

Raising the Baa

Company: Angelfleece

1. Enterprise description and goals: Angelfleece produces and markets sub-14 micron wool in viable quantities. A partnership of woolgrowers ensures genetic depth and increases the commercial volume of wool produced under one banner.

Wool at the top end of the market has a strong future, and Angelfleece will provide a marketing platform for this product.

2. Labour efficiency and profitability An over-arching genetic and production plan for several properties eliminates both guesswork and the need for outside consultancy and ensures

In the three years since the genetic plan was established, the hogget average on one property alone has decreased from 15.2 to 13.2 microns. This means that for the same cost of production (taking into consideration expected annual increases) the profitability has skyrocketed. Current net return per hectare is \$800.

Angelfleece recently produced the world's finest paddock-grown bale of wool (12.7 microns) which sold for 54,000 cents per kilo (\$50,000 for the bale).

The micron reduction has occurred without the use of sheep coats or the great expense of sheds and 'around the clock' feeding schedules.

Use of Prebiotic drench minimises the need for traditional worm drenching (therefore minimising chemical use and cost), and maintains the sheep in optimum health. This is part of the plan for breeding worm-resistant flocks, which is labour and expense reduction.

The conception rate of this Prebiotic test flock is 97%. Many of the ewes lambing in 2007 are between 5 and 12 years of age.

The current cost of production continues to be reduced.

3. Production systems: Use of RFID (radio frequency identification) eartags, barcodes and scanners, OFDA and Laserscan technology are essential to gathering information for the breeding programme, which again assists in maximising returns.

The interpretation of this information is the key to ewe selection for natural breeding and artificial insemination, and our embryo transfer (ET) programme.

All wool is micron tested on property prior to shearing. This is to minimise impact on the shearing process, and establishes a base for classing across the entire enterprise.

After shearing wool is gathered and classed at a central point for quality assurance and to maximise returns to each grower. Growers with less-than-bale quantities in each micron category can therefore participate on a percentage basis in the sale.

Time controlled grazing is used to reduce worm burden to pastures and reduce dust. It provides an even nutritional plain which assists in maintaining wool tensile strength. Sheep are moved between paddocks on a regular basis to maximise pasture growth in relation to rainfall.

4. Enterprise development: Angelfleece was established in 2006 primarily as a marketing platform for sub 14 micron wool, with the aim of improving returns to all participants, and to the wool industry as a whole.

We work with several other cutting-edge enterprises including Natures Own (organic drench) and Ewetec (embryo transfers and AI program).

Risk management includes forward buying grain / feed in case of drought, and regular flock monitoring. We are currently in discussion regarding contract selling wool, which could alleviate the uncertainty of price fluctuations of the current market.

Angelfleece has strict quality assurance measures, including following the AWEX code of practice, and encouraging certification for OJD. The director is a qualified TAFE instructor in wool handling, specialising in superfine wool classing.

Angelfleece marketing goal is to encourage more participants to pool ultrafine wool for sale, and to have 10 tonnes on the market by 2010 (current 1 tonne).

We distribute ultrafine genetics to benefit participating growers to ensure they have the chance at producing the finest wool in the world.

Value adding is a major component of the business, and we are currently working on a project to develop Eva David Lingerie, an enterprise which will produce some of the world's finest lingerie from Angelfleece. The director of Eva David has recently obtained a DAFF In-Market experience scholarship to further investigate market potential and pipelines in Europe.

Angelfleece will create a market for Australian superfine and ultrafine wools and the associated wider benefits are obvious. It will create rural jobs, a new 'face' for the wool industry and grower cooperation to ensure the best wool possible is produced.

5. Environmental impacts and benefits: Angelfleece is an environmentally aware organisation.

Cell grazing assists with pasture management and worm reduction.

Sheep are bred for worm resistance (Supersire Warrane, Angelfleece's top sire, has been tested by the Sheep CRC as the second most worm resistant ram.

Prebiotic drench improves overall health, organic parasite management, and will eventually lead to production of organic wool.

Ultrafine wool can be grown on low-fertility soils with little or no super application to native pastures.

The director of Angelfleece spent 9 years as a director of the Rural Lands Protection Board, including one as Chair.

6. Your farming life: Angelfleece has increased profitability and enthusiasm among participants. The establishment phase has been hard work and time consuming, but by 2009 it will ensure a flexible and fun lifestyle.

Benefits include working with industry contacts, invitations to share knowledge, including consulting Australia-wide. The director spent 4 weeks in 2005 buying and classing wool, and training staff in Argentina for Lempriere and New England Wool.

Angelfleece is the culmination of many years of learning and planning. Its initial success has generated excitement and fulfilment of a dream for participants – a reason to get out of bed each day!

7. Your international study tour: If we were to win the prize, our intention is to visit Biella (Italy) to further our knowledge of wool processing and investigate market possibilities for both raw product and value-added products, including Eva David Lingerie. Strengthening contacts with Italian wool companies will increase our knowledge of the market potential and current requirements, and allow us to continue to make the best decisions for the participants.

We can tailor wool production to specific market needs.

We would also visit Milan and Paris as the capitals of haute-couture fashion, our end target market.