

# LEO BLANCH

## WESTVALE MERINO STUD

WOLLUN, NSW

The Westvale Merino Stud was established by Roy Blanch, described by his son Leo as “a very good sheep man who didn’t have the technology we have today”.

Leo is now principal of Westvale and is utilising MERINOSELECT to improve traits crucial to his business of producing spinners’ wool in the New England district. They are breeding the same type of sheep that were produced when the stud was established in 1948 – large bodies with wool that is highly crimped, well nourished and soft handling, suitable for Italian spinners and weavers.

Under the eye of stud overseer Scott Matthews, Westvale sheep have an average micron of 17.5 microns and cut 4.3kg.

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A flock of 7000 sheep, including 600 stud ewes, and a herd of 400 Charolais cattle are run on the 1211 hectare property at Wollun in the New England district of NSW.

Leo decided to use MERINOSELECT in 2000 for two reasons – to give their stud a sales edge in a district highly regarded for fine and superfine genetics, and to help with breeding and selection, particularly for the non-visual traits of worm resistance (WEC) and staple strength.

These traits are particularly relevant for Westvale as worm burdens are a major problem in the New England district and

staple strength is prized within the spinning market.

“WEC is the big hit in the New England area as people are having trouble with drenches and need another way to combat the problem,” Leo said.

“Our WEC ASBV is a big drawcard for us as we’re able to provide worm-resistant sheep with traditional type wool year in year out.

“It has also been helpful within our own flock as the families we have selected are less likely to get worms than the ones we’re phasing out.

“Spinners’ wool needs to be sound and our staple strength measurement will prove a good sales pitch for Italian buyers who will demand it more and more.”

Leo believes MERINOSELECT will also help producers target and maintain their required style, which has not been something that could be measured.

“Softness, crimp and curvature are all measurements that can now be assessed to produce the style you want.”

Scott Matthews, who has worked at Westvale for 11 years and been stud overseer for the past five, said sheep must be hardy to survive the wet conditions of the area, so ASBV figures must be balanced with visual assessment.

Scott is responsible for collecting and manually entering the data into a laptop. A colour coded tag is assigned to each ewe to signal which sire she was joined to and each lamb receives the same colour at birth. The lamb is weighed three times - at weaning (four months), at 10-11 months when the animal is shorn, a sample of wool



Pictured - Scott Matthews

is taken and a WEC test is performed, and the third time at 16-18 months. Data from the third weighing, as well as a scrotum circumference measurement, are used in their on-property sale catalogue. ASBVs are also printed in the sale catalogue and these are requested more each year by producers.

“They like to have a backup of what they’re seeing,” Scott said.

“The beauty of the ASBVs is they’re not judged against our own flock but against other studs, which gives them credibility.

“We have been using information such as WEC in our flock joining and the results are correlating with the MERINOSELECT data. This has helped our marketing as we have visual results as well as data results for breeding.

“We want three or four bidding on each sheep to boost the value and MERINOSELECT has done that.”

Last year’s sale average of \$1975 at Westvale’s 25th on-property sale was the second highest in the state.