

# RICK KEOGH, “AMAROO”

BLACKALL, QUEENSLAND

- MERINO STUD AND COMMERCIAL WOOL GROWING
- ALL RAMS AND EWES TESTED USING A COMBINATION OF SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE MEASUREMENT
- BREEDING OBJECTIVES BASED ON HIGHLY MEASURABLE TRAITS THAT DRIVE PROFITS
- AIMS TO LOWER FIBRE DIAMETER BY ONE MICRON, INCREASE FLEECE WEIGHT BY 10% AND BODY WEIGHT BY 5% OVER TEN YEARS

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When Rick and Jenny Keogh bought some of the famous Queensland Terrick Terrick Merino stud stock in 2001, they knew they had a great genetic base to work with and nurture.

Firm subscribers to the benefits of objective genetic measurement for nearly a decade, the Keoghs relocated 54 stud sires and 2,187 stud ewes in lamb to “Amaroo”, south of Blackall, Queensland, and renamed the stud stock ‘Terrick Merinos’.

Mr Keogh began his association with the famous Terrick Terrick bloodline in 1977, starting as a senior jackeroo and then being appointed overseer the following year. In the three years he worked there he gained extensive skills in subjective sheep selection and became heavily involved in helping identify the stud’s top sheep.

However it was running his own commercial property in 1996 that he first became aware of the benefits of measuring genetic traits of stock.

“When we first started using objective measurements to class our sheep, it was based solely on micron measurement and traditional visual appraisal,” Mr Keogh said.

“Over the last nine years we have progressed to a stage where we test all our rams and ewes using a stringent and balanced combination of subjective and objective measurement.”

Each Terrick-bred ram undergoes two micron tests, a fleece weight and body weight before it is 14 months old. Based on those three genetic traits each animal is then indexed and ranked. Visual classing is

performed at 15 months where subjective and objective traits are compared. If for some reason they do not marry the animal is either down graded or culled. This process creates a healthy balance between wool growing, fertility, frame and structure.

“We currently use Advanced Breeding Services to provide our genetic evaluations and to help us select the rams we retain for use in the stud,” Mr Keogh said.

“When selecting rams for our own use we use the Central Test Sire Evaluation to benchmark and monitor genetic gain. Because of this, and by using the EBVs provided, buyers can feel confident when buying rams from Terrick that they will continue to genetically improve their flocks.

“While differing systems have performed well, the advantage of combining the various industry genetic databases (as SGA is doing), will create a single language and platform, making indices much easier to read and compare,” Mr Keogh said.

So firm is Mr Keogh’s belief in genetic measurement he uses a combination of objective and subjective appraisal to achieve the stud’s breeding objectives. Over a ten year period he is aiming to:

- Lower fibre diameter by one full micron;
- Increase fleece weight by 10%;
- Increase body weight by 5%; and
- Maintain structure and confirmation of his stud stock.



These breeding values are designed to increase the value of the wool produced as well as the stock the Keoghs sell.

The way Mr Keogh sees it, there is little difference in the process buyers go through when buying stock as opposed to buying bales of wool.

“If you are selling wool by highlighting all the traits people want, why wouldn’t you do the same when buying animals?” he asks.

“The breeding objectives we have set for our stud are highly measurable traits that drive profits.

“If buyer trends continue, and I believe they will, they won’t be buying stock unless the traits and figures we provide can be clearly proven, and this is what genetic measurement allows us to do,” he said.