

merino INC. newsletter

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From the chairman ...

AGM

Merino Inc's recent AGM showed strong industry presence and support, with M&WENZ endorsing the role Inc plays in representing merino growers and pursuing merino related research and development projects.

Mike Petersen introduced the Board and CEO for the recently established Wool Industry Network (WIN), and spoke on its role. WIN is still in the

very early stages of development and we look forward with interest to see the focus of their investment.

Geoff Mavromatis, departing Inc appointed Director, was formally farewelled at the AGM. The rule change that Directors be appointed by their respective Regional Associations rather than voted in was addressed and passed.

The Merino Inc Board for the 2006/07 year is unchanged:

- | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|
| Chairman | Ross Beech |
| Vice Chair | Tom Rowley |
| Directors | Simon Cameron,
Brian Hansen |

The year ahead will see a continuation of existing project work, plus scoping growers and the industry for opportunities that could require investment from levy funds.



Merino Inc Board and Staff

Top left: Simon Cameron, Claire Mulcock (R&D manager), Tom Rowley, Graeme Brown (financial manager). Bottom left: Anna Heslop (communications manager), Ross Beech, Allison Brook (administration), Brian Hansen.

Forum follow-up

Representatives from Merino Inc, MGIL and The New Zealand Merino Company (NZM) have met since the NZM Conference to discuss the outcomes of our April Grower Forum (notes from which have been circulated to all growers). The principle objective of the meeting was to look forward, and identify the roles for the respective bodies so that they can co-operate to maximise opportunities for the entire merino industry.

We eagerly anticipate an early spring, followed by strong demand for merino!

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Seed contamination of wool, pelts and carcasses

Research into the problem of seed contamination of wool, pelts and carcasses has been extended for a further three years and researchers from Lincoln University are looking for merino properties to carry out further trials.

Alan Marshall at Lincoln University began the study in spring 2004, and his discovery that Ripgut brome was the only seed responsible for carcass contamination surprised many who had always assumed barley grass was to blame.

Having identified the seed causing the problem, Alan began a scoping trial to look at the effect of shearing lambs soon after weaning on later carcass contamination. The results from this limited trial look promising and appear to support the findings of similar Australian work.

Alan says the new research project has two key objectives: finding out more about Ripgut brome and fully or more extensively investigating the shearing effect, hopefully including the economics of such a practice. Farmer help is required for both.

"To learn more about Ripgut brome we hope to survey farms in Otago, Canterbury and Marlborough this coming spring.

We're interested in pasture species composition and the brome's location in terms of aspect and altitude as well as any differences between improved and unimproved country. Individual property information will go back to the farmer and we will then ask farmers if they have problems with carcass contamination and discuss management techniques.

"We'll also need properties from Marlborough and Otago to carry out a study of the shearing effect. This will involve 100 male lambs from each property, with half being shorn at weaning and half later as is traditional. We're interested in three things here: first, will early shearing reduce carcass contamination, second, will it affect liveweight gain and carcass weight and third, what effect will it have on wool length and value at the next shearing."

The new research programme is funded by Meat & Wool New Zealand, the Sustainable Farming Fund and Lincoln University, and managed by Merino Inc. Anyone interested in taking part can contact Alan Marshall at the Field Services Centre, Lincoln University, 03 325 3838, 0274 329 399 or E-mail marshala@lincoln.

Classers' Association Update

The New Zealand Wool Classers' Association (NZWCA) has now been registered as an incorporated society and an interim board has been appointed.

Chairman Graeme Bell says the NZWCA has a range of responsibilities relating to organizational structure, promotion and development, recognition, skills, quality, education, standards, liaison, activities, strategies and focus. The board is currently looking at Classer Association rules, Professional Development and Training and a revision of the Code of Practice.

Graeme wants to remind members that their input is required to make the new association work.

"We need paid up members who are prepared to put their hands up, to speak up and to take part. As professional people we have a responsibility to maintain standards and be proud to put our registration number on our bales."

He says industry representatives have offered their full support and assistance in undertaking skills audits both for the purposes of registration and in following up any complaints made to the Registrar about classing standards.

"They believe that most complaints can be settled amicably without reference to NZWCA. All agreed on the importance of ongoing monitoring of classers work as a means of maintaining high standards in the profession."

NZWCA members are: Graeme Bell (Chairman), Alan Gallagher (acting Secretary), Allan Frazer (Meat & Wool New Zealand), Peter McCusker (Wool Brokers Association), Barbara Newton, Martin Paterson, Brian Jephson and David Carr. The appointment of an Executive Officer will be announced very soon.

Life membership for Lyn Finch

Former Merino Inc director Lyn Finch has been made an honorary life member of the North Island Merino Association.

North Island Chairman Brian Jephson says Lyn, who joined the Association after being appointed to the original Inc board in 1997, has done so much for the industry "it's hard to recall".

"Lyn brought a wealth of knowledge, especially in the commercial area, and she really shone during the mid-late 1990s when the merino price plummeted. It was at this time that she instigated contracts with end-users such as Glengyle. The contracts she developed then are pretty much the

blueprints for the current ones used by the New Zealand Merino company."

Lyn retired from the Merino Inc board in 2004 and we wish her well as she divides her time between her homes in Nelson and D'Urville Island.

Cold tolerance gene aids lamb survival

Lincoln University scientists Dr Rachel Forrest and Dr Jon Hickford, with Merino Inc funding and industry support, have identified a sheep gene that influences heat generation in response to cold stress, and farmers can now access this technology to improve lamb survival rates.

Dr Jon Hickford who led the programme says that depending on which form of the cold tolerance gene (called an allele) they carry, lambs will have improved survival

"About 7% of merino sheep carry a particularly bad form of this gene and their lambs are more likely to die of exposure. To help combat this, we have identified a genetic marker which allows farmers, especially stud breeders to test their stock and select for cold tolerance. Our initial aim is to eliminate the 'worst' form of the gene from stud stock in New Zealand. We are confident that doing this will not adversely compromise wool weights or other important productivity factors."

The testing procedure involves sending sheep blood samples to the Lincoln University Gene-Marker Test Laboratory where animals receive a tolerance

grade of A, B or C. A is the most desirable grade and C the least. This coding system promotes a conservative approach to selecting for cold-tolerance by focusing on removing sheep with "bad" cold tolerance genetics rather than selecting for sheep with "good" tolerance.

Dr Hickford says the test will improve the accuracy of selecting for cold tolerance and increase the speed of genetic gain, as sheep can be DNA typed from birth and therefore preferentially selected at an earlier age. While a number of breeding strategies can be employed, he recommends breeders should:

- Use the test predominantly on existing and potential sires, which have greater genetic influence on flocks than ewes.
- Remove sires with poor progeny survival rates at the first practical opportunity regardless of their cold-tolerance gene-marker results. (Some animals with good cold-tolerance gene-marker results still produce lambs with poor cold-tolerance because of other inherent faults such as insufficient birth coat).

- Increase the rate of genetic gain within flocks by selecting replacement ewes that have been sired by rams with "good" cold-tolerance.

However, he says good genetics will not save all lambs.

"The percentage of lambs that will die from cold exposure from a single sire will vary depending on numerous factors, including the severity of the cold challenge and the genetics of the ewe. Also, if lambs are not in good condition, they will not have the fat reserves required to convert into heat. Thus ewe nutrition and health are very important in ensuring that lambs are born with adequate fat reserves and have plenty of milk to drink."

If you are interested in cold tolerance testing, please contact Dr Hickford's group at Lincoln University, Ph 325 2811 Ext 8144 and they will send out a testing kit and further information.

Merino farmers qualify for a discounted testing price in recognition of Merino Inc's funding and the support provided to the project by merino farmers.

Young Farmer Group expansion

The successful Young Merino Group run by Graeme Ogle in the Otago, Waitaki and Mackenzie areas has reached the end of its funding life, but those involved are keen to see it continue. Its success has also resulted in plans for a similar group to be set up in Marlborough.

Graeme, who facilitated farm tours and meetings with the group three times a year says the project has highlighted just how keen the

members are to fill in information and technology gaps.

"At present we are investigating funding and management options for the group so that it can continue. The aim of the group is to access information and build the knowledge required to develop a 10-year property plan. New members are welcome and should contact Doug Brown 03 445 1215.

Young Merino Group for Marlborough?

Meanwhile, anyone interested in joining a Marlborough Young Merino Group is invited to a meeting at the Redwood Tavern, 7.30pm Friday 18 August. For further information contact Simon Harvey, 03 575 7361.

Merino NZ inc.

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Mulesing alternatives getting closer

Breech and tail clips will be tested on Australian farms this year giving growers an opportunity to gauge their effectiveness first-hand.

AWI Project Manager for blowfly control, Ms Jules Dorrian says the clips have been developed after extensive trial work with farmers and contractors and the intention is to have them commercially available next year.

"Trials have shown conclusively that breech clips can achieve similar results to surgical mulesing, but with less stress and better growth rates in treated lambs. Farmers selected by AWI to test the new clips will be

fully trained and supported by AWI throughout the testing process."

Additional trials are exploring the possibility of removing the clips after 14 days so they can be reused from one season to the next and testing a range of biodegradable materials to be used for the clip.

Merino growers and The New Zealand Merino Company representatives who attended the World Congress in Perth last month have reported back on demonstrations of the clips, and we will be following the AWI trials with interest. New Zealand trials may be considered in the future.

Meanwhile, Bayer has announced that it will be distributing a mulesing anaesthetic in Australia and internationally. Tri-Solfen® was developed by Dr Meredith Sheil, a Sydney paediatrician who also owns a sheep farm in New South Wales.

Dr Sheil says spraying Tri-Solfen onto the wound immediately after mulesing provides extended pain relief, helps to prevent blood loss and improves healing.

This article has been compiled from information in the Australian Wool and Sheep Industry Taskforce e-letter. For further information go to: www.woolisbest.com.

New Zealand-Biella Merino Ambassador

"Sharing our passion for merino"

Merino Inc is seeking a young merino ambassador to travel to the Biella fibre and fabric manufacturing region of Italy early next year.

The trip, which is funded by M&WENZ, involves three weeks stay in Biella, studying the production processes which convert top quality New Zealand merino fleeces into high quality yarns for high fashion customers.

Italy is still recognised as the world's most influential manufacturer of technical and design-led fabrics using natural fibres, especially fine merino.

The Biella scholarship is a new development in the relationship between the New Zealand merino industry and the Master of the Noble Fibre Foundation in Italy. Each year we host a small group of Italian Master of the Noble Fibre scholars, teaching them about our merino industry and allowing them to spend some time on high country merino properties so they can truly understand the New Zealand merino experience. Now, thanks to this funding from M&WENZ we are able to send someone from New Zealand to learn more about the Italian processing sector.

The aim of our scholarship is to continue building and strengthening New Zealand's relationship with the Italian textile industry and to cultivate future leaders for the New Zealand merino industry by exposing them to the infrastructure of that industry. It also provides an opportunity to forge new links between the future leaders of the Italian and New Zealand merino sectors.

Applications are open to any young person involved in the merino industry from on-farm to merino specific retail, and close on Friday 8 September. Application forms can be obtained from www.merinoinc.co.nz or by contacting Merino Inc on 03 365 0881.

Directory

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