

The model of ewe efficiency

Establishing a group of sheep producers implementing the latest technologies to identify the most efficient ewes.

On the Fast-Track:

In Anthony Shepherd's career as a sheep consultant overseeing the management and direction of flocks around Australia, he has learned two things: producers want to take on the latest technology but don't often have the time and when they do, it needs to offer clear, concise usable data.

"The technology is there and available. If you can show producers how to access it, when and how to use it and then act on the findings then they have the power to make rapid gains," he said.

A group of 13 producers from around Australia are using the Producer Innovation Fast-Track project to refine a system to allow them to quickly develop a flock of highly efficient ewes through early identification of key performance traits. It involves bringing together the latest tools to create a template which can be applied to any ewe flock to find the "best employees on the farm". That is, the ewes which perform according to measures on reproduction, growth rates, wool and meat production, health status and lifetime performance of their progeny.



“While we’re ground truthing it, the producers want to see how simple these technologies are and be empowered to use measurement tools themselves,” he said.

“The data capture we will have access to in the near future is mind blowing and, if producers know how to incorporate them into everyday farm management practices and act on the results, the potential to improve flock productivity is massive.”

Anthony said underpinning the project was the opportunity for him to act as a “coach” to a team of producers.

“We are all learning as we go and they are learning just as much from each other as they do from me and I’m learning from them exactly how to apply these tools for benefit in a busy farming enterprise,” he said.

“In turn these producers then encourage their neighbours and other producers to take on these technologies, which has whole industry benefits.”

How does it work?

The group of producers (seven from NSW, four from WA and two from Victoria) will measure the performance of their commercial nucleus breeding ewes using eID, pregnancy scanning, Pedigree MatchMaker, Smart Shepherd and/or DNA recording, with weighing and condition scoring of the ewes and weighing of their lambs at important times.

Anthony is also exploring ways of recording data on the performance of the ewe’s progeny.

“What we are looking for is the most efficient ewe. Not just the ones who carry multiple lambs but those who raise them to weaning with good weight gain, year after year, and are highly efficient at feed conversion,” he said.

“If we can have a ewe who does all that and weighs only 50kgs, then she is more valuable than one which weighs 80kgs. It all comes back to carrying capacity which means \$/DSE/HA.

“Essentially we can rank commercial ewes on what they yield in progeny live body weight.

“A 50kg ewe weaning a 30kg lamb is much more efficient than an 80kg ewe weaning that same 30kg lamb.”

Through the Producer Innovation Fast-Track program, Anthony has connected with Smart Shepherd, a new eID/ Blue Tooth tag system developed for pedigree identification shortly after the birth of a lamb. Smart Shepherd has been involved in an MLA Donor Company-funded research project and Anthony is talking to the company about rolling it out across his project.

For more information visit www.sheepmatters.com.au

About Producer Innovation Fast-Track

Producer Innovation Fast-Track is an initiative developed by MLA Donor Company (MDC) to enable producers to be actively involved in driving the innovation agenda. This program identifies the industry trailblazers and provides the support and expertise required to build their innovation capability.

An evolving pilot program, Producer Innovation Fast-Track is designed to accelerate the development and adoption of innovation and capability that have the potential to significantly improve farm and value chain performance. It provides the expertise, co-funding and support to producers who are innovators, early adopters, AgTech entrepreneurs or future value chain leaders.

Further information

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