



September 2018 Newsletter

Ram purchasing time will soon be here. The most important factor determining profitability is the management system you choose and how successfully you implement it. (ring me on 0428647457 to book up your ram supplies) The genotype and quality of the rams you buy can further add to profitability. Our interest of course is in maternal genetics. The dominant genotype in this arena is the Border Leicester merino ewe (X bred). With current wool prices more attention is being concentrated on its contribution to returns. In the current market an X bred ewe will return about \$30- \$40 more from wool than a composite ewe and there is plenty of data to show they wean about the same number of lambs. There is only one way to achieve the same level of profit from a composite ewe and that is to choose a genotype which is capable of weaning 25-30% more lambs from the same level of inputs. This is what a Multimeat composite ewe can do for you. The majority of our clients have used our rams over X bred or composite ewes to breed their replacements because of the high cost of buying them. This results in a 28 u ewe if you mate them over a 27u Xbred or a 31 u ewe if you mate them over a 35u composite. A number of clients have purchased merino ewes to breed Multimeat X merinos so they can have the increased wool returns as well as the higher lamb turnoff. We have been concentrating our genetic improvement on improving wool value without losing productivity. We are reducing the micron while maintaining wool cut and growing ability.

If you have composite ewes research has shown that you will increase your weaning rate of your replacements by 25-30% by using a Multimeat ram to produce them and there should also be some improvement in wool value.

It normally takes me about 5 minutes to read the Stock and Land and the Stock Journal but recently I read in the following statement in the Stock and Land **“In maternal ewes we found no significant impact of the feed on offer on twin lamb survival”**. This is a big change on the advice that has been delivered over the last 10 years telling us exactly how much feed on offer (FOO) we need for each class of ewe and exactly how much extra feed we need to supply if that level is not met. The research was excellent, in it confirmed the advice we have been giving on condition score for the last 15 years. FOO is a very poor guide to what a ewe can extract from a pasture except at the extremes. If you managed according to this advice you would have had to reduce your stocking rates or increased supplementary feeding unnecessarily. Pasture growth rates and selective grazing

enable sheep to do much better than FOO would predict. This does not mean that feed budgeting is not useful, we all do it every day to see how our pastures are going. What it means is that when we are making feeding decisions we need to look at the condition of the sheep first rather than what we think the pasture can supply.

I have done a lot of research on triplet ewes and visited many of our clients to learn about how their triplets are performing so I was interested to learn about the new triplet management project that has been proposed. The aim of this project is to “improve weaning rates in triplet scanned mobs by 30% to 45% and reduce ewe mortality by at least 4%”. I believe that the majority of our clients who follow our management system are weaning around between 170-180% from their triplet scanned ewes with some weaning over 200% in some years. To improve this by 30-45% would take weaning rates to over 200%. Many of our clients are weaning 180% from their twin scanned ewes so they can achieve 160% lambs weaned overall. At the same time as acquiring funds to undertake this triplet research the same group are telling producers that more prolific sheep are unnecessary. I am not sure how they think you can wean 160% from ewes which only scan 160% at commercial stocking rates.

Multimeats are making inroads into the prime lamb industry but it has been slower than we would have predicted. We believe this is for two reasons. The first is that agents do not like to see any change in a system which they have too great a say in. Agents are excellent at purchasing and selling stock but have very little understanding of what makes a profit for you. If you doubt this just ask your agent how many kilograms of lamb per hectare they think the most profitable producers are producing.

The second reason is that those who are chosen to speak at extension gatherings state that there is no reason to use genotypes with higher fecundity because all we have to do is increase lamb survival rates. At the same time they are telling us how we must produce more lambs from each ewe to satisfy the increasing demand. It's a bit like telling the pig producers they should have been satisfied when their sows were producing 8 piglets per sow. All of the analysis I have done confirms that the greatest limiter in our lamb production systems is the inherently low fecundity of the genotypes we have had available. Somewhere very close to you is a producer turning off 25-30% more lambs just because they are using Multimeat rams.

I was asked the question the other day about the concept of splitting joining into 3 periods for better use of lambing paddocks and spreading the risk at lambing time. That is mate for one cycle, have a break and repeat this 3 times so that you have 3 lambing groups. If you had a 10 day break between joining's then the first lamb conceived in the last group would be born 61 days later than the first born lamb in the first group. At a growth rate of 250 grams per day that lamb would be 15 kilograms lighter at weaning. Seven kilograms at \$7 per or \$50 per lamb takes a lot of making up. I can see potential benefits in regions with long pasture growth periods or where you have stubbles to finish lambs on but it should be considered very carefully before implementation especially in the 500-650 mm rainfall areas. I am sure some increase in lamb survival could be achieved but it could be with significant reduction in income. You should choose your time of lambing in regard to pasture growth, potential lamb survival and finishing ability very carefully and have the majority of them lamb in that period. . You should do your economic analysis even more carefully.

As I said in a talk recently. Firstly get your pastures right, secondly your time of lambing, thirdly your stocking rate and then your genetics. This system then has to be chosen to give the best outcome over a ten year period not just one year. Just getting the basics right is extremely difficult. If you had all of the important things right then perhaps you could consider such things as split joinings and using Eid's to improve ewe performance.

Colin Earl