

99/V02



Producer Research Support

Targeted Lamb Production and Marketing

Barwon Prime Lamb Group



This purpose of this project was to understand the 'paddock to plate' process, and consider opportunities to optimise producer benefits by growing lambs, selecting rams and appreciating how the meat trade handles prime carcasses.

The project

Producers in the Barwon area identified that they were not fully aware of how their prime lambs were marketed and prepared for consumer sale.

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Objectives

- Develop an overview of the prime lamb industry and thereby understand the producer's role in the 'paddock to plate' pipeline, through exposure to all levels of industry participants.
- Explore opportunities for producers to use genetics to enhance their customer focus and long term viability. Increase the use of LAMBPLAN for terminal sire selection from less than 50% to 75%.
- Build an awareness of the performance differences of prime dams, and how they impact a prime lamb enterprise.
- Identify and evaluate the prime lamb finishing systems most suited for the Barwon district.
- Enhance producer skills to assist group members with live lamb assessment and interpretation of processor feedback. These skills would then be used to assess 60% of lambs for marketing preparation. (Currently assess and obtain feedback on <25%).

What was done

A series of workshops was planned to equip producers with the skills to achieve project objectives. These activities included:

- A 2-day "Paddock to Plate" industry tour;
- A LAMBPLAN terminal sire demonstration to demonstrate the benefits of choosing rams with high LAMBPLAN indexes,
- A visit to Heywood Advance Breeders and Maternal Central Progeny Testing, Hamilton;
- A finishing systems demonstration of lambs on various feeds; and
- Live lamb assessment with processor feedback on several lots of lambs.

For the LAMBPLAN terminal sire demonstration, three rams of high and average CARCASE PLUS indices were purchased. Two mobs of ewes were created from a single mob of two year old first cross ewes. These mobs were joined to either high or average index rams. The progeny were born in late June 2002, and processed in two drafts, in December 2002 and June 2003, respectively.

The visit to Heywood Advance Breeders and the Maternal Central Progeny Test, Hamilton was attended by 24 Barwon Prime Lamb Group members.

Key points

- The producers who attended the "Paddock to Plate" industry tour reported an increased awareness of the prime lamb industry, and an understanding of their role within the meat industry.
- One butcher commented that his sales have steadily increased to 60 carcasses/week in the eight years since Trim Lamb was introduced.
- Chicory was found to be very successful in improving live weight gain of lambs in the Barwon area.

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Producer Research Support

MLA Producer Research Support offers support funding of up to \$15,000 over three years for groups of producers keen to be active in on-farm research and demonstration trials.

These activities include:

- Producer Initiated Research and Development
- More Beef from Pastures demonstration trials
- Prime Time Wean More Lambs demonstration trials
- Sustainable and productive grazing grants.

Contact Stephen Feighan - MLA Project Manager, Producer Delivery and Adoption.

Tel (02) 9463 9245 or
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Targeted Lamb Production and Marketing

August 2005 / PIRD OUTCOMES

The lamb finishing systems demonstration was conducted on farms belonging to six producers from the Barwon Prime Lamb Group. Finishing systems including lucerne, barley stubble, chicory, lupin crop, feedlot and pasture, were trialed at different farms. Each month, the weight of 30-60 lambs was recorded. Corresponding stocking rates and drenching records were also collected. It was not possible to compare the slaughter results of the lambs because the dry seasonal conditions meant that lambs were either sold early or kept unusually late.

The live lamb assessment with processor feedback activity was not conducted.

What happened?

Producers who attended the "Paddock to Plate" industry tour reported an increased understanding of improving the value of lamb skins, insight into the throughput of Coles and Top Cut and learned about how these companies are keen to purchase direct from producers. They learned about the "New Trim Lamb" products, packaging technology, and consumer preferences and trends - including the demographics of meat buyers and the cuts they choose.

The dry seasons affected the LAMBPLAN terminal sire demonstration trial, with most lambs having a carcase weight of 20-23.9 kg, and lambs less than 19 kg carcase weight receiving a 100c/kg penalty. There was a marked difference in carcase weight of lambs from high and average index rams, although this was lower than the expected 1.5 kg. At observed rates, and assuming a conservative lamb price of \$2.80/kg, this would translate to the progeny of high index rams yielding an additional profit of \$556 over the lifetime of a high index ram.

An interesting outcome of the finishing trials was the success of chicory. Chicory persisted over the dry summers and helped put an extra 5.5 kg liveweight on a flock of lambs. These trials introduced participants to weighing lambs, enabling an understanding of the growth rates of lambs to be developed.

One producer repeated his finishing trial using chicory the following year, and reported that he was able to lift the lambs from trade to heavy trade and export weight, thereby increasing the value of the lambs by an average of \$20 per head.

Discussion

The LAMBPLAN trial was successful in demonstrating the benefits of using higher CARCASE PLUS index rams and many producers indicated they would consider LAMBPLAN figures when purchasing rams in the future. Producers also reported an interest in using chicory for finishing, following the success of the chicory trials, even under harsh conditions.

Although the live lamb assessment and processor feedback was not completed, producers gained an insight into managing and meeting carcase specifications by weighing lambs, a practice that had not been widespread among group members.