LYNTON ARNEY, "INVERBRACKIE"
STRATHALBYN, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- BORDER LEICESTER STUD AND COMMERCIAL FLOCK
- PERFORMANCE TESTING FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS
- OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS AN AVERAGE INCREASE IN EBV FOR POST WEANING WEIGHT OF OVER 3KG
- NUMBER OF LAMBS WEANED EBV HAS RISEN BY NEARLY 5%

"SGA is the dawn of the future, allowing sheep breeders to be in control of the path taken to achieve their chosen breeding objectives."

South Australian Border Leicester breeder Lynton Arney believes Australia's meat-sheep genetic evaluation system LAMBPLAN is the best in the world.

Mr Arney is well placed to make this bold statement: he was selected by the Nuffield Farming Scholars Association to travel overseas in 2002 to investigate other key animal breeding technologies, systems and structures.

After assessing those used in Europe, North America and New Zealand, Mr Arney says that by comparison, LAMBPLAN is world best technology for overall effectiveness and providing accurate data from multiple information sources.

However, Mr Arney says the on-farm productivity benefits have convinced him of the worth of performance recording.

"We are able to link across flocks so that we can compare within the breed – in other words we are not just improving our stock, but the Border Leicester breed itself is improving at a fast rate. It's also a way of ensuring the progeny are actually better every year," Mr Arney said.

"The genetic trends have shown improvement in all traits, for example, over the last 10 years we have achieved an average increase in estimated breeding values for Post Weaning Weight of over 3kg, while our Number of Lambs Weaned value has risen by nearly 5%. To achieve this rate of gain is particularly pleasing as we aim to make progress in several traits at once.

"I have another way of measuring this progress, which is to compare our average index ram of today with the average index ram from 10 years ago. When today's ram is joined to 40 ewes each year for five years, the extra weaned lambs and weight gains amounts to an additional $1,860 from that ram's progeny.

"This means our genetic gain has contributed to the lamb industry $186,000 per 100 rams produced.

"I have also held the position of the Chairman of the Australian Border Leicester Association and during that time was involved in the setting up of a group called $uperBorder$. All the members of $uperBorder$ have genetic linkages allowing genetic comparison between the flocks. The rams with performance data which exceed the groups specifications are labeled with a $uperBorder$ tag. They are basically the top of the crop within that group," he said.

"And we are marketing these above average rams to help the commercial producers identify and use their better maternal genetics."

Mr Arney says he has seen many improvements in the genetic database.

"Being able to describe traits which cannot be seen, like number of lambs weaned, is very powerful. Performance data and indices have become more accurate as LAMBPLAN has developed and this has driven many improvements for sheep farming in Australia."

Mr Arney says the new single genetic database SGA will be beneficial for all breeds.

"If I was a Merino breeder I would be very excited about all that SGA has to offer. A single database will solve the problem of having four or five options, which might run different information. As a Border Leicester breeder though, I expect the same great service I have been experiencing, if not better.

"SGA is the dawn of the future, allowing sheep breeders to be in control of the path taken to achieve their chosen breeding objectives. Selection based on visual characteristics has served the industry well over a long period of time, but it can be hard to allow for different feeding regimes and pre-sale preparations when comparing sires by their looks in a sale ring or at an auction. And you can't always be sure how the progeny of these sires will perform back on the farm.

"But at the same time, we all appreciate there are unmeasured important structural traits which can be overlooked if performance data is used exclusively," he said.

Mr Arney recommends growers seek advice to understand the full potential of SGA and its information.

"Sheep farming in Australia wouldn't have a sound future without SGA. The cost squeeze on producers means that if we are standing still, we are going backwards.

"This technology allows us to stay competitive."