

Woodpark “knowledge network”

There is much talk of the Merino industry’s reinvigoration and people rejigging operations to increase their Merino component. But with capital commitments to cropping or unused livestock infrastructure, and even the fact many younger farmers may be daunted by stock work, we are developing a network for Woodpark clients and friends, with the first session on August 18. As one mixed farmer remarked, there are any number of agronomists available but it is not so easy to get people to talk about sheep.

However, with great research and industry knowledge abundantly available it is a wonderful chance to make the links and gain the information to continue to take flocks forward.

We have discussed the concept with representatives of several industry organisations who are keen to help to provide the information which could help continue to develop businesses and the industry. We also hope these will not only be learning experiences, but enjoyable “get-togethers” for people with similar breeding aims.

A word about wool:

A change to shearing time meant an eight month clip from a shocking drought year was harvested and delivered at Eurolie in April this year.

At Oakwood and Moonbria there have already been several eight month clips which have achieved similarly productive results

The flock averaged six kilograms fleece, skirted, for the eight months’ cut.

Eamon Timms, Lempriere Fox & Lillie, who saw the wool in the box, said: “I really liked the tight CV of the micron, but the beautiful style that the deep crimping wool had was absolutely magnificent. “I saw that last time and it was really evident with this wool.

“To have a ceased mulesed clip with that most gorgeous style is really great.

“The sheep are pumping out a heap of wool for 8 months wool.”

The experience also suggests productivity benefits for the ewes, with less wool weight to carry at crucial times.

Hamilton Sheepvention:

We made our first trip to the Hamilton Sheepvention this year as it seemed a natural fit for the Polls in particular, with the demand for these types of sheep in South Australia. In addition, Sheepvention visitors seemed to have a commercial focus well suited to the Woodpark ethos.

We offered a pen of five rams in the big multi-vendor sale. They were selected from among the

September auction team. The rams were quite unlike most of the rams on offer as they had not been shed-reared but we felt despite being fresh from the paddock they held their own with their well-fed counterparts.

Two rams went to the McNaughton family, and one each to the Reading family of "Elston", near Marnoo; the Houston family of "Budgewah", Hay, and the Bibby family of Tattyoon.



Woodpark Deniliquin display on August 20:

We will have a display of rams and ewes at the Elders sheep field day in Deniliquin on August 20.

The display echoes our visits to the Loddon Valley Field Day in March and Bendigo’s Australian Sheep and Wool Show in July.

Woodpark annual ram sale:

Monday September 20, 2010

12:30 pm

Woodpark

Merino and Poll Merino studs



Strong sheep prices and a solid wool market are proving a great fillip for those who have maintained their sheep operations, with the past six months' returns encouraging to both people and the bottom line and convincing sheep producers to go forward with confidence to rebuild their flocks.

And at long last it appears the gloomy seasonal outlook of previous years has eased. There have been long dry spells for many but others have received good falls and, locusts permitting, are looking forward to an excellent spring. At "Woodpark" and "Eurolie", seasons are much improved on previous years, with Woodpark rain tracking above average. Eurolie has had 6", still well short of the annual average of 12-14 inches but already topping the 5.5" average of the previous four years. Still not a big year but with a bit of sunlight we have already started to see some great grass growth. It has been great to have the sheep home from agistment at Brewarrina and south east of Cunnamulla, although most of the cattle are still on leased country in northern NSW. While the agistment experience was trying in many instances, we were lucky to have the sheep from "Eurolie", Woodpark and Moonbria all agisted on neighbouring properties just over the NSW border which did make some management easier. The agistment program did mean we were hampered in tracking progress of individual sheep but delivered some benefits. The nature of

the country meant the sheep were put to the test in terms of huge areas to walk for feed; the different environment and different feed types meant we had much reduced feed

quality to what we would expect at home. And despite the drought, the studs have been continuing to gain new interest, with some large sales to pastoral clients, recent export sales to Argentina and the current sale of rams to Chinese interests. The confidence Owen had in polls when he first started working with them has been shown to be well placed. In addition, the limited and judicious selection of out crosses to the stud stand it in good stead in terms of the predictability of the sheep and their breeding.

Measuring up: After the years working toward the sheep it was felt would lift a flock, we felt it was time to quantify and measure the sheep, both individually and on industry parameters. Our in-flock benchmarking over the past few years has been part of this. We have also used two link sires with great repeatable data to be able to gauge our sheep against other sires well linked across the indus-



try. We also took part in the Craig Wilson Livestock Wether Trial from 2005-2007. The team entered were wethers from the young "Eurolie" commercial flock, which recorded above average fleece weight, below average micron and the second highest body weight. In terms of quality these sheep were well behind where the flock stands today.

There are two Woodpark blood teams in the new Craig Wilson wether trial, from the McNaughton family's flock "Burong", Seaspray near Sale, Vic, and from the Houston family's flock at "Budgewah" near Hay. This trial, with 50 30-wether teams, is solely for commercial breeders. The wethers were split into two teams of 15 for assessment for their carcase and meat characteristics. The teams are run in a feedlot near Collingullie and both flocks have been rated as among the heavier teams in the first weighings.

Woodpark Merino and Poll Merino Studs

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Wool update: Woodpark branded wool from Woodpark and Eurolie has been used in batches of ceased mulesed and non- mulesed wool by The Merino Company, the joint venture Merino Pool run by Lempriere, Fox & Lillie and, in mainland eastern Australia, Rodwells.

The wool went to a 19.5 micron order to China, into a 20.5 micron batch to leading Japanese suit retailer Aoyama and another to Norwegian retailer Devold for its circular knit base layer and outdoor wear and to India and Indonesia. Another parcel of 18.2 micron wool went to UK company Reid & Taylor for suiting. The batches required stringent certification and declarations the flocks were no longer mulesed. We stopped mulesing at "Woodpark" and "Eurolie" three years ago. Even with the extreme seasons since putting a lot of pressure on sheep, including running large numbers of sheep on irrigation in short periods, we have had few fly problems and made minimal, if any, changes to management.

EMS: Woodpark, Moonbria and Eurolie and Narrawong have all achieved certification the properties' management complies with the internationally recognised ISO 14001 environmental management standard. This certification is independently audited. It is managed by the Australian Land Management Group to verify where land managers are implementing a responsible and sustainable approach to long term land management.

This quantifies the work which has been done for a long time; offered opportunity for incentive payments for wool and has future potential as buyers become more environmentally aware.

Made in China: Mongolian ram sale



Woodpark genetics will be added to the mix of a 50 million head sheep flock in Mongolia after Chinese government department officials selected 35 Poll rams to take home with them in an Australian visit in early July.

The consignment follows a sale to Argentina three years ago and echoes a previous sale of Woodpark horned rams to the same Chinese government department several years ago.

The Chinese delegation was hosted by Elders International and comprised seven Chinese agricultural department staffers from Ho Hute in Mongolia.

Elders International consultant Pat Esse said the delegation, led by Mr Gow of the government's animal breeding centre, was part of a team responsible for managing a massive animal operation.

The department runs 50 million sheep, 30 million goats and 20 million cattle across

the undulating Mongolian terrain, where rainfall averages 450 millimetres a year and temperatures range from 30 degrees in summer to minus 14 and 15 degrees in winter.

The Merino flock wool ranges from 18.5 to 21 micron wool. The delegation sought Poll Merino rams with 19-20.5 micron and soft handling wool that could cope with the big climate variation, Mr Esse said.

Mr Esse and Elders International colleague Scott Jewel hosted the delegation on a 21 day trip. "It's a big thing for the Australian economy. They keep coming back because the sheep and product they get from Australia perform very well," Mr Esse said. "This was the sixth time I've been involved in this."

"Many of the places we are going to, they have been repeat buyers because the stock performed so well. They want to come back."



Stephen Huggins with Gregor and Andy McNaughton of "Burong", Seaspray, near Sale. The McNaughtons were Woodpark Poll's first ram buyers almost two decades ago. The former Victorian Flock of the Year winners are passionate Merino breeders and have maintained a wether operation through testing years of extreme dry.

Woodpark Polls: 20 years building toward today



It has been two decades since the Huggins family started breeding Poll Merinos in the late 1980s.

The formation of the Poll stud was a great opportunity to create an entirely new flock and use the opportunity to incorporate characteristics which would be significant into the future.

Poll characteristics were clearly the way forward.

They provided the basis for an improved functionality and efficiency in breeding and performance and the opportunity to re-focus on a more dual purpose Merino sheep type.

At that time there was very limited medium/fine medium Peppin polled genetics and although it would take time to build a solid genetic base it was a challenge that could not be overlooked.

After having always been impressed by the functionality of poll sheep (and cattle), it made sense to move in that direction.

An undertaking such as this was the chance to create a sheep type which we really believed in. Although any breeding program was always a "work in progress" it was a great opportunity to begin an entirely new flock and therefore be able to directly control and influence its direction and be able to sequentially add to its depth and capacity as time went by.

During the first years it was essential to establish a predictable and pre-potent sheep type with Poll genetics.

It was critical the sheep go on to perform well in clients' flocks so that they would also be able to benefit from these enhanced genetics and build a good sheep flock for the future.

We really believe a good Poll flock represents the highest pinnacle within the Merino industry, an object really worth striving toward and one able to achieve great benefits for producers.