

merino INC. newsletter

From the chairman...

Any gathering of merino farmers this autumn has produced discussion of the same key issues, generally ranked as follows:

- The vagaries of the climate
- Returns for wool and meat
- Mulesing

The climate is beyond our control, and wool and meat returns require the intervention of higher authorities than I to make our businesses more robust. However, I am qualified to comment on animal welfare and the practice of surgical mulesing.

It is timely to reflect on what, if any, developments have occurred since mulesing was catapulted into the media circus by PETA in November 2005, and where we as growers now find ourselves.

I believe we face three options, depending on the time frame under consideration.

Short term

Continue the current practice, but with pain relief either pre- or post-operation. This option does not, however, reduce the risk of repercussions from the market place. The practice remains visually graphic and unacceptable. Voluntarily cease mulesing by 2010.

Medium term

Use alternative forms of breech modification, forms that we all hope will be commercially available by 2010.

Long term

Breed merinos that will not require breech modification.

Contrary to strongly expressed views held within the industry and by Tasman-hopping sheep classers, breeding such animals need not reduce the wool cut. We need a more positive attitude from the stud industry than that currently voiced by many of our stud breeders. Although for generations we have selected to increase wool coverage, within all flocks there are animals that perform above the average and can be managed without mulesing. As growers we must put buying pressure on the stud industry, and accept that there may be slower genetic gains for production when another selection criterion is introduced.

The long term approach of selecting cleaner breech sheep is the most positive way of countering the mulesing issue on farm, but in the interim we need to retain some form of breech management. This includes analgesics with surgical mulesing and chemical mulesing.

Many of us have ceased mulesing and are struggling to manage the result. Regardless, there are many properties which do not/have never mulesed,

and understandably these farmers are questioning why their businesses should be put at risk by growers who refuse to acknowledge that mulesing is not an acceptable practice in the 21st century.

The pressure for change is coming from every direction: merino growers; the wider New Zealand sheep industry; the fibre market; animal welfare activists; international retailers and consumers and the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. We cannot ignore the signals; we must embrace new technology as well as actively breed for sheep that can be farmed without breech modification.

We need to alter the mind-set from "it's impossible" to "anything's possible...how do we do it".



Ross Beech

Biella Merino Ambassadors

New Zealand Biella Merino Ambassadors Paul Ensor and Christina Perriam are back in New Zealand after three weeks of fibre, fabric and fashion in Biella, the woolen milling district near Milan in Italy.

The pair discovered that the Italians are passionate and knowledgeable about wool, and they have come away confident in the industry's future in that country.

Paul explains that like many in the industry he had some concerns that traditional Italian companies could lose out to the ever-increasing processing giant China. However, his trip has convinced him of the opposite.

"The amount of large capital investment in plant and buildings reassured me that the Italians believe that the industry has a strong future there. A number of companies are looking to move or increase the level of production of luxury fabrics to improve the viability of their businesses.

"It was interesting to learn that generally the Italians see China as an opportunity rather than a threat, because wealthy Asians and Indians

want Italian made suits or fabric as it is seen as superior in every aspect."

Christina "loved every minute of her trip" and says the highlight was gaining an understanding of what "made in Italy" really means.

"I gained a true understanding of what quality means to the Italian people and how they place great importance on every element in the supply chain. To produce the highest quality cloth in the world they need the best wools in the world. They're looking for wool which is contamination free and consistent."

The Biella Young Merino Ambassador Programme was funded by Meat & Wool New Zealand (M&WNZ), Merino Inc and the Otago and Canterbury Merino Associations. It was organised



Christina Perriam and Paul Ensor with Stefano Trabaldo Togna. Trabaldo Togna S.p.A. is a world leader in fine and medium-fine fabric production. The mill is run by the fifth generation of the Trabaldo family; Stefano, Luca and Elisabetta.

by Merino Inc and The New Zealand Merino Company. The aim of the programme is to strengthen New Zealand's relationship with the Italian textile industry. The four Italian Biella students that Paul and Christina worked with on their trip will visit New Zealand in September.

Leadership

The issue of developing future leaders within the industry was raised at last year's Merino Grower Forum and was discussed again at a meeting between Regional Associations (RAs) and the Board of Merino Inc in February.

Currently, Merino Inc fosters leadership through the Biella Scholarship programme and support for Young Merino Groups. We have also agreed to actively research agricultural scholarships and leadership programmes and (with the help of Regional Associations) identify growers we feel should consider such training for their own business and personal

growth and for the skills we feel they can offer the industry.

Probably the most effective programme identified to date is the Rural Leaders Development Programme. This NZQA accredited programme grew out of the Young Farmers' Clubs and comprises nine one-day workshops over a nine-month period. Courses are run in each region and cost around \$300. The modules include communication, strategic planning and team building.

For more information go to www.taratahi-ag.ac.nz or contact Anna Heslop at Merino Inc.

For those who already have a degree of leadership experience, the following programmes may be of interest:

Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme
www.events.lincoln.ac.nz/kelloggs

Nuffield Scholarships
www.nuffield.org.nz

FAME (Food and Agribusiness Marketing Experience)
www.fame.ac.nz

New Zealand Merino – A Functional Fabric

Runners wearing merino fabric can benefit from extra comfort and prolonged endurance. This is just one of the findings of the Functional Fabrics research programme which has been presented at international trade shows in recent months.

The project, which was completed last year, developed and applied methods of testing the performance of Merino-based outdoor active wear over synthetic equivalents.

Trials showed that runners wearing merino vs synthetic gear maintained a lower heart rate for longer (in hot and cold conditions) and took longer to begin sweating.

The New Zealand Merino Company (NZM) and Designer Textiles International (DTI) have presented the study's findings at outdoor trade shows in the USA and Europe, and NZM Marketing Manager Gretchen

Kane says the response was overwhelmingly positive.

The Functional Fabrics project was funded by Merino Inc and TBG. NZM undertook the project and research was carried out by the University of Otago.

An extended summary will be sent to growers in the near future.

NZWCA Classer Training

In line with the expectations of its members, the New Zealand Wool Classers Association (NZWCA) is organising industry-led "Back to Basics" refresher days for wool classers and senior wool handlers in Dunedin and Napier.

NZWCA Executive Officer Mike Gourdie says the board has been working towards a united classer refresher day for all breed sectors since its inception.

"The idea is to inform classers and handlers of the latest market analysis and trends and remind them of the basic principles of wool preparation to achieve maximum returns for growers."

The southern refresher day will be held at the Southern Rugby Clubrooms in South Dunedin, on 11 May. The NZWCA's first AGM, including election of officers, will be held during the lunch break.

The northern event will be held at the Elders Primary Woolstore in Napier on 1 May. It will include a shearing and handling demonstration and a visit to a wool scour to assess at first hand the issues faced by processors here and overseas.

Current or intending members of NZWCA are welcome to either event. To register phone Mike Gourdie, NZWCA, 03 353 9299.

Wool Industry Network

WIN is calling for comment on its Wool Sector Strategy Discussion Document "A Catalyst for Change".

The paper considers marketing, science and leadership for all sectors of the New Zealand wool industry. It is available from their website www.woolnetworknz.com or by phoning Gill Happer on 03 357 0690.

Johnes disease

A multi-industry consortium has submitted a research proposal aiming to bring all New Zealand based Johnes research into one \$2 M/annum research programme.

Richard Templer, Meat and Wool New Zealand's General Manager of Research and Development, says Johnes can cause significant productivity losses and is also recognised as a potential market access barrier for red meat exports. The bid, which is currently being considered by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST) will focus on four areas:

- Developing a vaccine that doesn't cause lesions or cross-react with Tb
- Flock and herd management techniques to eliminate spread
- Improved diagnostics
- Genetic resistance

The bid has been put together by M&WNZ, the Deer and Dairy industries, the Meat Industry Association, Otago and Massey Universities, AgResearch, Dairy Companies of New Zealand and Livestock Improvement Corporation. The group is chaired by Mark O'Connor of Deer Industry New Zealand. FRST's funding decision should be out by the end of April.

Merino NZ inc.

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Marlborough events

The dust was flying along Marlborough’s rural roads last month as merino growers from both sides of the Tasman headed for the hills to view seven merino studs and 11 ewe hogget flocks.

The event, sponsored by Blenheim Toyota for the 10th time, drew up to 90 people to each of the properties, a fantastic result for Marlborough Merino Assn. Chairman Marty Westenra and his organising committee.

“We achieved what we set out to do. We got people together and discussing a whole range of issues from body conformation to wool nourishment. The judges comments reinforced the various competitors’ decisions and I’m sure there was a take home message for everyone, no matter how different their properties and flocks.”

Results of 2-tooth ewe flock competition:

Judges — Michael Collins: Linton, Victoria; Bob Brown, Lake Coleridge.



The issue of wool nourishment led to close investigation of fleeces during the ewe competition.

1st Aschworth — Tim & Sally Wadworth

2nd Awapiri — Graham, Bev, Duncan & Michelle Black

3rd Blairich — Ron & Sue Small

Most Improved 2007 : The Bounds — Harry, Jan, Simon & Jane Fowler

Conformation: Middlehurst — Willie & Sue MacDonald

Wool Quantity : Blairich

Wool Quality: Blairich

NB Marlborough Regional Association AGM, Friday 11 May, 4.00pm at The Blenheim Club.

Merino Excellence Awards

The Otago Regional Association’s Merino Excellence Awards will be held at the Skyline Gondola & Restaurant in Queenstown, 15 June 2007.

The event’s new title recognises the addition of a new class in the awards, The Merino Production Award. Organiser and Otago Chairman Andrew Sutherland says The Merino Production Award will look at farm wide returns, not just one class of animal. The winner of the Cancer Fleece competition will also be announced during the awards as will the winner of the Clip of the Year.

The closing date for entries is 30th April. Contact the secretary Kylie Strain, 03 409 2222 or kylie@administrationhq.co.nz for further information.

Fibre Select (formerly Classer Select) will be held in Queenstown on 15 June to co-incide with the Merino Excellence Awards. Run by The New Zealand Merino Company (NZM), Fibre Select is open to classers, growers and leading hands. No charge for attendance. Contact Jo at NZM, 03 377 7990.

Merino Inc Directory

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