

EP Scholar turns to Dorpers

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5CriticalFactors

- 1 Look at breeds that provide the greatest meat quality
- 2 Explore co-operative opportunities
- 3 Find where you get best bang for your buck
- 4 Embrace change
- 5 Apply for a Nuffield Scholarship

could achieve the best meat premium.

"Over many years our business has strived to produce what the wool market demanded," he said.

"We lowered microns, increased yields and implemented quality assurance programs to give customers more confidence in our product. We have not been rewarded for it.

"The wool pipeline is a long one, the markets are fickle and the industry's issues are many. I have run out of patience with it."

Ben said that this, coupled with the costs involved with the animal husbandry and processing of wool sheep, led him to concentrate on producing meat.

And in line with this, the Randorfs had 70 Saltbush blood Dorper F4 ewes from Spear Creek delivered to their property just last week.

Ben said Dorpers ticked the three boxes he was after, with having a 100,000t bunker grain storage site south of Rudall," Ben said.

Ben is also the project officer for a red meat supply chain project funded by FREE Eyre, Meat and Livestock Australia and Primary Industries and Resources SA.

"A summary of the findings and recommendations from this work will be presented at FREE Eyre livestock producers at one day workshops across Eyre Peninsula from October 12 to 16," he said.

"Adding value to grain through supplementary feeding livestock including feeding or grain-finishing and nutrition for maximum productivity will be a focus."



SUPPLY CHAIN: Eyre Peninsula farmer Ben Randford returned from his 2008 Nuffield Scholarship with renewed determination to become more involved in the supply chain of the wool and sheep meat he produces.

high lambing percentages, high growth rates and high cents/kilogram.

"SAMM are a dual purpose sheep, but the result is usually a compromise," he said.

"The wool income is lower than with a Merino and the carcass value is below a crossbred. I want to target meat production with the Dorpers and remove the lamb marking and wool production costs from that enterprise."

Ben said another benefit of his new direction was that he did not expect to have to mules or tail Dorper lambs, therefore helping to lower costs of production.

"And, I only expect to have to shear them properly once as hoggets," he said.

"From there, I expect I'll only have to give them a quick whizz over their backs every three years."

Ben also expects the Dorpers will be easier to finish than the Merinos and crossbreds, and require less supplementary feeding.

He is planning on the Dorpers meeting Meat Standard Australia guidelines for quality lambs.

"The animal needs to have good weight gain in the last two weeks leading up to slaughter," he said.

"Putting on significant growth rates for every day of the last two weeks before processing is the main ingredient to producing really good eating quality."

Having the opportunity to agist has helped with the livestock operation.

"Because a lot of people have got out of livestock, there have been opportunities to agist sheep," he said.

"I couldn't run as many sheep as I do now if I didn't have access to agistment over the summer and autumn months.

"It's a good way to effectively increase the stocking rate."

During his scholarship Ben travelled to India, China, the United Kingdom, Europe and the Ukraine, looking at supply chains.

"I think the big thing I got from the scholarship was that a lot of the time farmers stay in their comfort zone, as producers we like to do things our way," he said.

"We don't stop to think about what the most important person in the supply chain - the customer - wants.

"You really have to look at ways to be the customer's preferred supplier."

"That why I'm moving into Dorpers, the price signals are there, that this is what the market wants."

Ben said livestock would always play a part in the farming operation.

"The returns from livestock are a lot less volatile and are a lot less risky.

"Cropping is more like playing at the casino."

Ben leads FREE Eyre into livestock

CLEVE farmer Ben Randford has been involved with the farmer co-operative FREE Eyre since its inception, and was part of the steering committee that helped form the group.

"There a huge amount of benefit that comes from collaboration," he said.

"FREE Eyre started as a response to changing circumstances in the grain industry.

"As a region, we felt that a lot of companies we had been doing business with were becoming less aligned with us as farmers."

EP Grain has been the co-operative's flagship business. The joint FREE Eyre/Emerald business last season received 200,000t from EP growers.

"We are now working towards