

JOHN KEILLER, “CASHMORE PARK”

PORTLAND, VICTORIA

- THREE SEEDSTOCK FLOCKS AND A LARGE COMMERCIAL PRIME LAMB FLOCK
- VISUAL AND GENETIC SELECTION SYSTEMS IMPORTANT
- LAMBING PERCENTAGES INCREASED BY 9% - 20%
- STOCK MORE TOLERANT OF INTERNAL PARASITES

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The Keiller family’s “Cashmore Park” enterprise is at the cutting edge of the prime lamb industry. Three seedstock flocks are currently run under strict commercial conditions in conjunction with a large and very productive commercial prime lamb flock.

“Cashmore Park” is situated 15km west of Portland, Victoria in an 830mm rainfall zone and it carries 2.8dse per hectare per 100mm of rainfall. Besides a high degree of animal husbandry to cater for the high stocking rate, John Keiller also places a strong focus on genetic selection.

Mr Keiller says the operation has changed significantly in recent times.

“Prior to 1992, Poll Dorset sires and Border Leicester x Merino and Coopworth ewes were the base of our flock – as they were in the district. But looking at the pig and poultry industries, you see that they use composite animals.

“With LAMBPLAN, the national meat-sheep performance recording program, and the Terminal and Maternal Central Progeny Testing Programs, we had a means of introducing new genes to improve flock performance. So we decided to go down that path, and we haven’t looked back.”

The three seedstock flocks consist of Composite Terminals (Poll Dorset x White Suffolk x Texels), Composite Maternals “Cashmore Twinners” (Coopworth, Finn, East Friesian, Border Leicester, South African Meat Merino, Poll Dorset, White Suffolk, Texel and Corriedale genetics) and Coopworths.

“To many this seems like a large mix, but they are just bags of genes walking around the paddock to me,” Mr Keiller said.

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sheep studs and flocks generally, and I am particularly looking forward to the next development: SGA.

“Once you identify market signals and production systems that suit the environment, you can tailor your livestock to suit and achieve the financial gains as a result.

“In our case, the lambs now are faster growing with carcass weights of 26kg, high lean-meat yields and optimum fat levels. The highly fertile ewes have lifted lambing percentages by 9% – with the best up by 20% – and all stock are more tolerant of internal parasites.

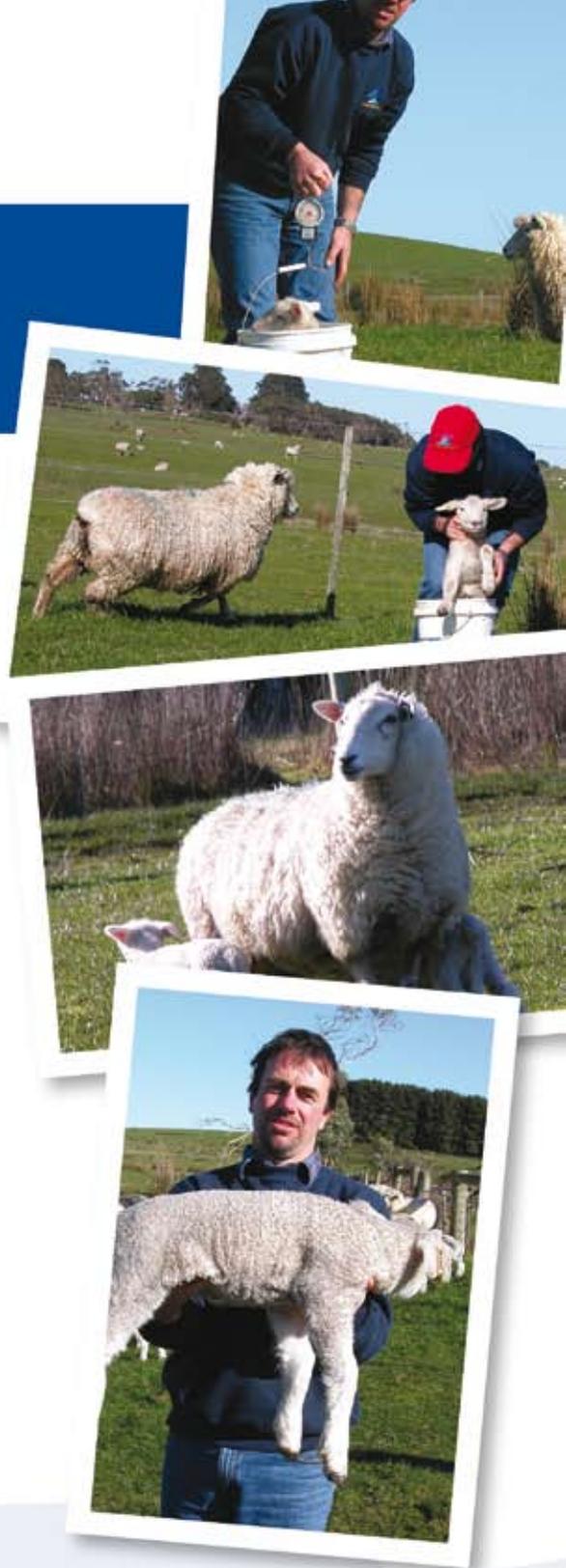
“Prior to using estimated breeding values I had a little bit of doubt about seeing the gains on the scale we’ve actually achieved in such a short period of time, but we have all the documented proof here. This gives us great confidence to move forward at even faster rates,” he said.

Mr Keiller estimates the financial gain from lifting his productivity is in the order of \$30 per hectare per year compounding. And he says LAMBPLAN has played a significant role in that.

Even so, he says objective measurement needs to be seen as a part of the overall farm management program.

“We can’t ignore the reality that we farmers have to be specialists in assessing livestock quickly with the naked eye – and that form of selection pressure needs to be used alongside genetic information systems as a check and balance. At the end of the day the stock need to be sound and functional and if both selection systems are used, they act to complement each other.”

Though he says the broader industry gains are important to recognise.



“Prior to the availability of objective measurement to the Australian lamb industry, relatively small degrees of genetic gain can be seen over time.

“With the use of performance data, genetic gain can be much more rapid. And we’ve got to remember that as costs rise 3% every year, farmers need better animals than yesterday to be profitable, or even maintain a position in the market place.”

Mr Keiller believes that the prime lamb industry has embraced LAMBPLAN and will quickly take on board SGA as a more refined tool to position the Australian lamb industry into the future.