

merino INC. newsletter

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Message from the chairman...

The Merino Inc Board was extremely heartened by the 'club' spirit and unity of merino growers as proved by the level of support from growers and the industry at our 2007 AGM, with 50 growers and industry personnel in attendance.

Points to note from the AGM:

1. The Inc Board remains the same, with the re-appointment of Tom Rowley [Otago] and Simon Cameron [McKenzie/Waitaki]
2. Inc staff and office remain the same
3. The Inc Board's policy of maintaining reserves was realised
4. Advocacy for merino growers has always been important, but is now a major role for the Inc Board. Regional representation on the Board and strong ties to the Regional Associations are the vehicle for growers' views to the Inc. Board.

The Merino Inc Board met with MGIL to air governance issues and the roles of the respective Boards, and also facilitated a meeting between MGIL and the Regional Associations' Chairs. I recommend that the MGIL and Inc Boards and the Regional Chairs in

future meet annually, around the time of the Inc AGM, as the discussions that developed were of considerable value to all parties.

As a consequence of these meetings in July, the Inc Board has conveyed several recommendations to the MGIL Board for their consideration.

The profile of Merino in the community is encouraging, yet we are regularly reminded that in real terms, the value of our fibre has declined. When researching areas of investment, your Board must question where lies the greatest opportunity to address the viability of our merino business. The answer has to be in areas that enable us to capture a greater more equitable share of the value of our fibre.

On farm technology research continues to be important, but without an economically sustainable business its usefulness wanes significantly.

It was with dismay I read a recent statement that "picking what the [wool] market is going to do over the next 12 months ... is to a degree like picking what the dollar is going to do.....".

This statement is not much different to that we used to hear from brokers in the 'olden days', suggesting to me that the spot market commodity price is still the main driver for merino wool price rather than production-to-retail costs/returns.

We have had 11 years of investment and dedicated commitment to excellence by growers and staff of Merino Inc and the NZ Merino Company; we have made strides in connecting with all the parties in the chain from merino sheep through to end user of our wool; we have the possibility of contracts for a portion of our clips. However, it seems to me that the former commodity mentality continues to permeate the entire industry.

Growers, Merino Inc, MGIL and the NZ Merino Co must keep the focus on improving returns to growers, by developing the shortest possible chain to market — this means more contracts, fewer auction-based sales, and getting closer to our customers. We must build on what has already been done.

Ross Beech

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Sharing our passion for merino

Merino Inc has just farewelled four students from the Master of the Noble Fibre programme in Biella, Italy. They spent 10 days learning all they could about the New Zealand merino industry.

A highlight for this year's students was the opportunity to visit the families of Paul Ensor, Christina Perriam and Gretchen Kane who studied with them in Biella earlier this year.

They also met with staff from Meat and Wool New Zealand, The New Zealand Merino Company and Merino Inc to learn about the wool industry in New Zealand, and spent a day at AgResearch learning about textile research and production.

The visit was funded by M&WNZ and organised by Merino Inc, who hope to send two more New Zealand Merino Ambassadors to Biella in 2009.



Marco Masiero, Giampaolo Ciarnelli, Elisa Bellini and Tommaso Becca at AgResearch Lincoln.

Out-competing ripgut brome

Ripgut brome surveys on high country merino properties in Marlborough, Canterbury and Central Otago are yielding interesting results on the weed's distribution and habits.

A research team led by Dr Grant Edwards from Lincoln University found the weed growing under a range of management conditions and at altitudes ranging from 400 to 1400 m. However they confirmed it was more common under lax grazing; on stock camps; on sunny aspects; and where there was a lower perennial grass cover (ie ripgut brome declined with increasing perennial grass cover).

Ripgut brome was unaffected by legume cover, shrub presence or altitude. It was often not present in lightly grazed or understocked paddocks at high altitudes, possibly because it had not yet spread to those regions via stock movement, machinery, etc.

Based on findings from this survey, it appears that increased grazing pressure (but not overgrazing) and competition from perennial grasses may help to suppress ripgut brome in localised areas of high country properties, in particular on stock camps and dry, sunny slopes. This theory is supported by results from California, where ripgut brome is also a problem in extensively grazed pastures, and where increasing grazing intensity successfully reduced its prevalence.

Salt is another potential control tool. Dr Edwards' group is currently investigating the effects of late autumn and early spring salt applications in combination with herbicides and oversowing, on ripgut brome populations. Spring measurements of seedhead production will be used to assess the effectiveness of these treatments.

Cessation of Mulesing Project

Merino Inc has received further funding from the Sustainable Farming Fund to extend The Cessation of Mulesing Project. The money is being used to set up on-farm trials to measure the impact of potential flystrike management techniques.

The first two focus farms are Bog Roy (David and Lisa Anderson) and Redcliffs (Willy and Sarah Ensor) where pasture species trials will be sown in the next few weeks. Two further properties will join the Focus Farm project and we are hoping that these will be stud breeders which will enable us to investigate some issues around genetics and breeding.

Information-line: If you have any queries about this programme or any issues related to the cessation of mulesing please contact Dave Maslen 03 377 7990 who will direct you to the appropriate expert.

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Plain bodied merinos make sense

Dr David Scobie, AgResearch

Despite 75 years of research on the topic, the debate about the merits (or not) of plain versus wrinkly Merinos continues. What do the following scientifically proven results suggest to you?

- Wrinkly sheep are more likely to suffer flystrike
- Wrinkles reduce fertility of rams and ewes
- Wrinkles reduce fecundity
- Wrinkles reduce growth rates
- Wrinkles increase wool yellowness/ reduce clean yield
- The wool on the wrinkles is coarser in fibre diameter and longer in length than the wool on the skin in between.
- Wrinkly sheep are 20% slower to shear
- Wrinkly sheep are 20% less likely to rear a lamb
- Wrinkly sheep produce ribby pelts

To me the message is clear: wrinkly sheep are less productive and harder to manage. But what can be done about it? A lot actually, and it needn't take too long either.

Wrinkle is a heritable trait...about 30% heritable. This means 30% of the wrinkliness of an animal comes from its parents. (Compare this to the heritability of fibre diameter 41% and fleece weight which around 25% in New Zealand Merinos.) Breeding plainer animals can be done relatively quickly because a) the trait is highly heritable and b) unlike fleece quality, wrinkle is obvious from birth, allowing early culling of unwanted animals.

Bindi Thomson in Western Australia has just published a paper reinforcing these findings. She selected a line of sheep free of wrinkles, dags, urine stain and yellow wool. These animals were 60% less likely to suffer flystrike. They were also a kilogram heavier as hoggets than a control flock of wrinkly, daggy, mulesed ones.

Many growers fear that selecting for reduced wrinkles will erode all the progress made in fleece weight and quality. In fact, the correlation between fleece weight and wrinkles is weak (-0.05) which means that selecting for one does not have much affect on the other. In this case we want to decrease wrinkles which will decrease flystrike and increase clean fleece weight.

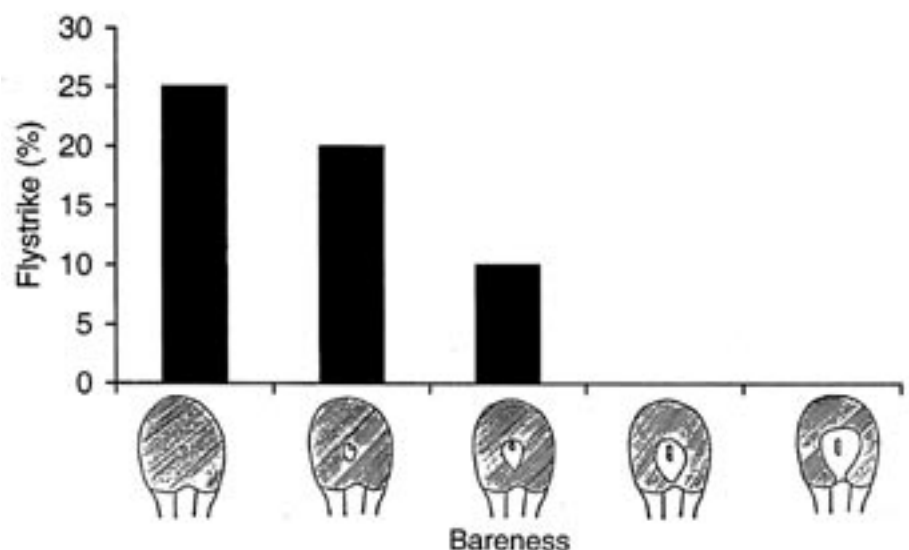
In 1974 Barlow showed that selection for fleece weight did not change the wrinkling of the skin, and conversely, that selection for reduced wrinkles did not dramatically decrease fleece weight. He also showed that apart from reducing yellowness (increasing yield through reduced grease), reducing wrinkle did not change the character, handle or architecture of the fleece.

I am now involved in research into bare backsides — another heritable trait. See graph below. Three research

groups in Australia are repeating our work and coming up with similar results. We estimate heritability to be around 36%, while some estimates from South Australia are as high as 46%. Bareness is easily spotted in weaned lambs, once again allowing for quick selection. Don't forget, it needs to be quick, because the lambs you select this year will have lambs of their own in 2009 and those will be the last lot before 2010!

What all this boils down to is the fact that breeding for flystrike resistance and improved wool quality is possible and it won't take 20 years! All that is required is some positive decision making by growers and stud breeders and some faith in science.

Please contact me if you want further references for any of the points I make in this article:
david.scobie@agresearch.co.nz or
03 321 8688.



The effect of increasing bareness of the breech on the proportion of lambs that became flystruck.

Merino NZ inc.

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Inc Updates

- Inc and The New Zealand Merino Company have produced four fact sheets to answer most of the questions we get about the merino industry. They're suitable for overseas visitors, media backgrounders, school projects etc. The two farm based ones were prepared by Inc and the two processing ones by NZM. Find them on our website or contact Allison Brook at our office for copies.
- Communications Manager Anna Heslop has (with heavy heart) resigned, effective end of September. Claire Mulcock will deal with communication issues until a replacement is appointed.

Leadership planning for the merino industry

Leadership issues generated a lot of discussion at the pre-AGM meeting of Merino Inc and Regional Association delegates.

Recognising that the next generation of industry leaders will require training, support and encouragement, Inc is looking to develop a three step plan to work at three levels of the industry: 'young' merino; growers; existing officer holders at Regional Assn level considering moving up the line and directors.

A range of training and development options were discussed, with the Regional Associations indicating a preference for programmes such as the Kelloggs Rural Leadership Programme which provide the opportunity to develop a network of similarly minded rural leaders while researching a relevant industry issue.

The Kelloggs Programme has no academic prerequisites, so is open to all whether or they have degrees or left school without qualifications to work on the farm. What they look for in selection is community and industry involvement and two referees.

Until Merino Inc finalises its leadership policy, we are happy to support applicants to such programmes by acting as referees, and, depending on number of applicants and fees, by subsidizing costs.

A little nudge here to some of the women involved in this industry. If you know as much about your property and business as your partner, why not take the next step and consider taking on a larger role in industry affairs at a regional level?

Wool Research Scholarships

Meat & Wool New Zealand is currently advertising one undergraduate and one post-graduate scholarship for wool research.

If there's a bright school leaver in your family, they might be interested in the prestigious Wool Research Organisation of New Zealand Undergraduate International Scholarship. This scholarship, for study in textile science and technology at an approved overseas university, covers tuition and accommodation for up to four years.

Or, if you know someone who already has a good degree and is interested in post-graduate study, the New Zealand Wool Industry Charitable Trust and Wool Research Organisation of New Zealand PhD Scholarship could be of interest.

This PhD is expected to focus on post farm-gate research, and scholars will be selected on their academic ability, commitment to their course of study and to the wool industry and their ability to work as a team player.

A focus of the scholarship is to support research at the AgResearch Lincoln Research Centre, however consideration will be given to applications for study at other appropriate New Zealand organisations including universities.

For further information about either of these scholarships please contact: Allan Frazer, 04 473 9150 allan.frazer@meatandwoolnz.com

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