

EP scholar turns to Dorpers

PAULA THOMPSON
19/09/2009 4:00:00 AM

COMPLETING an Australian Wool Innovation-sponsored Nuffield Scholarship last year has led Eyre Peninsula farmer Ben Ranford to change the direction of his livestock enterprise.

Ben farms with his wife Kathy and parents John and Diana at Cleve, where they have 2400 hectares of arable land.

About 70 per cent of that area is put to crop, with the rest made up of annual medic pastures and some perennial pastures such as lucerne and saltbush.

The family also runs up to 1500 breeding ewes.

"We traditionally ran self-replacing Merinos, that was until eight years ago," Ben said.

"We then got into South African Meat Merinos and put them over our Merino ewes."

Ben said the SAMMs provided better survival rates in their lambs, along with better growth rates.

"I want most of my wether lambs to be between 22 kilograms carcass weight and 26kg by the time they're over our stubbles after harvest," he said.

"We were able to achieve this with the SAMMs, but we weren't meeting that target with the straight Merinos."

While Ben has been pleased with the growth rates he achieved with the SAMM/Merino crosses, his Nuffield scholarship made him have a good, hard look at his livestock options, and where he 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 Ranfords 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 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 with 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."

* Extract from a full Livestock report in *Stock Journal*, September 17 issue.

RELATED COVERAGE

14 Sep 09:

[North Ashrose ram makes \\$23,000 top in stellar sale](#)

14 Sep 09:

[Mutton output continues downhill run](#)

[Used Farm Equipment](#)

[Upcoming Auction on September 17 Inspected & Guaranteed. Bid Online!](#)

Ads by Google

comments

No comments yet. Be the first to comment below.

post a comment



Eyre Peninsula farmer Ben Ranford 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.