

MICHAEL CAMPBELL & GABRIEL McMULLEN

COROMANDEL POLL MERINOS

GAIRDNER, WA

Coromandel Poll Merinos co-principals Michael Campbell and Gabriel McMullen began using MERINOSELECT to improve the carcass qualities of their stud and commercial flock.

Through the selection of high merit animals, the husband and wife team have not only made great gains in carcass quality but have also doubled their wool return.

Michael and Gabriel run a mixed farming operation, growing grain and running 1000 stud and 1200 commercial ewes, at Gairdner in south west WA.

The Coromandel Poll Merino Stud was established by Michael's father Ian in 1968 and they now sell 80 stud rams each year, predominantly to commercial producers. They joined MERINOSELECT in 2002 to improve the carcass traits of their Poll Merino flock and Michael said it had helped them make great progress in this area.

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“Five years ago we were only getting about five per cent of our animals at 15 months of age with an eye muscle depth of 40mm or above,” he said.

“We have now increased this to 20 per cent of our animals by selecting animals within our flock that had high Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) for this trait.

“We have also used outside sires in our AI (artificial insemination) program with EMD ASBVs of +2 mm”

Using high indexing animals has allowed Coromandel to reduce micron moderately, while maintaining or slightly increasing clean fleece weight.

In 2000, Coromandel's commercial flock cut an average of 6.3 kilograms of 21.4 micron wool, returning \$30 per head (dry sheep equivalent).

By comparison in 2008, the commercial flock cut an average of 7.4kg of 19.6 micron wool, returning \$69 per head (dse), although recognizing some of this difference is due to market and seasons.

The use of MERINOSELECT fits into their longtime breeding objective of producing a profitable plain bodied well structured fine/medium Poll Merinos carrying soft, white, nourished quality wool with well aligned fibers.

Michael said sheep must be quick maturing and have good carcass characteristics to be turned off as high value lambs or sold into the export market. Ewes must produce many lambs over their lifetime and shear a high value fleece.

Visual assessment remains critical and they have been breech wrinkle and dag scoring their lambs for the last three years to help reduce breech strike.

MERINOSELECT is used to analyse worm egg counts (WEC) to increase worm resistance in the flock.

“We see ASBVs as an important part of producing a profitable animal relevant to present and future requirements in the livestock industry,” Michael said.

“We progeny test by placing our young sires over a group of randomly selected ewes to identify the improvers.



“The progeny are then tested and subjectively classed to identify the sires that best suit our breeding objectives. Indexes and ASBVs are a big part of this.

“Once identified, our best breeding ewes have been used in embryo transfer programs with great success.”

A good example of combining MERINOSELECT performance data with subjective breeding and classing objectives is a Coromandel ram Michael and Gabriel christened Sir Thomas.

Sir Thomas was awarded junior champion ram at the Australian Sheep and Wool Show in Bendigo in 2008 and supreme champion at the Katanning Sheep Show later that year.

Sir Thomas was ranked second on points from 82 entries in the all-purpose class at Bendigo, where rams have regulation wool test data and are body weighed and eye muscle tested. This class is open to March-shorn rams two tooth and younger and assesses animals suited to carcass and wool productivity.

Sir Thomas has also been included as a reference sire in the Sheep CRC Information Nucleus flock. This data is entered into a formula where the four categories of objective tests, wool tests, carcass body weight/eye muscle depth and subjective classing all make up 25 per cent of the final tally. Sir Thomas was awarded 86.9 points out of 100.