

# RICHMOND

## MERINOS

Flock No. 5021  
Stud Classer: Charlie Massy



The Cram family's ewe hoggets with wool shown at 7 months growth.

### CLIENT FOCUS THE CRAM FAMILY, YOUNG NSW

Don and Marjory Cram are one of our oldest clients and have developed over time a productive and high quality merino flock. At my most recent visit in October last year I had the pleasure of classing their young ewes which were outstanding for growth, evenness and fibre quality. A good percentage of the ewes (many still with their lambs teeth) were estimated to be over 80kg and with 7 months wool the best of them were measuring up to 120mm staple length enabling them to move into 6 month shearing with relative ease. Don penned the following summation of their flocks journey.

**“When we began using Richmond rams we wanted to reduce our lines of wool, improve our style and reduce our fly problems. Combined with the use of side sampling hogget's these goals have been achieved. The use of fly prevention treatment is now rare and green wool in wet years is non existent. The wool has always achieved above valuation making selling in tough markets easier. We have for the last 2 years ceased mulesing with wether lambs sometimes being able to be sold as early as 6 months of age”**



### WOOL V/S LAMBS

Earlier this year we ran a facebook post about the importance of fertility and talked about the experience we had with ewes we'd bought in for our lease country comparing the value of the lambs they reared to the correlated loss of wool production. My memory of this post was recently jolted when I read an article about a commercial producer that quoted “we are not bothered about lambing percentage as it is not a key driver of profitability... we always lamb around 90 – 100%... and in a wool production system fertility is not relevant”. You don't have to spend too much time on the calculator to blow this theory out of the water. Some simple maths reveals the following outcome.

If we take two mobs of 1000 ewes each and mob A lambs at 90% while mob B lambs at 120% this means mob B has 300 extra lambs to sell. If we sell these lambs straight off their mother's we will have very little effect on the overall DSE especially if they are reared through the peak spring growth season. If we sell these extra lambs for say \$130/head this means that we will receive \$39,000 or \$39/ewe joined. At current wool prices this means the ewes from mob A will need to cut 5kg more wool per head just to keep up with mob B. Some serious food for thought when pondering our breeding direction.



## WELCOME TO OUR 2020 NEWSLETTER

It's been a bittersweet year for agriculture in the eastern states with most areas experiencing wonderful seasonal conditions but the excitement of the drought breaking has been somewhat tempered by the Covid-19 cloud that has hung over the industry effecting not only our lifestyles but also our incomes with the fall of the wool market from its previous near record highs bearing the brunt of the economic downturn. Fortunately for those breeders who have moved towards a more modern dual purpose animal with multiple income streams these financial effects have been softened by a huge post drought restocker demand for breeding ewes as well as continuing strong prices for lambs.

There are very few enterprises in the agricultural sector that have the capacity to target three separate and generally unrelated markets. This diversity gives the modern merino resilience and security during uncertain times and at Richmond this is something we have always been acutely aware of as we continue to focus on breeding sheep with good commercial weights of the highest possible fibre quality on growthy, muscular early maturing bodies that produce great wether lambs and also provide the industry with a highly sought after maternal ewe for either merino or first cross flocks

**We would like to extend an invitation to anyone wishing to privately inspect our rams prior to the sale. We have always been more than happy to provide obligation free inspections at any time and we feel that it is more important than ever especially in these times to convey this message.**

### 2020 SALE CALENDAR

#### FRIDAY 18 SEPTEMBER SALE RAM INSPECTION DAY

10.00am – 4.00pm. All sale rams penned with up to date fleece data and ASBVs.

#### TUESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER ON-PROPERTY RAM AUCTION

Inspection from 10.00am. Sale commences 1.30pm. Offering approximately 120 thirteen month old rams.

#### WEDNESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER PRIVATE SALES

Grade rams available at set prices by appointment from Wednesday onwards.

## 2020 RAM SALES

At present we are still very much hoping to go ahead with a physical on property auction as per normal although at the time of writing social regulations are changing by the day so nothing is assured. It is likely that we will be using various other platforms including livestreaming and Auctions Plus. Whatever the case the one thing that can be assured is that the sale will go ahead in some form and we will endeavour to keep everyone updated via mail/email/Facebook etc and notified of developments as we move towards the sale date. We will be holding at least one inspection day on Friday Sept 18th and possibly more depending on the restrictions in place at the time. It may not be possible for all or some buyers to attend the sale and it is our priority to enable all current and potential clients an opportunity to properly inspect the rams prior to the sale under correct social distancing laws if need be. Please bear with us, these are very unusual times.

On a different note this years sale rams are looking in great condition due to the improved season and early indications are that they will provide a very even draft of well grown, predominantly polled rams with the usual high quality fibre and the right balance of improving carcass and wool traits. For the first time we are hoping that most of this years draft ( if not all ) will be presented with a 50k DNA test that will offer an extended range of ASBVs, increase the accuracy on the traits that have data already collected as well as provide a poll/horn status for each ram.



## DOES THE PERFECT SHEEP EXIST?

In the social media age that we live in where everyone is living the perfect life it seems like every stud on Instagram or Facebook is readily able to offer commercial growers an endless supply of near perfect young sires for their flock. The reality is that it's biologically incredibly difficult for a merino sheep to direct enough energy to multiple antagonistic traits so that it performs in the top percentile for all traits while on the same level of nutrition as it's peers. A good example is the relationship between high levels of muscle and fat and high fleece weight. If a sheep is genetically wired to lay down high levels of muscle and fat it is very difficult for it to direct enough energy from the same amount of food to also produce high fleece weight. It is also important to be aware that when we talk about fleece weight we are talking about actual adult data not the often misleading yearling ASBVs that are constructed from lambs tip shearing. Nutrition of course is the game changer and extreme levels of nutrition especially for young sale rams will always cover up any genetic deficiencies however once the nutrition is removed there will always be a compromise or trade off between traits. This compromise is exacerbated when the breeder attempts to rapidly increase one or two particular traits in a short time period. This doesn't mean that we can't improve a broad range of traits in our flock over time but time is the key and we need to be patient and sensible with our breeding goals. It's important that as breeders we have a clear vision of our flocks direction and of where our priorities lie in regard to individual traits. At Richmond we have always taken a balanced approach to our breeding goals. We believe that it is possible to move all traits forward over time but understand the compromises involved. Successful breeding results can't be achieved overnight and usually if it looks like they are being achieved overnight there is generally a compromise that will at some point become apparent

Below is a graph showing the relationship between 6 of the most common and more important traits that are selected for within the industry. What becomes obvious when studying this graph is that all traits apart from growth are antagonistic towards fleece weight. If a stud breeder is advertising high end production from fleece weight along with a number of antagonistic traits in either ASBVs or raw data then it is more than likely that there are either accuracy issues with the figures or they are covering up the compromises with feed.



## 2019 SALE REPORT

Once again we would like to extend a warm thank you to all those who supported our sale under very trying climatic and financial conditions. By sale day last year drought conditions were just about as bad as they'd ever been across most of Eastern Australia but despite this the confidence in the merino industry held strong resulting in another very pleasing on property auction result with 106/110 lots selling for a \$1941 average. The top price of \$6500 was paid by Meemar Past co for a heavily muscled son of 150182 with a beautifully soft fleece and a well balanced set of figures. Murray Henderson of Coolah, The Cram family of Young and Gunnegalderie merino stud of Wellington all paid \$4500 for top end sires while it was also pleasing to see interstate studs Calcookara, SA and Hynam Poll, Vic making judicious purchases. Long term clients the Haylock family of Cooma and first time buyers R & C Lomas of Victoria were the volume buyers on the day.

## SIX MONTH SHEARING

With at long last a good season underway we were again able to resume our six monthly shearing for the adult ewes and the initial December to June growing period proved to be very encouraging. The ewes cut well considering for the first 3 months we were still in drought but the most pleasing aspect for us was the evenness and depth of quality of the clip with nearly every fleece going straight into the main line with the ewes holding their micron at 18.6 which is generally considered difficult to achieve at 6 month intervals. We definitely recommend 6 month shearing however it is important that the right management and especially genetics are in place in order for fleece lines to hit the magical 70mm mark otherwise discounts begin to nullify the advantages. Richmond sheep possess light, supple skins with long slender follicle bulbs able to freely access nutrients from blood vessels that are unhindered by excess collagen in the skin. These animals are genetically wired to produce long fibres which makes them the ideal choice for shorter shearing intervals.

Average fleece line wool tests for Richmond ewes at 6 month shearing:

**GFW - 3.6kg    CV % - 16.9%    YLD - 68.5%    STR - 45n**  
**Mic - 18.6    COM - 99.6    LGTH - 72mm**

*The best of the Richmond ewe fleeces were 90mm long*



POSITIVE, NEGATIVE OR NEUTRAL CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TRAITS						
	FLEECE WEIGHT	FIBRE QUALITY	FERTILITY	GROWTH	FAT & MUSCLE	ETHICAL/EASYCARE
FLEECE WEIGHT		- ?	-	+ ?	-	-
FIBRE QUALITY	- ?		0	0	0	0
FERTILITY	-	0		+	+	+
GROWTH	+ ?	0	+		0	+
FAT & MUSCLE	-	0	+	0		+
ETHICAL/EASYCARE	-	0	+	+	+	

\*KEY + ( positive correlation), - (negative correlation), 0 (neutral effect), ? (weak correlation)

## THE ROLE OF ENERGY DISTRIBUTION

Sheep use up the energy that they obtain from their nutritional intake in a number of different ways. First and foremost a certain amount is allocated to everyday organ function and the basic processes of grazing, walking etc and staying alive. Once this is taken care of the remaining available energy is distributed to various processes such as foetal growth, milk production, fibre production and the laying down of fat and muscle. The amount of energy available for these processes is limited by the nutritional intake and the amount of energy that is allocated to each particular process or trait is determined by how the sheep is genetically wired. Some sheep direct most of their energy towards wool production while others may direct more toward carcass attributes. This all ties in with the above graph on trait correlations. Obviously if we steer our selection criteria towards improving one particular area then the production of the antagonist traits will decline. If we want to increase the production of multiple antagonistic traits then the only way to do it is by increasing the feed intake.

It's a simple equation. On limited feed with only so much available energy the sheep will concentrate its production in the areas that it is genetically engineered to favour. Wool sheep will produce fleece weight at the expense of fertility and carcass and vice versa with carcass sheep while dual purpose types will produce average but not great amounts of both. What we need to decide as breeders is the direction that we want to steer our flock in.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"When the whole world is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind"** C.S Lewis



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