

# ROBERT MORTIMER, “DEVONDALE” TULLAMORE, NEW SOUTH WALES.

- MERINO STUD AND COMMERCIAL WOOL-GROWING
- USE OF GENETIC DATA BASES FOR OVER TEN YEARS
- FLEECE MICRON DECREASED FROM 22.5 MICRON TO 18 MICRON
- FERTILITY LEVELS INCREASED BY 30% OVER 24 YEARS

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There’s a saying around the Merino industry: “if it can be measured, Robert Mortimer has measured it”.

Robert Mortimer is a part-owner and manager of a Merino Stud and wool-growing operation on an 1800 ha aggregation in the Tullamore district of Central-West NSW.

Specifically, he is the Technical, Nucleus & Breeding Manager for Centre Plus Merinos Pty Ltd, on “Devondale”, Tullamore, and several other sites around Australia.

Centre Plus began in the early eighties as a group of people who joined together to produce more profitable sheep genetics. The core breeding program is based on the assumption by founding members that a self-replacing dual purpose merino flock has the best potential to continually increase the bottom line profits of breeding shareholders.

Mr. Mortimer says over the years the program has evolved and developed after experimenting with various genetic evaluation strategies and products.

“We now know how our own sires perform against the best in Australia for the traits measured in a commercial environment, and this confirms the power of our breeding program to identify the truly elite animals, which in turn allows us to make continual predictable genetic progress, in our chosen direction.”

Mr. Mortimer was one of the first users of genetic databases and has been using Merino Genetic Services (MGS) as a tool to record genetic traits with his stock ever since.

“I first heard about genetic evaluation systems when it was presented to the

Australian Merino Society. I was keen for the industry to be involved as I believed that we could achieve increased profitability through faster genetic change,” Mr. Mortimer said.

Like some other Merino breeders who are involved in performance recording, Robert Mortimer uses both the MGS and Merino Benchmark databases to grade stock.

Sheep Genetics Australia (SGA) will combine the two systems to produce one dataset and language.

Mr. Mortimer says it’s vital to ensure correct performance recording information is entered in the database.

“I check the information all the time to ensure accuracy and when I compare the figures I am generally highly impressed”.

“Genetically speaking, all traits are changeable and the more information you have on the animals the more accurately you can change their traits. How quickly you change them depends on the selection pressure placed on each trait”.

“By focusing on just two traits, my fleece has gone from a 22.5 micron to 18 micron, which is a considerable achievement. The fleece weights are also much better”.

Over the past 24 years, by selecting for it, Mr. Mortimer has seen fertility levels increase by 30% and consequently that has a great bearing on profitability.

But the Centre Plus flock is also a dual-purpose flock, and Mr. Mortimer says a focus is also on carcase characteristics.

“1999 saw the commencement of EMD (eye muscle depth) and fat measurements. And we’re making large progress in that area too”



Also in 1999, Centre Plus became the first Merino Stud to use the LAMBPLAN ~ MGS, TGRM (Total Genetic Resource Management) mating program. This program allows the stud breeder to control inbreeding, while making even faster genetic progress

All sheep are taken through the complete analysis and before selection, have to meet rigorous visual standards.

All wool traits including softness, crimp, colour, luster and nourishment are measured and / or scored.

“Linked Breeding programs will almost certainly become an essential tool in the sheep industry, to know where we are genetically and where the elite genetics can be found”.

“Genetic databases can also be used as a marketing tool, as a tool to compare your stock against others in the market or to buy other sheep”.

“Once you have learnt the basics of managing a database, accurately taking measurements, and setting management groups, using a system such as SGA should be easy to keep up with”.

“New breeders can get their sheep up to a high standard, to compare with others in the industry in no time, and I look forward to the availability of Sheep Genetics Australia to include in the management of the Centre Plus programme,” Mr. Mortimer said.