RICHMOND
M E R I N O S

Flock No. 5021
Stud Classer: Charlie Massy
Stud Consultant: Dr. Jim Watts

Whilst writing the report of last years auction in this newsletter I penned the following sentence that I thought really summed up the progress of our flock.

Above all else we have always strived to present quality and not be sidetracked by fads or the seduction of high figures to the detriment of fibre and confirmation.

I felt this really resonated with our direction especially in this computer driven age of ASBVs where the accumulation of high indexing animals seems to be the priority of so many breeders. ASBVs of course play an important role in modern sheep breeding and we are increasing our figures with each years drop as can be seen by the trait leading results from our semen sires in this newsletter. Over many generations however and above all else we have attempted to instil quality in our flock to complement steadily improving figures and at this stage the indications are that this years sale team will be raising the bar even further.

SEMEN SIRES

RICHMOND SIRE 160110

The top priced ram at our 2017 on property auction purchased By East Loddon merino stud for $11,000 and he has been used with great success across 3 states. A multiple trait leader, his strength lies in his carcass attributes. A deep bodied ram with a great barrel and back end he stands square on all four feet and carries the double poll gene.

MERINO ASBVs FOR RICHMOND SIRE 160110

	YWT	YEMD	YFAT	YCFW	ACFW	YFD	YDCV	YSL	POLL	MP+	DP+
160110	13.2 96%	2.8 94%	1.1 92%	27.5 86%	15.4 82%	-0.2 92%	-2.4 88%	13.9 89%	PP	174 52%	194 47%

RICHMOND SIRE 170004

An ET bred son of 130579. He is a very impressive frame type ram with long stapled, soft stud quality fleece. He also carries the double poll gene.

MERINO ASBVs FOR RICHMOND SIRE 170004

	YWT	YEMD	YFAT	YCFW	ACFW	YFD	YDCV	YSL	POLL	MP+	DP+
170004	8.6 74%	1.2 70%	0.7 66%	25.0 67%	17.2 62%	-0.1 75%	-2.1 68%	19.6 59%	PP	162 46%	172 47%

RICHMOND SIRE 170013

A full brother from the same ET flush to 170004, he is a wool ram that also possesses impressive carcass traits. His strength however is his dense , deeply crimped fleece and his productive yet supple skin.

MERINO ASBVs FOR RICHMOND SIRE 170013

	YWT	YEMD	YFAT	YCFW	ACFW	YFD	YDCV	YSL	POLL	MP+	DP+
170013	7.0 74%	1.0 70%	0.5 66%	24.1 67%	19.2 62%	-0.6 75%	-1.2 68%	16.3 59%	PH	163 46%	171 47%

WELCOME TO OUR 2019 NEWSLETTER

Unfortunately at the time of printing the drought that has prevailed in recent years across much if eastern Australia has continued into the 2019 winter, however once again the shining light in the industry has been the record meat prices to go with a solid wool market throughout most micron ranges.

It is during these difficult times that the adaptability and resilience of the Richmond phenotype really shows it's benefits. The modern merino that we aim to breed is an efficient, low cost model that uses its dual purpose traits to adapt to multiple markets growing good commercial weights of elite quality fibre while producing high numbers of fast growing lambs. They are able to achieve these production goals often on less than desirable nutrition levels which is due mainly to the combination of high genetic muscle and fat instilled in animals that are unencumbered by a thick, heavy skin.

2019 SALE CALENDAR

TUESDAY 1 OCTOBER
ON-PROPERTY RAM AUCTION
Inspections from 10am.
Sale commences 1.30pm. Offering approx 120 fourteen month old rams.

WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER
PRIVATE SALES
Grade rams available at set prices by appointment from Wednesday onwards.

Pre-sale inspection of all auction and grade rams by appointment is welcome at any time.

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SRS genetics

2019 SALE REPORT

On the tail end of one the driest years on record the success of stud sales was a real concern for many seedstock producers across the state however as the selling season kicked into gear it became clear that the resilience and money making ability of the merino under these tough conditions was giving commercial producers plenty of confidence. The 10th on property Richmond sale was no exception with a 100% clearance at an average of $2027 making it a very pleasing result.

The top priced ram, secured by the Lawson family of Cookardinia for $10,500 was a very productive ET bred son of 130579 with a good all-round balance of figures and gutsy high density fleece. Jock Allen of Berridale also outlayed $5250 for another productive ET bred sire of similar breeding while The Green family's Aloeburn stud Paid $4750 at the back end of the catalogue for a very sweet wooled son of Arcadia 140210. Volume buyers on the day were Geeron partnership , Forbes taking home 24 rams at a $1250 average, the Haylock family "Old Springfield " Cooma with 15 rams to a top of $3250 and Brian and Amanda Protheroe of Grenfell who picked up 13 new sires to a top of $3000.

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all those old and new clients that supported the sale under very tough seasonal conditions. Under the circumstances we were very proud of the high quality draft that we were able to present on sale day. Above all else we have always strived to present quality and not be side-tracked by fads or the seduction of high figures to the detriment of fibre and confirmation and the loyalty of our clients is testament to this policy.

The top priced ram with Aaron Seamen Elders Young, Trevor Ryan and buyers James, Neil and Andrew Lawson

VALE DR JIM WATTS

It was with great sadness earlier this year that we farewelled one of the great innovators of the wool industry when after a long illness Dr. Jim Watts passed away. Dr. Jim began his relationship with the industry as a member of a team of scientists in the late 70s and early 80s working for the CSRIO on flystrike resistance in sheep and it was through this and the subsequent research of skin biology that he began to understand the biological pathways that enabled animals to produce a much higher quality fibre than had previously been grown.

After this research work had been disbanded and the scientific team dispersed Jim took this new found knowledge and was able to identify the fleece characteristics that were associated with these animals and implement new visual selection markers and measurement systems that could be used to extrapolate the numbers of these animals within merino flocks. From there he established the SRS (soft rolling skin) breeding program which over the last 30 years has had a significant impact on not just those flocks that have followed his direction but also on the industry in general. Jim's work was not confined to fibre production as he was also an industry leader in the understanding of the importance of muscle, fat and early growth and his work on the development of mules free genetics has been of great significance as the industry moves towards a more ethical breeding approach.

To those who knew him Jim was a kind, thoughtful, quietly spoken man with a wonderfully dry sense of humour. He was highly intelligent and possessed a knowledge of follicle and fibre development unrivalled throughout the industry. Dr. Jim will be greatly missed not only by those who knew him but also by the industry in general.

VALE RAY GRINTER

Sadly 2019 also saw the passing of one of our longest clients, Ray Grinter of West Wyalong who was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident earlier in the year.

Ray purchased his first Richmond rams at our inaugural sale in 2009 and since then has been a permanent fixture at the annual auction. Usually ably assisted by his classer Bron Rogers, Ray always made judicious purchases at auction and was never afraid to pay a little bit extra for a ram that he thought was worth it. It always seemed like Ray had an enormous, permanent smile and he was one of those people that made everyone else feel better just by being around him. His friendly " she'll be right" attitude seemed to rub off on others and sale day at Richmond will definitely not be the same without him.

DENSITY – WHAT IS IT AND WHAT IS IT'S ROLE IN FLEECE WEIGHT

A fleece showing all the visual markers of density. Fibre bundles, alignment and crimp definition but will this translate to high adult fleece weight?

Most merino breeders have heard of the term density and maybe a few in particular have learnt about skin testing and the process of follicle counting to determine high and low density animals. Over the years however it has become apparent that there is some confusion about the role of this very important merino trait.

In a nutshell, measuring follicle density is a process whereupon the number of follicles within a square millimetre of skin area are counted to give an average figure for each individual animal. It would be easy to assume that a high density figure would mostly lead to a high fleece weight however for a number of reasons this is not necessarily the case. This is not to say that we can't increase both traits simultaneously but it does mean that selecting for density and expecting wool cut to automatically rise is a bit more complicated than generally thought.

What role does density play in fleece weight ? - When density increases, micron often but not always decreases so we often have a two steps forward , two steps back situation at play when we are trying to raise wool cut. A good analogy is to think of trees in a forest. You can have a lot of small trees close together but still no more wood than if there were fewer big trees.

Other factors to consider are staple length and the amount of the surface area on each animal. If a sheep has say 20% more surface area due to either extra skin in the form of wrinkles or simply a larger body then it may well have the same fleece weight as a sheep that has 20% higher density.

One of the more intriguing factors however is the likelihood that some sheep may possess a heavier fibre and although the research in this area is limited we know from our understanding of the protein composition of individual fibres that this is a real possibility and may well play a significant role in overall fleece weight.

What does all this mean ? – Firstly it puts a different perspective on selecting for measurable density as a tool for increasing fleece weight. Due to the biological processes involved in creating follicle density and the correlative effect of other traits I think it is highly unlikely that selecting for density alone will achieve higher wool cut. Density seems to have a much closer relationship with wool quality than wool cut. When density is high, fibre alignment, crimp definition and processing performance all improve yet wool cut often remains unchanged.

The take home message is that follicle density is a very important trait that we should continue to select for but it is probably linked more closely to processing quality rather than fleece weight. This is not to say it cannot have an influence on fleece weight but we need to be aware of how density interacts with other traits and of the likely outcomes when our selection decisions head down this pathway.

FLEECE WEIGHT ASBVs – ARE THEY ACCURATE?

Yearling clean fleece weight (YCFW) appears on nearly every pen card at ram sales were ASBVs are utilised and it is generally one of the key traits that buyer's focus on, however the figure itself can be very misleading. For ram buyers it is very important that they understand how these figures are generated before they make their selections. Following is a list of key factors regarding how YCFW figures are generated and the relationship to the number on the pen cards that we see on sale day.

Raw fleece weight data for YCFW is almost always collected when the animals are lambs and if the animals are winter/spring drop then it is probably from their first lambs tip shearing. Trying to estimate adult fleece weight results from lamb fleece weights is basically guesswork. Early maturing, fast growing sheep generally cut well as lambs but will often taper off as adults.

ACFW (adult clean fleece weight) is of limited assistance as there is mostly no raw data to base a figure on and the ASBVs for this trait are mostly generated from correlations with other traits.

If yield data is not entered along with the greasy fleece weights then a much stronger emphasis on correlated traits is used to generate a clean fleece weight figure. For example if the sheep has a high micron reading and a high growth figure then the fleece weight ASBV will be bumped up because fleece weight has a positive correlation to these traits.

Because the computer uses correlations to generate an ASBV figure it is possible for animals to have trait leading fleece weight figures without ever having their fleeces weighed.

SO HOW DO WE USE YCFW FIGURES?

The entire drop of Richmond rams are fleece weighed with yield tests and all their sisters are fleece weighed as hoggets which helps generate more accurate yearling and adult ASBV figures for the sale rams. When selecting on sale day always check the accuracy figure on each trait and if they are not close to or above 70% then be wary. If fleece weight is a priority then as a precaution avoid animals with low figures but also remember that some of the rams with high YCFW may not translate to high adult fleece weight. At the end of the day trust your eyes and hands and as always use ASBVs as a tool and not as a definitive selection method.