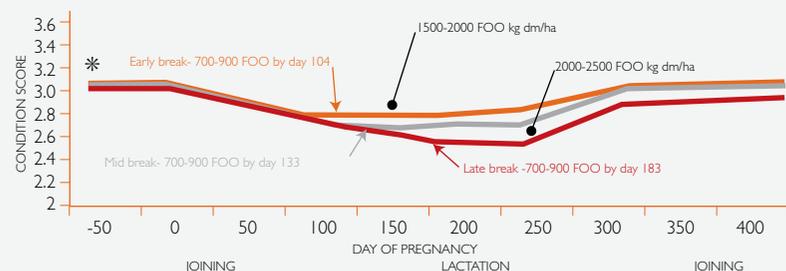
At present, some 'Edale' wool is exported directly to a processor, who has claimed that the wool is the best he has ever seen. Phil says this enthusiastic buyer response is the result of selection, over time, for wool with a low crimp frequency for the micron. The TEAM formula was used to predict hauteur and the coefficient of variance (CV). The formula predicted hauteur of 70.4mm and a CV of 47.6 per cent. However, the actual values were 86mm and 27.3 per cent. These figures make the wool spin into excellent quality yarn – better than the TEAM formula predicted. Phil believes there is an avenue for growers supplying wool with a low crimp frequency to promote their wool for its processing attributes.

In terms of on-farm management, the main issue at 'Edale' is weaning time. Traditionally, lambs have slipped back in condition score during weaning. To get the weaning package right, Phil has a three-stage strategy.

First, more worm-free paddocks will be preserved specifically for weaners. This will be achieved through intense rotational grazing of six to seven paddocks, through which



General profile for optimum economic production (joining 14 Jan 2005)



Phil Gardiner: a three-stage strategy for getting the weaner package right.

For example: Feb 14 joining with 25% twin bearing ewes
 ■ Early break 24 April (PGR – pasture growth rate – 35, 700 FOO by 14/5 = d104 of pregnancy)
 ■ Average break 15 May (PGR 25, 700 FOO by 12/6 = d133 of pregnancy)
 ■ Late break 15 June (PGR 15, 700 FOO by 31/7 = d183 of pregnancy)
 * If > 3.5 allow decline to 3.5 then maintain
 If 2.5 to 3.5 then maintain condition through to day 17 of joining.
 If less than 2.5 lupin 'flushing' is an option

LIFETIME WOOL PROJECT

a mob of sufficient size will be rotated during early July to mid-September. During this time, the weaner-paddocks will have pasture growth and remain worm-free.

Phil will also be targeting paddocks affected by grass seeds. Removal of weeds such as barley grass and brome grass in particular will ensure better health of lamb weaners.

The final prong of Phil's management strategy is to have good pastures on which to graze lamb weaners. His ideal pastures are good stands of dalkeith, casbah or prima gland clover.

More information: www.edale.com.au

Michael Humphry – 'Pankee', Walebing, WA

Michael Humphry of Walebing describes himself as a frustrated woolgrower who does not want to grow crops. Michael and his wife Tracy took part in The Sheep's Back program, which reinforced their belief that stocking rate is the key profit driver of any livestock enterprise. "We build our management around our desired stocking rate," Michael says.

Following The Sheep's Back program, Michael has revised his five-year management plan. By 2011 he plans to have increased his stocking rate from 9.6 DSE/ha to 11.3 DSE/ha.

The downside of maintaining stocking rate despite seasonal variation has been a reduction in the flock's reproductive performance. Michael is keen to improve the reproductive rate through feeding "smarter". He believes that if he can feed his ewes according to the condition score profile set down by the Lifetime Wool project, he will be able to improve reproductive performance and achieve his stocking rate targets.

Condition score profiling, combined with feed availability information from Pastures from Space, seems the simplest, most cost-effective information to use for feed budgeting, according to Michael. Using research at the University of Western Australia by Dr John Milton, Dr Graeme Martin and Dr David Lindsay, he is refining his supplementary feeding methods and is now feeding in a more targeted manner over a shorter period of time. By changing the nutrition, the hormonal balance is changed and fertility can be improved.

Michael is also feeding his ewes barley to improve colostrum production and lamb survival. In a mob where barley was fed to ewes, the twinning survival rate was significantly higher compared with a twinning mob that was not fed barley.

Monitor farms show the way

Tasmanian woolgrowers are benefiting from access to research, development and extension through three monitor farms under the 8x5 Wool Profit Program

By Fiona Conroy

Monitor farms are proving their worth in helping Tasmanian woolgrowers access management information and make changes on their own properties. The 8x5 Wool Profit program has used three commercial wool properties as monitor farms as the focus for discussion groups and specialist field days.

Giving woolgrowers the chance to see changes to farm management applied on a farm scale, and then to talk through the impacts on the business with the property owners as well as technical experts, is paying dividends.

The three monitor farm properties – 'Apsley Park' at Melton Mowbray, run by Sarah Ackland and Steve Barrington, 'Forton' at Epping Forest, run by Antony Gunn, and 'Kelvedon' at Swansea, run by Julian Cotton – have been a central part of the 8x5's drive to help Tasmanian woolgrowers increase their productivity and profitability.

Management changes on the three monitor farms have brought a range of benefits such as increased stocking rates, reduced weaner deaths and increases in wool production, according to Sarah Campbell, pasture officer with the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE).

"More importantly, an independent survey of wool producers who attended a monitor farm field day found that 61 per cent of respondents subsequently changed their farm management," she says. "The biggest changes were the timing of key management events, weaner management and improved pasture management."

The 8x5 Wool Profit Program began in 2002 after stakeholders in the Tasmanian wool industry – including producers, brokers, DPIWE, the University of Tasmania, private service providers and TQW (Tasmanian Quality Wool) – met to develop a vision for the future of wool in the state. The resulting program combines research, development and extension and has made a significant contribution to improving woolgrowers' access to information and their ability to improve the viability of their enterprises.

The program is guided by a state-based committee, with a majority of woolgrowers. Bothwell grower Henry Edgell has chaired the committee since the program's inception, and says the wool industry projects under the 8x5 umbrella were the direct result of consultation with producers, brokers and service providers.

"Before 8x5, woolgrowers in Tasmania didn't have a dedicated specialist program to help them deal with farm management, production and profitability issues," he says. "The 8x5 represents a major initiative for the Tasmanian wool industry and is jointly funded by AWI, the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research and DPIWE. The program has helped Tasmanian growers increase their productivity as a basis for lifting the profitability of their woolgrowing enterprises."

Projects managed under the 8x5 banner include:

- the Pasture Solutions project to improve pasture and grazing management;
- a wool enterprise benchmarking project, which gives individual growers a confidential analysis of their enterprise, comparing it with others in the state;
- a fertiliser audit project to help growers identify fertiliser gaps and soil deficiencies;
- a blowfly eradication project, which examined the potential to eradicate blowflies by the mass release of sterile male flies;
- a fibre diameter profile project to help identify and address potential causes of low staple strength;
- accessing potential specialist customers for Tasmanian wool; and
- workshops and seminars.

A key aspect of the 8x5 program has been about giving growers access to information, through discussion groups, field days, newsletters and specialist workshops, then supporting them putting that information to use, Mr Edgell says. Farmers wanting a more hands-on involvement have been encouraged to join one of the programs' monitor farm discussion groups.

Specialist workshops – on topics such as understanding the key profit drivers in wool production, footrot management, weaner management, ram breeding, carrying out faecal egg counts and winter pasture management – have also been held across the state.

More information: www.8x5.com.au; Andrew Johnston, 03 6336 5318