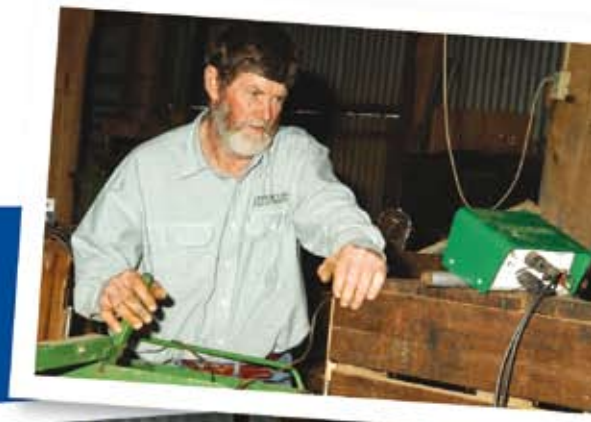
ROGER AND DIANNE TREWICK, "PEPPERTON STUD"

BENDIGO, VICTORIA

- POLL DORSET STUD AND COMMERCIAL PRIME LAMB OPERATION
- INCREASE IN LAMB CARCASE WEIGHTS BY UP TO 33% OVER SIX YEARS
- NUMBER OF RAMS SOLD EACH YEAR INCREASED FROM 80 TO MORE THAN 200 – AT IMPROVED PRICES
- VISUAL ASSESSMENT FOR STRUCTURAL AND CONFORMATION FACTORS COMBINED WITH GENETICS AND PERFORMANCE RECORDING



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Making full use of sheep industry genetic information systems has allowed Roger and Dianne Trewick of Victoria to move their prime lamb and stud ram enterprises to elite levels.

The Trewick's "Pepperton" Poll Dorset stud and prime lamb operation is situated midway between Bendigo and Echuca in Central Victoria. The business is conducted on a 720ha property with a long term average annual rainfall of 475mm and their operation consists of two key parts: the Poll Dorset stud and the prime lamb producing flock.

The stud supplies top line terminal sires to the crossbred ewe flock, which is based on a first-cross East Friesian/Border Leicester and Merino flock.

While the Trewicks are looking forward to using the new SGA database, they have been successfully using LAMBPLAN for the past 12 years, and Mr Trewick says over the past six years, there has been a very large jump in productivity and genetic indices.

"We've seen significantly higher muscling levels, better growth rates and lower fat levels in the stud sheep, the dams and the sale lambs. We monitor growth rates, fat levels and muscle depths right throughout the production process," Mr Trewick said.

"And the figures speak for themselves: our sale lamb carcase weights have moved from the typical old 'supermarket' type lamb of 18-20kg up to export grade and weight lambs of 24-30kg – in a relatively short period of time and without supplementary feeding, as the lambs are finished on dryland lucerne."

"To put it another way: when we started testing on LAMBPLAN, our across flock Carcase Plus measurement index averaged out at 105 points; but in our 2004 drop lambs, their Carcase Plus index averaged 176 points. That index is made up of Post Weaning Weight measurement values for growth (60%), muscling (20%) and fat depth (20%).

"So either way you look at it – the traditional way or the LAMBPLAN way - you can see objective measurement is doing the right job for this operation."

The Trewicks said much of the index jump has occurred over the past six years since they started using AI and semen from Western Australian, Victorian, New South Wales and New Zealand studs with superior genetics for growth and carcase characteristics.

All Poll Dorset rams are assessed visually for structure and conformation before they are introduced into the Stud, and the Trewicks believe this is very important.

"There's no sense using a ram if he is not structurally sound as you can end up introducing sway-back, undershot jaws and the like into the flock. A ram with high index attributes doesn't by itself mean that he's got everything you need or want," Mr Trewick said.

As far as sale rams are concerned, the Trewicks have observed a demand for performance tested seedstock.

"Lately, repeat customers are buying up to 20 rams at a time. It's interesting to note that before we started genetic evaluation through LAMBPLAN in our selection and breeding, we were selling around 60 to 80 rams a year. We are now selling in excess of 200 – at improved prices."

Mr Trewick believes with the advent of the new industry-wide performance recording database SGA carcase quality and yield as well as lamb growth rates can now be replicated consistently from stud stock around Australia, and he says using objective measurement to assess livestock is a proven way of lifting productivity and profitability on farms.

"Farmers into the future have to be more savvy in everything that they do – and SGA is one of the main tools we will have available to give reliable genetic evaluation across flocks and breeds to enable us to lift our productivity.

"The use of genetic databases and performance recording is already an important part of the sheep industry in Australia, though it will become more so in the years ahead. Just look at the Angus cattle breed – it's a prime example of what can be achieved by using genetic evaluation with almost total acceptance by that breed society of BREEDPLAN, the cattle equivalent of LAMBPLAN," Mr Trewick said.