

## ANDREW MICHAEL, "LEACHIM" SNOWTOWN, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- WHITE SUFFOLK, POLL MERINOS AND COMMERCIAL FLOCK
- PERFORMANCE RECORDS HELPING TO ACHIEVE RAPID PRODUCTIVITY GAINS.
- MERINO MICRON DECREASED FROM 24.7 TO 19.4 WITH FLEECE WEIGHTS MAINTAINED
- LIVELWEIGHT RECORDS INCREASED BY 20KG AT 12 MONTHS.

*"Every other livestock industry has made rapid progress in genetic improvement. We've seen how well it can work in the lamb industry. With SGA it can now be done in all sheep breeds."*

Success has led to even more success and enthusiasm for objective measurement on Andy Michael's wool, meatsheep and grain growing enterprises on 'Leachim' near Snowtown in South Australia.

Andy and Rosemary Michael, along with their sons Luke, Stewart and Alistair operate a 375 head White Suffolk stud and a 1200 head Poll Merino Stud on 1800ha in 425mm rainfall country near Snowtown, and a commercial wool growing operation on 6300ha of 250 mm rainfall pastoral country east of Burra.

"We have clear 10-year targets. With the Polls we are aiming to push the boundaries to meet increasing marketplace demands for Merino's capable of lowering micron yet maintaining fleece weight and also improving carcase attributes and fertility.

"With the White Suffolks, we're looking to further increase meat yield and select for hardiness and feed-conversion efficiency," Mr Michael said.

Over the past ten years, the average flock micron in the Poll Merinos has fallen from 24.7 to 19.4, and the across-flock woolclip micron range has been reduced to 1.5 microns. At the same time fleece weights have maintained an average of 7.25kg.

"Our selection programmes have also seen improved hardiness, body weight and better lamb marking and weaning rates."

In the White Suffolk stud over the same period, Mr Michael says the 12 month of age live weight records for the flock show a gain of 20kg. Post weaning weight breeding values have increased by about 7 kgs in the same period.

"This indicates the high rates of growth are occurring before 7.5 months of age, rather than after maturity. The White Suffolks are increasing their meat yield and hardiness as well as their feed conversion efficiency."

Andy says his base measure as a breeder is proven financial gain for clients, and that's being achieved, with clients returning repeatedly and reporting productivity gains.

To achieve ten year goals, the Michael family make good use of best practice methods from across the district, consultancy advice and the LAMBPLAN and Merino Genetic Services objective measurement databases.

The family laptop is now a regular fixture around the farm to measure and record key data, including weights, carcase scans and fleece tests.

"We even conducted some interesting 'speed tests' last year to see if we can get an indicator of temperament – based on the principle that sheep that move more slowly through the yards are quieter, easier to handle and are less likely to get stressed" he said.

Overall, Andy says it hasn't been as hard to achieve the gains as he thought it would be initially.

"By using the combination of advice, objective measurement systems and aiming for targets, we have been able to implement changes and see the benefits - and that success is giving the operation more momentum for go for greater gains," he said.

"But objective measurement isn't the 'holy grail', our breeding stock are all also visually

assessed for conformation, structural soundness and productive traits.

"However, performance records provide an extremely useful tool in making informed decisions and achieving rapid productivity gains.

"The development of Sheep Genetics Australia will make it even easier for the industry as a whole to progress," Andy said.

"It will make it much easier to interpret and use the data, both in-flock and across-flock, for stud and commercial Merinos and meat sheep."

Sheep Genetics Australia (SGA) introduces a national standard and single language for genetic evaluation, and is a joint venture between Meat and Livestock Australia and Australian Wool Innovation.

Elite animal summaries will be available from the website, with the ability to search for "trait leader" sheep in the top 10 % band for each ASBV.

"My clients are producing more meat and more wool, of better quality, and so am I," Andy said.

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