

# DAWSON BRADFORD, “HILLCROFT FARMS”

POPANYINNING, NARROGIN, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- POLL DORSET STUD AND COMMERCIAL PRIME LAMBS
- BREEDING VALUES USED AS A BASIS FOR SELECTION ALONGSIDE VISUAL ASSESSMENT
- ALL STUD STOCK MONITORED AND TESTED FOR PERFORMANCE
- POST-WEANING LAMB WEIGHTS UP BY ONE KILOGRAM PER YEAR FOR 10 YEARS

*“SGA will mean anyone can access the latest performance information to assess their own performance and discover where they can acquire the genetics to suit their goals and environment.”*

Such is the demand for their terminal sires with top performance data, one WA Poll Dorset stud will double the number of rams sold to producers this year. In fact most of the 1,000 rams to come from Hillcroft Farms, Popanyinning, near Narrogin, WA have already been forward sold.

Principal of the family company, Dawson Bradford Snr, has embarked on a major artificial insemination and embryo transfer operation to meet the demand for Poll Dorset rams.

“We sold some 500 rams last year, this year we have Merino and Border Leicester/Merino cross ewes as surrogates to lamb down a greatly increased number of purebred stud stock.

“The increased demand is coming from two sectors of the sheep industry. Firstly, wool growers are off-loading wool-cutting wethers and replacing them with ewes to join to terminal sires. Secondly, prime lamb breeders are really focusing on genetics to maximise profits,” Mr Bradford Snr said.

Hillcroft Farms is a 4,000ha property in a 450mm winter dominant rainfall region, 30km from Narrogin, WA. It is an intensive, diversified and highly integrated farming operation focusing on prime lambs, stud stock, winter grains and export hay enterprises.

While Dawson Bradford Jnr now manages the property, Dawson Snr runs the stud enterprise and chairs the WA Meat Marketing Co-operative, a farmer owned cooperative that focuses on processing and marketing of prime lamb.

The sheep enterprises consists of three parts: 2,000 21 micron Peppin type Merino ewes for wool and Border Leicester/

Merino cross dam production; 1,500 Border Leicester/Merino cross ewes as prime lamb dams and the Poll Dorset Stud – which has a ewe base of 1,000 head.

However, reflecting the differences in gross value returns from wool and sheep meats, Mr Bradford Snr said his operation is being changed too.

“Pretty much all the Merino and 1st cross ewes will rear pure Poll Dorsets. From this year on, wool will play a diminishing role in the farm business.”

Mr Bradford Snr has been with LAMBPLAN since its inception and has been performance recording since 1990.

“The 2004 Poll Dorset drop lambs had an average LAMBPLAN Carcase Plus index of 185 – which is an index that measures growth, eye muscle and fat depth. Compare that with back in 1995 when our average lamb Carcase Plus index was 115 – it’s gone up near 70 points in 10 years.”

He said in productivity terms, his average post-weaning lamb weight has gone up by nearly one kilogram per year for 10 years.

“Joining times, animal health and nutrition have remained constant over that period, so the gain of 10 kilograms in 10 years is due to one thing: constant selection for superior genetics.”

But Mr Bradford Snr says it’s not all just objective measurement.

“We use EBVs as a basis for selection alongside visual assessment – which is essential to confirm structural soundness. But we analyse performance data on any stock brought into the stud: we’re not investing in looks; we’re investing in performance.”



All stud stock are monitored and tested – both ewes and rams – for performance through LAMBPLAN which also maintains all of the data records for the flock.

The Bradfords are active participants in the show circuit believing it is vital to benchmark livestock and to keep in touch with industry needs and trends. It is also a good promotion and marketing avenue. However, Mr Bradford Snr believes it is essential that show judging must include performance data to make judging assessments in the future or the show ring will rapidly lose importance to the needs of the commercial sheep industry.

In regards to the future, he believes SGA will provide an accurate and objective tool to use in animal selection.

“It’ll mean anyone can access the latest performance information to assess their own performance and discover where they can acquire the genetics to suit their goals and environment. SGA is long overdue. And really, you’ve got to appreciate all the work that’s gone into SGA, it will achieve something quite major in our industry,” he said.