

AMS rams attract buyers

THREE Springs farmer Craig Morgan's AMS Merino rams have attracted clients from as far south as Broomehill and Esperance, as far north as Northampton, and as far east as Keith, South Australia, for their bright, white wools and big, plain-bodied rams.

Craig farms with wife Jocelyn and parents Ray and Lorraine Morgan on the family's 5000 hectare property, Neearra.

The Morgan's farming program consists of 70 per cent crop, 18pc Merinos and 12pc Shorthorn cattle.

Craig and his family mate 1800 Merino ewes, consisting of 1000 ewes in the nucleus flock and 800 in the commercial flock.

"In our flock we have about 15 different mobs that are all single-sire mated," he said.

"Each year the different ewe mobs get moved along to the next sire.

"With the sires used, if there is a son better than the sire, then we use him otherwise we continue to use the sire for another year."

If the sires aren't performing to the Morgan family's high standards, they will be cull.

Craig breeds his own rams, but would look at any sires with the right ASBVs to bring in new genetics.

"Our aim is to breed highly profitable sheep and for us that is a good sized, plain bodied, easy care Merino with a fine micron, very high fertility and low worm egg counts," Craig said.

The Morgan family made the decision to start wool testing their ewes about 20 years ago.

The move to monitor their wool paid off for the Morgan family, with their flock now averaging 18 to 18.5 microns.

The sheep are shorn in April, and the ewes lamb in July and August.

The rams are joined to the ewes for four weeks which makes it easier to handle the flock; the lambs can be weaned earlier and ewes have more of a break between joinings.

The single sire mating program is set at an average of 80 ewes to one ram, however, flocks range from 60 to 120 ewes. The ram put to the 120 ewes achieved 118 lambs at marking.

In the commercial flock, the rams are joined to the ewes at 2pc.

Their fertility averages 100pc, in the single sire matings some groups achieving 120pc.

Craig enters data into MerinoSelect each year, and all of the Morgan's sheep have an ASBV.

"It's a valuable tool, to get a genetic value as opposed to environmental expression," he said.

"We measure all the traditional wool characteristics including length and strength, staple strength, weaning weight, yearling weight, yearling muscle and fat scans and WECs when enough eggs can be found. (The adult ewes haven't been drenched for several years.)

"In the last couple of years wrinkle score and dag score have been added."



■ Craig Morgan with a selection of his sheep

Craig is satisfied with the type of Merino his family have produced.

"We have a naturally large animal, we don't want to go any bigger or smaller," Craig said.

"We're very happy with what we've got, the emphasis is on increasing yield, increasing staple strength, reducing WECs and keeping a plain body."

The Morgan family cull wrinkle sheep, poor wool colour and any flystruck sheep.

Lambs haven't been mulesed for the last two years. Being hard on feet in the past has delivered a flock of sheep with excellent feet now. The ewes are run on sandplain country so feet problems show up easily.

The Morgan family's ram selection process is also very stringent.

"We start off with 450 ram lambs tagged, as hoggets about 300 are selected to be measured with 80 to 100 of those being sold to clients," Craig said.

"So the pressure is very high and

the rams selected in the 100 – 125 ranking would still be in the top 25pc of lambs born."

Apart from, the flock's excellent wool characteristics, the true dual purpose attributes of the Merino are illustrated in the meat prices they have received.

The last of the Morgan family's cull lambs went on a truck on Monday.

Craig said he has received prices ranging from a top of \$106 to \$80, but so far they've averaged around \$90 this year.

Craig is hopeful for the future of the Merino industry, but concedes the drop in the state flock is a concern.

"As an industry we can breed for non-mulesing, it'll just take time, but numbers are a real issue, we are going to lose processors and competition if we can't keep the numbers up," he said.

"The recent high prices need to be the average."



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