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Producer Research Support

High performance rams make $500 more than 'average' sires

Heywood Advanced Breeders Inc

Heywood Advanced Breeders Inc. developed a breeding program incorporating US Suffolk genetics into prime lamb seedstock.

The group completed a breeding program which has improved the genetic capability of the composite seedstock it uses through widespread artificial insemination (AI).

Key points

- The Heywood Advanced Breeders Group is still a leading prime lamb seedstock and commercial producer group.
- They have influence over 40,000 prime lambs and continue to be known as successful innovators.
- Their results are first class and have shown the way for many other groups in focussing on objective measures of performance and artificial breeding.

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The project

If terminal prime lamb sires produce 250 offspring during their working life and each LAMBPLAN index point is valued at 6 cents per lamb, then the high index US Suffolk infused sires produced by the Heywood Advanced Breeders Group produce extra income in the range of $400 to $500 over average sires.

This is one conclusion of one of the most successful early Producer Research Support projects conducted in south western Victoria.

According to group spokesman John Keiller, Cashmore Park, Portland, the improved genetics added an extra $91,000 to the balance sheet of prime lamb breeders who were either members of the Heywood Advanced Breeders Inc or ram clients.

What was done

The group set about learning how to use performance by attending field days, entering rams in the Central Progeny Test and meeting with LAMBPLAN staff.

The semen from US Suffolk sires was initially bought from Australian Performance Suffolks for the 1992-93 matings.

Rams and semen were bought from other breeders in subsequent years.

Group members decided to use AI to introduce the US Suffolk genetics because the cost of rams exceeded budgets.

LAMBPLAN genetic analysis is used.

Both sexes are measured for weight, fat depth, muscle depth and rams for scrotal circumference. No culling takes place before measurement.

What happened?

Group members were supplied with genetics that were mated to 25,000 prime lambs per year generating an extra $57,000 in superior quality prime lambs.

Surplus sires were also sold to other producers who produced 15,000 lambs, adding an additional $34,000 to their operations.

Mr Keiller said prior to the Producer Research Support funding breeders used traditional visual selection to determine the merits of the ram they used.

Breeding strategies were not carefully planned and failed to deliver the desired results of improved flock rams and prime lambs that consistently and efficiently met market specification.

But the use of consultants to build understanding of across-flock LAMBPLAN EBV data, link sire selection, choosing AI sires and progeny testing young sires was invaluable in implementing the technical aspect of the project.

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By using high performing genetics the group has lifted the overall performance index of their flocks. Their LAMBPLAN Index has increased from 98.7 to 117.5 while client breeders have gained index points. Their index growth from 1993-96 of 104 to 117 — shows the benefit of both AI and LAMBPLAN performance data.

Discussion

The AI program was successful with 100 per cent lambing. AI has been adopted by group members as common practice.

The current structure involves five outside elite sires from any breed which are AI'd to 500 ewes each year.

The best ram lambs from the previous year are used as back up sires. Elite sires bred within the group are used by AI and natural mating.

Mr Keiller said there had been a shift in attitude by members who now realised that to maximise genetic gain experts trained in the field of genetics needed to be consulted.

When the group was formed there was willingness to use measured performance as one basis for selection but there was poor understanding of how to use it.