



THE AUSTRALIAN POLL DORSET JOURNAL

VOLUME 54 / NUMBER 1

MAY 2024



Young blood

INSIDE
THIS ISSUE...



ICMJ FEEDBACK
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TAGGING LAMBS
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FULL SHOW
COVERAGE
PAGE 24-27



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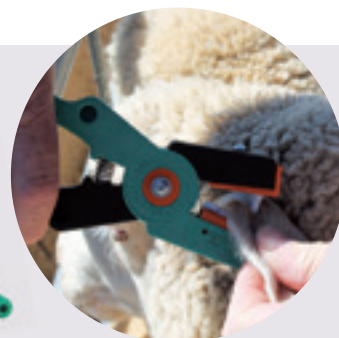
Emma Tadday, Victoria

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2024 is off to a flying start and it's hard to believe we are in April already. As I write this report much of Victoria has just experienced a good drink with the autumn break felt across many northern and central regions with some receiving up to 50mm.

At the March board meeting we welcomed new western Australian member, Brittany Bolt to the table. Brittany will be a favourable asset and brings a wealth of sheep knowledge with her. Brittany has studied Animal Science and animal health and has also been a participant of the prestigious Intercollegiate Meat Judging competition (ICMJ). She has been working as a research scientist at Katanning DPI working on her latest project of investigating individual sheep feed intake, methane production and body composition using DEXTA and correlating the relationship between these measurements. The board believes she has a lot to offer our breed.

The board will also continue to sponsor the ICMJ event in 2024. The event is to be held at the Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga from July 2-6. The purpose of the event is to educate and encourage participants into the red meat industry and with the Australian Poll Dorset Association sponsorship, a nominated board representative is invited to attend the event and also participate as a guest speaker. This will give us the opportunity to promote Poll Dorsets to the next generation of meat buyers, processors, agents, farmers, feedlot companies, and even supermarkets just to mention a few. It is opening a whole network going into the future and putting the Poll Dorset breed in the limelight. Currently Poll Dorsets are the only sheep breed sponsoring this event and this is to the breed's advantage.

The board also discussed and has decided that a Poll Dorset Conference would be most advantageous to our breed members, so this will return in February or early March 2025, with location to be either Wagga Wagga or Bendigo at this stage. If you have any suggestions for guest speakers, then please contact Margot with any requests, as the APDA office will be the overriding organiser of the event. It has been a few years since we have had the opportunity to hold this event and we anticipate it will be well supported by yourselves and a fantastic opportunity for us all to get together as one breed and enjoy each other's company and yarns.

I would also like to take this time to thank Jamie-Lee Oldfield for her tireless and dedicated work in promotions. As many of you would be aware, Jamie-Lee and husband Joe Scott welcomed the arrival of their second child in December 2023 and she has taken parental leave. We now have a new communications and journal editor, so I officially welcome Fiona Myers to the team. She brings along a wealth of industry knowledge, so we are in good stead going forward once again.

2024 sees the return of Lambex, which is going to be bigger and better. The event is to be held at the Adelaide convention centre from August 7-9. It is an industry event that I encourage you to attend if possible. The APDA hopes to have a trade display as it would be beneficial for us to be a participant at such a prestigious sheep event.

And just to remind you all that 2024 is an election year for federal council. We currently have vacant seats in South Australia, Tasmania, and Victoria, in which we hope to see members fill these positions come September. The board meets twice a year in Bendigo with smaller meetings held via zoom, where necessary.

Our breeds ram sales advertising campaign will remain the same, using the 'Punch' slogan adverts. I am hearing other breeds are quite envious of how this has been so successful. We will continue with ACM and have a stronger online advertising presence this year, and if all members share what they see online, then more exposure for Poll Dorsets.

Finally, I would like to congratulate our past president, Isabele Roberts, and the Ridgehaven team on their recent 'The Weekly Times Coles 2023 Sheep Farmer of the Year award' as the best sheep producer. This is an accolade which is well deserved for their hard work and innovation. This is also a reminder to us all that we need to be proactive in recognizing any of our Poll Dorset family or individual who is achieving remarkable things in our industry, regardless of stud size, whether they show or not, or even positions within our association. We all have the same common interest at the end of the day, and all breeders can benefit from just one member putting Poll Dorsets in the spotlight. Media coverage of such achievements also costs nothing, but it does spread the good word of Poll Dorsets nationwide.

On closing I wish you all the best for the year ahead.

Tania King
PRESIDENT



THE AUSTRALIAN POLL DORSET JOURNAL

The Australian Poll Dorset Journal is the official journal of the Australian Poll Dorset Association Inc.

President
Tania King

Vice President
Laurie Fairclough

CEO & Secretary
Margot Falconer
secretary@polldorset.org.au

Advertising Sales
Patrick Falconer
marketing@polldorset.org.au

Journal Editor
Fiona Myers
fionarmyers@gmail.com

Administration & Graphic Design
Sam Garland
samgarlanddesign@gmail.com

Address for correspondence
Australian Poll Dorset Association Inc.
Unit 1/6 Merino Court
East Bendigo, VIC 3550

Telephone: (03) 5443 9902
Fax: (03) 5443 9354
Email: secretary@polldorset.org.au
www.polldorset.org.au
ABN: 65 206 172 969

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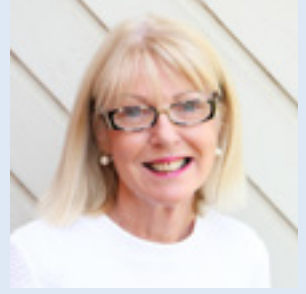
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- MAY 10-12** NSW State Sheep Show - Dubbo
- JUNE 21-22** NSW Dorset Championships - Cowra
- JUNE 23** Victorian Sheep Show - Ballarat
- JULY 19-21** Australian Sheep & Wool Show - Bendigo
- AUG 4-5** Hamilton Sheepvention
- AUG 7-9** LambEx
- AUG 10-18** Ekka Royal Queensland Show
- AUG 31- SEP 8** Royal Adelaide Show
- SEP 13-15** Australasian Dorset Championships
- SEP 21-28** Royal Perth Show
- SEP 26-OCT 6** Royal Melbourne Show
- OCT 10-12** Royal Launceston Show
- OCT 24-26** Royal Hobart Show

ACROSS THE PENS

Flock returns

By now you will have received your email to complete the Flock Return for this year or a paper copy if that is how you deal with it. Remember, we are here in the office to help if you need any assistance at all. Please have your flock return completed by June 1 so the \$50 late fee does not apply.



March board meeting

You will find the motions passed at the recently held APDA Board meeting in this issue. The board has also decided to hold an APDA National conference in the first quarter of next year so stay tuned for more information as it comes to hand. The likely venue will be Wagga.

Australian Dorset Championships

If you are attending the Australian Dorset Championships in Bendigo this year, the office will have a help desk set up to assist with transfers and registrations. More information on that will be sent closer to the event.

Social Media/Facebook

We are hoping to expand our social media offering and ask that if any of you have drone footage that you are happy to share, please send into the office to secretary@polldorset.org.au

Sale Dates

Please also send your sale dates and results in as they happen so that we may publish them on the website and if timely in the Journal.



AUSTRALASIAN DORSET CHAMPIONSHIPS
FRIDAY 13th - SUNDAY 15th SEPTEMBER 2024
 Prince of Wales Showgrounds - Holmes Road, Bendigo
 Judging from 1pm Friday. Ram Sale 1.30pm Sunday



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FURTHER DETAILS

PHONE: Ian Furze 03 5444 4646
 EMAIL: secretary@bendigoshowgrounds.com.au
 WEBSITE: www.bendigoshow.org.au/australasian-dorset-championships



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PROMOTIONS REPORT

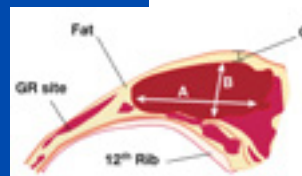
For 2024 we are looking to support our members in the many activities that they are involved in across the country.

Most excitingly, a Poll Dorset Conference in early 2025! After all the disruption and disjointedness of the last few years, we want to get together and renew old friendships and meet some of our new members. We are looking forward to putting a line up of topics and speakers that can look at what we will need for the future, and help us understand how to get there. The last conference in Orange (2019) had a topic of "what the sire 2039 needs" – it will be great to reflect on the progress we have made in the last 5 years.

Promotional activities for the ram selling season are in planning, with a focus on region driven concepts, an online presence to engage directly with lamb producers, and social media to create a conversation. We'd love all of you to help us bring social media to life by providing content of "what's happening on our farm" for us to share. Keryn has completed some social media training and is keen to share the Poll Dorset story from the perspective of the breeders.

LambEx is in Adelaide, and for those who are able to make it, a great opportunity to learn about a broad range of topics. Thanks to the South Australian members who will be manning the APDA stand, putting a face to our breed is so valuable! If you are interested in helping them out in this way, let us know so we can put you in contact with the right person.

There is a good range of promotional merchandise available from the secretary including PD branded clothing, banners and give away items. It's all on the website, so check it out to see what is available.



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MARCH BOARD MINUTES

The board meeting of the Australian Poll Dorset Association Inc was held in person and via Zoom on Tuesday and Wednesday, March 19th & 20th 2024.

Present in Bendigo were Tania King, Laurie Fairclough, Isabele Roberts, Damon Coats, George Carter, Liz Mann, Brittany Bolt and via Zoom was Andrew Gillett.

Apologies were received from Andrew Scott and James Frost.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

The following motions were resolved:

- That the APDA review the current accounting procedures with a view to reducing monthly bookkeeping costs and appoint an external company to assist with this process.
- That the late fee charge increase to \$50 from June 1 onwards and the office to enforce this fee.
- That advertising rates in the Journal remain at the current level.
- That the Southwest region of NSW (who are currently not operating) send their funds to Federal for safekeeping with a view to the funds being spent back in that region at a future time.

PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE

There was general discussion on the maintenance of the current theme and advertisements and the meeting agreed to further using these brand building measures.

MAJOR EVENT FUNDING

The following funding was approved:

- Adelaide Region SA Sheep Expo
- Vic State – Live streaming of ADC and social evening at Australian Sheep and Wool Show

REGIONAL ADVERTISING PROPOSALS

- Central Western Region – signage at Livestock Exchange
- Central Victoria – Saleyard Billboard
- Goulburn Valley Region – Advertising in regional press
- Wimmera Mallee – Radio advertising
- Albury Wagga region – Advertising in rural newspapers
- WA – Advertising in Farm Weekly and Prime Lamb magazine
- Adelaide region – funding was provided for a variety of events including merchandise, breed display, social media and livestreaming.
- A trade display has been booked at LambEx with Adelaide assisting with the manning of the site.

2025 APDA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The meeting decided that there will be an annual conference, most likely in the Albury/Wagga region, possibly March next year. More to come on this.

FLOCK COMMITTEE

New members included Parkes High School, Danny Teskera Roslynmead West, Hugh Nash Nangar Valley (Junior Member), Matthew O'Brien Parkville.

MAJOR SHOW JUDGE APPOINTMENTS

- Ballarat – Joseph Scott Valley Vista
- Sheepvention – Will Milroy Rangeview
- NSW Dorset Championships – Wallace Binnie Coledale
- Australian Sheep and Wool Show – Finlay Macdonald Fairburn
- Sydney – Ruth Klingner Ridgehaven
- Royal Melbourne – Liz Mann
- Canberra – Chris Marr, Gererdan
- Adelaide – Chris Marr, Gererdan

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APDA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2025

*Growth, Retention and pride
in our breed*

Venue: Wagga

Details to be confirmed
Late February/early March 2025

- Key speakers
- Great networking

More to follow!



MLA sheep projections

A predicted fall in the national flock, and steady kill numbers year-on-year are some of the key messages from Meat and Livestock Australia in its early year sheep projections.

And while last year may not go down as one of the best for lamb producers, the high production and the appetite for Australian sheep meat has seen it gain more than half the world market for the first time ever.

China increased its take of sheepmeat by volume year-on-year, with a spike of 24 per cent to 429,434 tonnes.

Australia wasn't the only country to benefit from China's demand for sheep meat, but our major competitor - New Zealand - only had a rise in volumes to that country of 10 per cent as more Australian product was available.

It was not all bad news for New Zealand, which still grabbed 50 per cent of all imports in 2023 but the win for Australia was that more than 70 per cent of the increase in exports to China was supplied by Australian product.

MLA predicts Australia is on track for its largest sheepmeat production on record, providing what it terms as "solid supply into global markets".

"Over the next 12 months, we will see ample sheepmeat production and will likely see variation in the mutton and lamb production split," the authors said.

"Processor prioritisation of sheep versus lambs will drive the differing production values, allowed due to high supply of both processor ready sheep and lambs forecast for 2024."

On the export front, there are projections for better times ahead even with the high production levels.

"Economic resilience in the United States and emerging markets will drive demand for lamb, despite the outlook for consumer demand in China remaining uncertain," the report said.

"Regardless, a shortage of competitor proteins will encourage imports of sheep meat in high protein consumption markets.

"Confidence at the producer level is expected to recover and sustained global demand for Australian sheepmeat will drive recovery."

Flock

The national sheep flock in Australia is expected to fall by 2.25 million (2.9 per cent) to sit at 76.5 million by June, 2025. This is not a one off - numbers are expected to come back again the following year, with the national flock predicted to be 74 million before lifting again slightly in 2026 to 74.5 million.

But while the numbers jump about, there is not expected to be a major decrease or increase in flock numbers.

"After a period of intensive restocking between 2020 and 2022, the flock reached a 16-year high in 2023 at 78.8 million," the report said.

"Larger than normal number of ewes were retained on-farm during this period.

"As a result of drier conditions in 2023, sheep turnoff over the year was elevated.

"This higher than normal turnoff, alongside a slightly smaller lamb crop in 2024, will lead to a slight decline to the flock overall."

Slaughter

A predicted rise of 1.2 million lambs processed in Australia in 2024 should see lamb slaughter set a record this year.

About 26.1 million lambs are expected to be slaughtered this year, boosted by numbers held over from last year.

"Despite a slightly smaller lamb crop in 2024, more lambs from the 2023 cohort are still to be sold in 2024," the report said.

"Moving forward, lamb slaughter will fall slightly but remain at historically high levels as the productivity improvements seen during the rebuild and a large flock ensure that lamb supply remains strong over the forecast period."

Price

MLA's sheep industry projections also make some predictions about prices, developed with the input of five industry analysts. All concurred that prices would rise between now and June.

It was good news for both trade and heavy lambs, each expected to sit above 700c/kg carcass weight by mid year.

For trade lambs, the average national price from the predictions of all analysts was 751c/kg carcass weight, ranging from 689c/kg to 854c/kg carcass weight at the extremes.

For heavy lambs the national indicator, the average price across the analysts predictions was higher at 763c/kg carcass weight, with a range of 714-877c/kg carcass weight.

The caveat, as ever, was around the season.

"If both prices eventuate (trade and heavy lambs), prices will remain below the five-year average for June," the report said.

"The main drivers behind these movements are better seasonal forecasts and processing capacity."

KEY 2024 NUMBERS



Flock:

76.5 million head



Lamb slaughter:

26.1 million head



Lamb production:

621,000 tonnes cwt



Sheep slaughter:

10.1 million head

*Graphic illustrates year-on-year change

Providing the right ASBV advice

The use of Australian Sheep Breeding Values can help commercial sheep producers to achieve their breeding goals. And as ram suppliers, providing the right advice on how to use these figures is important especially given the range of ewe breeds they are being used over.

The Poll Dorset Journal put some questions to Sheep Genetics Australia on the ways to advise ram clients and these responses have been prepared by Kate Rummery, who is a sheep genetics development officer at Meat and Livestock Australia.

How can ASBVs for terminal sires be used for different ewe types for the greatest outcomes?

Before purchasing rams, sheep producers are encouraged to set a breeding objective. This includes identifying the key profit drivers and other traits of interest for that particular sheep business, aligning these traits with ASBVs and a selection index. Sheep Genetics has a tool to help producers work through identifying the traits that are important to them.

If a producer has been purchasing rams with ASBVs previously, it is recommended that they do a stock take of their ram team, work out their average ASBVs, use their breeding objective and ultimately purchase rams that will improve their sire team for the key traits. Knowing where your genetics currently sit and where you want to get to is key to purchasing rams that will improve the genetic merit of the flock and ultimately breed lambs that are fit for farm and fit for market.

What should those buying terminal rams be looking for if they are joining to Merinos, composites or first cross ewes? If the ewe sources is a "fatter" breed, is it OK to use rams which have lower levels of fat and is it actually better to do this?

As mentioned above it is important to know where your current ram team sits for key traits of interest. This may include carcass fat. Knowing the on-farm performance of your current lambs will allow you to tailor the breeding objective accordingly. For example if my current ram team had an average PFAT value of -0.5mm and I was having difficulty finishing my lambs to meet my target market specifications, with my current ewe base, I may wish to purchase rams that have an ASBV for PFAT that is fatter (higher). However, if my ram team average was 0.3mm for my PFAT ASBV and I was able to finish lambs with optimum fat cover then I may wish to continue to purchase rams with an ASBV in this range. If you were to change your ewe base you may have to adjust your breeding objective accordingly.

How quickly can meat characteristics flow on to lambs and how heritable are they? If a producer chooses rams with high IMF, will this be displayed in the progeny?

Meat eating quality traits like intramuscular fat (IMF) are moderately heritable meaning the genetics are playing a significant role in the phenotype being expressed. As with any trait, it's important to make sure that you're selecting the correct genetics and managing non-genetic influences like nutrition to ensure animals are able to express their genetic potential. The rate of improvement will depend on your flock's current genetic progress. It is important not to focus on a single trait as often traits such as eating quality

can be negatively correlated with other traits such as lean meat yield. However, using selection tools such as ASBVs and indexes producers are able to make balanced progress and move both traits in favourable directions simultaneously. When choosing a ram team, it's important to have a breeding objective, align this with a selection index and use that index and individual ASBVs when making ram selection decisions.

How can ram breeders advise their clients in terms of what rams they should be buying based on ASBVs? Are there compromises that need to be made or are there some traits that should never be discarded?

Ram breeders are able to assist their clients in using the tools mentioned above to link key profit driving traits to ASBVs. Rams purchased by clients this year may be in use over the next four to five years, or perhaps longer, so it is important for ram breeders and buyers alike to be considering the current profit drivers but also those in the future.

What is the best advice that terminal sire breeders can give their clients in terms of the use of ASBVs? How can they help their clients better understand the figures that are available?

MLA has a range of resources to assist both ram breeders and their clients in using ASBVs in their businesses. BredWell FedWell (BFWF) is a practical, one-day introductory workshop on how productivity and profitability can be improved through good breeding and feeding over the livestock production cycle, with a specific focus on profit drivers. Ram breeders are able to sign up to host this workshop and it is targeted for commercial producers to attend. BredWell FedWell has recently been redeveloped and its newly released workshops have got off to a flying start since being launched in 2023. Sign up here for more information:

Sheep Genetics has a range of resources for terminal sire breeders that are targeted towards their commercial ram clients. These include the Sheep Genetics Pocket Guide. If you are a Sheep Genetics clients and would like some hard-copy resources sent out please contact Sheep Genetics on 02 8055 1818 or info@sheepgenetics.org.au.

Handy links:

Setting a breeding objective
<https://www.sheepgenetics.org.au/updates/news/new-tools-for-setting-breeding-objective-and-tracking-genetic-gain/>

BredWell FedWell hub
<https://www.mla.com.au/extension-training-and-tools/bredwell-fedwell/>



Kate Rummery, Sheep Genetics Australia

Taking advantage of the large Poll Dorset genomic reference population

Almost a third of animals which have eating quality and carcass traits are Poll Dorsets or have been sired by a Poll Dorset ram in the reference flock (Figure 1). This means that Poll Dorset producers have access to ASBVs and indexes underpinned by large quantities of data. Given the difficult nature of phenotyping eating quality traits like intramuscular fat (IMF), shear force (SHEARF5), and lean meat yield (LMY), it is important to ensure good linkage to the reference population (animals with a genotype and phenotype). It's

counterintuitive to measure a potential breeding animal for eating quality and carcass traits, however, breeders can genotype potential sire candidates to increase ASBV accuracy for eating quality traits.

Since 2017, when genomic information was first used to underpin ASBVs, the proportion of Poll Dorset animals with a genotype has increased each year (Figure 2). This increasing number of Poll Dorset animals with a genotype, coupled with the high proportion of Poll Dorset animals with difficult to measure carcass and eating quality phenotypes puts breeders in a good position to make genetic gain due to increased ASBV accuracy for those hard to measure traits like eating quality (Figure 1). Note, the number of 2023 drop Poll Dorset animals is expected to increase as those that lamb later in the year submit data to Sheep Genetics.

Poll Dorsets are performing lower than the Terminal analysis for the index Lamb Eating Quality (LEQ), however this gap is closing (Figure 3). As mentioned, the increasing number of Poll Dorset

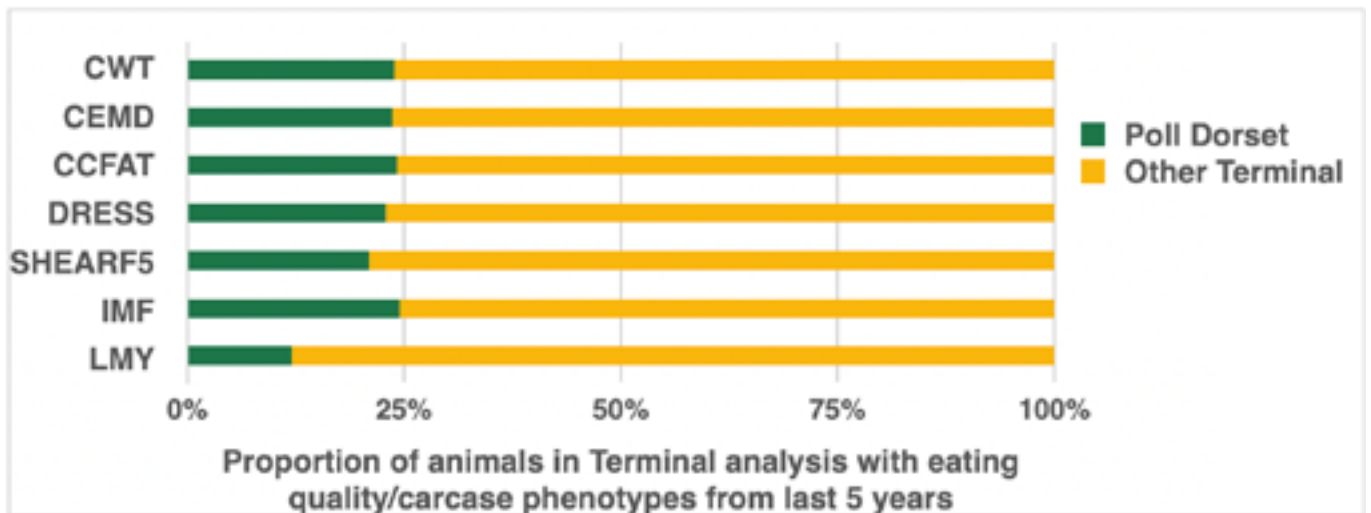


Figure 1 - Proportion of Poll Dorsets with eating quality and carcass phenotypes measured over the past 5 years

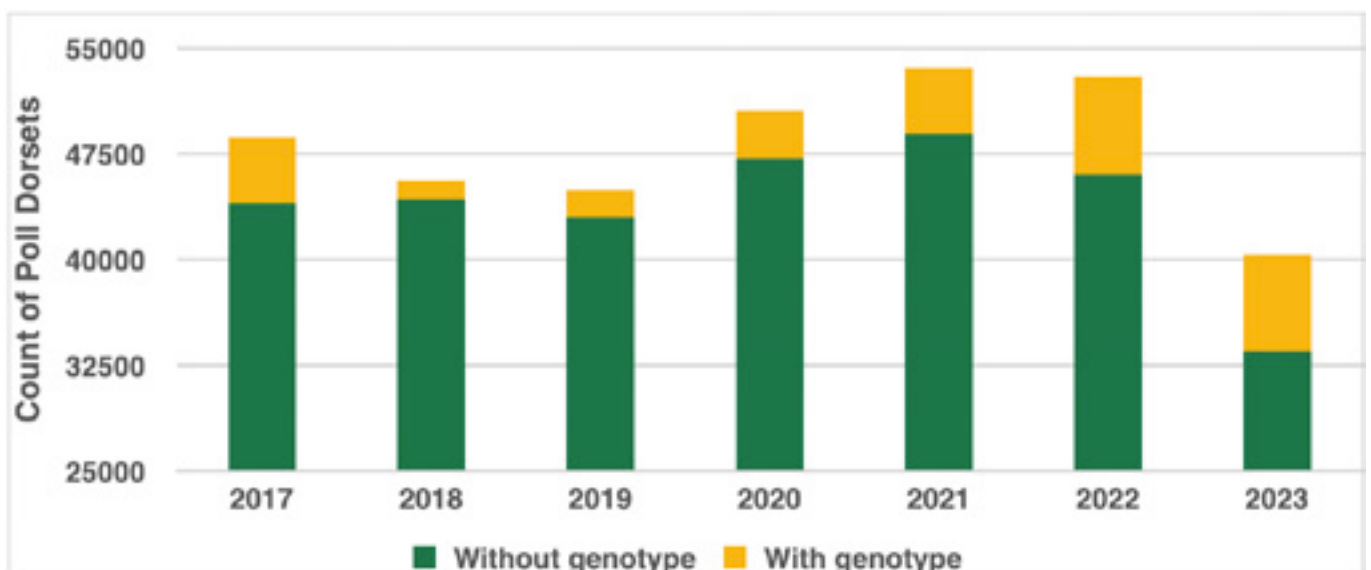


Figure 2 - Proportion of Poll Dorsets in Sheep Genetics with and without a genotype

SHEEP GENETICS

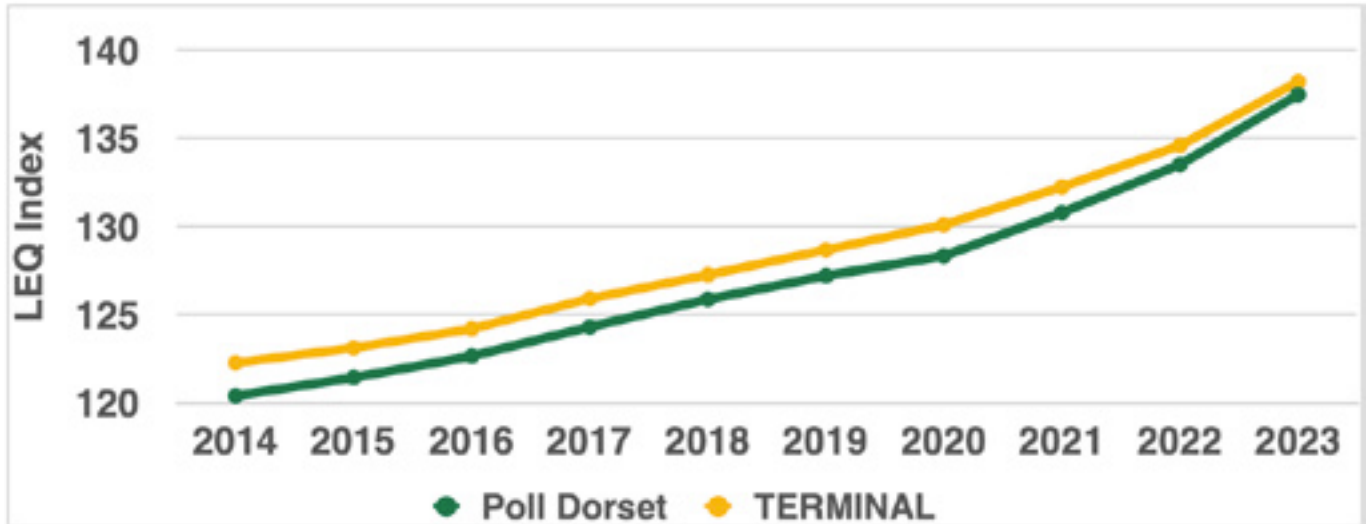


Figure 3 - Average genetic trends over time for Poll Dorsets and the Terminal analysis for LEQ

animals with a genotype and large reference population set Poll Dorset breeds up to capitalise on the benefits of genomics. Being more strategic with genotyping and placing selection emphasis on eating quality ASBVs may result in increased rates of genetic gain.

Strategic genotyping for increased genetic gain

Poll Dorset breeders can leverage the large reference population to make more genetic gain in direct ways that increase response to selection. These include genomic selection of young ram candidates to increase ASBV accuracy of young sires, and in turn, reducing the male generation interval. This involves selectively genotyping ~20-30% of young ram candidates that you have identified as potentially wanting to join, ideally after cutting down your ram list using key ASBVs and indexes following submission of weaning/post-weaning phenotypes to Sheep Genetics. It's important to make sure that you allow for enough time when

sending genotypes off to ensure you receive the results prior to making joining/sale decisions.

Please contact Sheep Genetics to discuss strategies on how to increase your genetic gain.

2024 analysis enhancements

The below table highlights key analysis enhancements that are relevant to Poll Dorset breeders occurring in May 2024. For more information, please keep an eye out for webinars dates, email, and printed resources.

For more information:

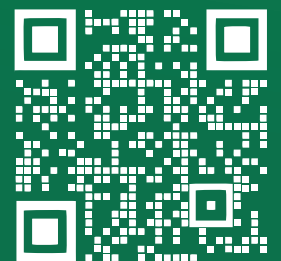
Marnie Hodge
 LAMBPLAN Development Officer
 Email : mhodge@mla.com.au
 Phone : +61 (2) 8055 1830
<https://www.sheepgenetics.org.au/>

Terminal analysis enhancements	What this means for Poll Dorset breeders
Inclusion of objective carcass data collected from processors	Sheep Genetics will be able to use eating quality (DEXA and IMF) data collected in plant to inform eating quality ASBVs. Please contact Sheep Genetics prior to consigning animals for more information and to ensure the proper data quality assurance steps are taken prior to slaughter.
Shear force validation	Updates to data quality control steps for the shear force at 5 days analysis will be applied, removing data where a contemporary group has a shear force >50nM.
Genomic breed reference (includes new breeds and allele frequencies)	New breeds will have access to the use of genomics to underpin ASBVs, which will result in increased ASBV accuracy.



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Capturing the Benefits of Genomic Technology

The cost of genotyping an animal has dropped dramatically since the inception of technology. The technology itself has been provided with many advances in the way that we breed animals for both meat and wool, but can we use it to get greater gains in our breeding operations, and are we using it to its full capacity?

The answer is both yes and no. The three most recognisable functions of DNA technology within a sheep flock are:

- Parentage - Provided that DNA samples of the sire, dam and progeny have been taken accurate assignment based off of DNA markers assigns lambs to their parents.
- Traits controlled by single genes - The best example to give here would be the polled gene, polled rams can be carriers of the horned gene variant and can pass this onto their progeny. However, utilising a genetic test can identify polled rams which only carry the polled gene.
- Genomic Breeding Values using a 50K - These traits are controlled by many genes so many DNA markers are needed DNA taken can from a young ram or ewe and used to accurately predict their genetic merit for a large range of traits, including those hard to physically measure like carcass and meat quality traits.

To predict genomic breeding values for traits in the Sheep Genetics evaluation, the correlation between DNA information and the traits must be drawn from a large data set. Meaning that the traits must be recorded in high volumes along with genotyping for a large volume of DNA markers. The 50K allows the DNA marker profiles to be identified for the associated traits allowing the ASBV's to be predicted for any young ram or ewe.

The real value in genomically enhanced breeding values for any producer to make good selection decisions are all dependent

on the accuracy level. Accuracy in a simple form explains how well the ASBV's predicts the real value of the animals' genetics or what its true breeding value is.

How do genomically enhanced breeding values for sheep become more accurate and more useful?

The best answer for both is more data. If you look at the dairy industry the accuracy levels of genomic breeding values have improved extensively over time as further data has been added. In some ways we have already seen evidence of this occurring in sheep from where the Sheep CRC information Nucleus was to the current point in time. The other key driver of accuracy with genomically enhanced breeding values are how closely related the animals for which the breeding value are calculated to that of the reference population. So, animals that are less related to the reference population will be predicted to have less accuracy.

What opportunities does genotyping give you in your breeding program?

The most obvious one is the rate of genetic gain for those traits that are measured later in life, hence how genotyping has helped transform dairy cattle breeding – before the use of genomic technology bulls within dairy breeding were selected on the data from their daughter's milk production, which saw at least a five-year lag before industry use. Genomic breeding values are accurate enough to select bulls for breeding at a younger age therefore reducing the generational interval by 3 years. In both meat and wool similar opportunities exist for traits that contribute to direct profit (for example lean meat yield).

To conclude genomics have had major influences on other livestock species, advances have been made in what genomically enhanced breeding values have been applied to in the Sheep Genetics evaluations it's now up to breeders to utilise this technology to get the maximise the benefits across breeding objectives, testing animals younger to reduce the generation interval and get highly accurate genomically enhanced breeding values to increase selection accuracy across your flock.



Meat judging a career catalyst

For Brittany Bolt, competitive meat judging was a catalyst to her career.

Ms Bolt, a research scientist with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in Katanning, Western Australia, can't speak highly enough for her experience taking part in the Intercollegiate Meat Judging (ICMJ).

She took part in the competition in 2018 during her second year at Murdoch University. Ten teams from universities across Australia competed in Wagga Wagga, NSW, along with teams from Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Texas and Colorado.

And through this program she gained lifelong friends and valuable exposure to Australia's meat industry supply chain.

The Murdoch University team was made up of seven students, all from different backgrounds but all eagerly devoted to what Ms Bolt said was a "wild, unfamiliar world of meat judging that we leaped into together".

It was not just a matter of turning up to the competition and having a go.

"We would meet up twice a week, once for theory in the lecture theatre and once for practical," Ms Bolt said.

"For three months leading up to the competition in Wagga Wagga, we met up at 6am every Thursday at Goodchild Meats, Hamilton Hill, WA to train for hours in the chillers, judging beef and lamb, cuts and carcasses."

When it came to the ICMJ at Wagga Wagga, the week long event included time mingling with the competitors across Australia and with their new international mates.

"There were sessions focussing on eating quality, value adding and how consumers drive the market in addition to practical workshops on meat judging and product identification as well as an array of presenters ranging from sheep, beef and goat producers, chief executive officers, researchers, market analysts and more," Ms Bolt said.

"Engaging communicators were put forth to intrigue the next generation, by sharing the newest technology, innovation and development in the meat industry and projections for the future."

Ms Bolt described the ICMJ as "an opportunity like no other" and said she was grateful for the work that went into organising it on a yearly basis.

"It is so unique in the level of exposure and transparency within the industry," she said.

"The content of the workshops, tours and presentations are incredibly relevant and applicable to industry."

She said any university student with an interest in the industry was to take part in the event if they had a chance.

"The time and effort that the ICMJ committee put into this experience is because they truly value sharing knowledge with the next generation," Ms Bolt said.

"They want to ignite a passion and provide direction to invest your passion into building a career in the meat industry."

It was the icing on the cake for Ms Bolt, who was already invested in sheep production through her family's sheep and cropping farm which includes the Rockalong Poll Dorset stud, commercial Merinos and prime lambs.



But she said the ICMJ truly brought things full circle.

"Being able to see the results of selective breeding in carcass yield and quality, helped me understand why we do what we do on farm and how we can do it better," she said.

And the information and experience she gained from ICMJ has helped her in every role in her career since the competition.

"ICMJ provided a holistic understanding of the supply chain and a base to integrate knowledge from university, on-farm, and throughout my experience in industry," Ms Bolt said.

She also was one of the top 20 students selected for extra industry training, where she gained additional information on each stage of the meat supply chain.

Since competing in ICMJ, Ms Bolt has worked as a research assistant at Murdoch University for the meat science team while she completed my studies, assisting with lamb eating quality trials, learning to operate different measurement devices that measure aspects of sheep meat yield and quality.

In 2019, she was awarded a full scholarship (along with a group of other Murdoch Uni students) to travel to China for two weeks on an agricultural tour. Given a choice of what she wanted to look at, Ms Bolt compared sheep production systems in China and Australia.

She also was given the chance to speak to students and researchers at China's Agricultural University where she spoke on Australia's red meat industry, which she said was fuelled by her experience at ICMJ.

Ms Bolt now works as a research scientist at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) in Katanning, WA, on a sheep sustainability traits project (an overlay project on the genetic resource flock, formerly recognised as the industry nucleus flock), where individual feed intake, growth, methane production and body composition are measured.

INTERCOLLEGIATE MEAT JUDGING

And with all that study and experience behind her, Ms Bolt still thinks the ICMJ was her biggest and most influential learning periods.

“I can wholeheartedly say that this was the best thing I did while I was at university, in terms of the people I met, the career trajectory it set me on, and the knowledge it has equipped me with, which I have been able to apply in each of my roles in industry since,” she said.

“As a producer, ICMJ has provided me with detailed context for our end products, how to meet market expectations and understanding trends for future markets.

“It has helped me make connections and conclusions from my other experiences in optimising nutrition, management and genetic improvement for carcass and eating quality traits and has sparked the drive to continually improve this in our own Poll Dorset stud.

“ICMJ is a great initiative for our industry, that I could not endorse enough. It inspires and equips the next generation with applicable industry skills and knowledge to carry the baton and keep the future of our meat industry thriving and evolving.”



A cut above

Being a part of the intercollegiate meat judging conference (ICMJ) in Wagga Wagga last year stands as one of the most rewarding decisions Indi Longbottom has ever made.

And it's not only in terms of her tertiary education but for her future career in the agricultural workforce which she said has benefited from her participation.

“The conference is truly special as it brings together passionate young individuals from across the whole of Australia who all share a common enthusiasm for the meat industry, for five days of guest speakers, workshops, networking and lots of meat eating,” Ms Longbottom said.

And while some may think it's all about the winners, she said winning was not the most valuable outcome.

“The competition itself for me was not the most important part of the conference,” she said.

“The value I got from meeting so many like-minded people and the industry guest speakers is incomprehensible.

“Hearing from the Australian Poll Dorset Society has stuck with me over the past eight months.

“Learning about the progress in lamb genetics and meat quality within the breed was really interesting and was also then backed up by other industry leaders over the five days.”

Ms Longbottom said spending time around both beef and lamb, it was great to see the sheep/lamb get some of the spotlight. This was a view shared by other ICMJ students with a beef-only background.

“Learning about the advancements in Poll Dorsets and what the breed is doing for the lamb industry was eye-opening,” she said.

Ms Longbottom said the ICMJ experience was special, not only for the students, but for the industry bodies and organisations that were there.

“It is a rarity to be able to talk to so many young people dedicated to the meat industry and leave a mark with what is said,” she said.

“My advice for any student interested in agriculture would be to involve themselves with ICMJ, and that goes as well for any organisation that wants to be a part of the evolution of the industry.”



Strong figures start at lambing

Lambing is a busy time for Lachie and Sophie Kelly who run the LSK Studs and Ivadene Poll Dorsets at Hexham, in south-west Victoria.

Lambing down and keeping strong records across about 1000 stud ewes and ewe lambs across three breeds is certainly a task.

But it's one they are committed to in ensuring they have accurate information to feed into their genetic decisions.

The Kellys run their sheep studs at Hexham, country that is quite flat topographically. They continue to add native plantations, and one key reasons for this is to provide shelter for livestock, including at lambing.

Improved pastures include predominantly phalaris or ryegrass plus clover, some with chicory and also dryland lucerne.

Their AI and recipient ewes lamb at the end of June, naturally mated lambing is during July and ewe lambs in August.

"Our time of lambing strategy aims to optimise the balance between reliability of pasture availability and giving lambs as long a growing season as possible," Lachie said.

"Stud lambing is also matched to our commercial lambing, and the majority of our commercial ram clients.

"This means that birth, weaning and post weaning measurements are aligned in both age and timing, to when their commercial progeny need to perform."

A drawback is that lambing during winter does increase the risk of weather challenges. They pride themselves on ensuring that their stud lambs must perform, particularly from birth to post weaning measurements, in a very similar environment to what their progeny will experience commercially.

"At birth, we unequivocally expect our lambs to be born unassisted, in normal paddocks, then vigorously stand, drink and keep up with their mother," Lachie said.

"If any lamb falls outside of this, it is recorded and culled.

"We believe that if our demands, on each stud lamb, are at least what our commercial clients will place on that ram's progeny, then we are testing fitness, and hopefully over the long term, contributing to improved economic outcomes for our clients and improved animal welfare outcomes across the industry."

To track lamb performance, they identify stud ewes with a Maxi cattle tag, printed with their tag number, which makes for easy identification of the dam at the birth site.

Lambs are caught by hand, sat in a bucket each, then recorded, tagged and returned to their mother as quickly as possible.

Other than recording mating sires, joining dates and conception methods, the birth site is the foundation of every lamb's lifetime records. Recording the lamb's mother, who has a joining sire attached, gives full pedigree. Other records taken include: birthweight, birth date, tag number, EID associated, sex of lamb/s, birth type (single, twin etc), lambing ease score (understanding-lambing-ease-asbvs.pdf



(sheepgenetics.org.au)), as well as management groupings as appropriate.

Stud lamb tagging and recording is completed daily during lambing, ensuring that they are recording birth data within a maximum of 24 hours after birth.

All aspects of the stud recording takes place on a software program.

"We use the BreedElite software and have found it to be very good, with an excellent support service," Lach said.

"However, I haven't used any alternatives, so strongly recommend a software program to streamline your recording, and encourage your own research on the number of options available."

He said accuracy of the data he recorded was critical to providing customers with a trustworthy product. In his words, accurate data is good data.

"In my opinion, no matter what your persuasion, the main issue with data of any kind, is low accuracy data that is liable to more substantial change," Lachie said.

"Taking our data recording job seriously and doing our best to accurately represent every animal with complete integrity, results in good data in, good and meaningful data out. "Genomic testing would seem to me to be a great tool, that will continue to grow in importance, for verifying recording and adding accuracy."

He said for Lambplan members, the importance of accurate and comprehensive record keeping at birth has increased for ASBV accuracy, with the inclusion of the Lambing Ease Direct

FOCUS ON MANAGEMENT



trait in the terminal indexes. Made up of gestation length, actual lambing ease score and birth weight (including relatives also), it is critical to be accurately recording and submitting conception method, AI date, birth date, birth weight and lambing ease score to generate as accurate as possible Lambing Ease data. This will contribute marginally to higher accuracy indexes.

"In my observations, greater accuracy leads to greater variation between animals, and therefore greater value," he said.

It's not all been smooth sailing though.

"We have lots of room for improvement, which is exciting," Lach said.

"One area where we have tried a number of things that have not worked well enough is lambing triplets, and we haven't found the answer yet, so any help is appreciated!"

Some of his top tips for lambing recording are:

- if using cattle tags to ID ewes, print the number on the back of the tag as well;
- have a pair of binoculars with you, even at a short distance they can make reading a tag easier;
- always keep the ewe's lambs together - catch them at the same time and let them go together.
- spend the time entering the information into your software at birth including EID, it makes future recording a breeze.



Poll Dorsets prove the right weigh

There may be plenty of uncertainty in the West Australian sheep industry but there was one thing that Glenn Davies from Wagin could bank on.

With prior experience with Poll Dorsets, choosing to use them again has proved to be a good decision and it's allowed him to compare the performance of the terminal sires against his purebred Merino lambs.

Glenn runs a mixed farming operation at Wagin, with the mix about 60 per cent cropping and 40 per cent livestock in the 450mm rainfall country.

Faced with dwindling returns for the progeny from his pure Merino flock, Glenn bought a few Poll Dorset rams from the nearby Rockalong stud at Wagin to try to boost the bottom line.

He chose the rams on visual assessment, looking for length and scale to balance the traits of the Merino ewes they were being joined to.

It was a leap of faith but something that Glenn said he needed to do given the tenuous situation for lamb producers in that state.

The first signs it was a good decision were at lambing. The Davies Merino flock is highly fertile and that's not always a good thing when there is a larger litter size, with lamb mortalities sometimes an issue.

Glenn noticed a difference when the Poll Dorset-cross lambs were born, with the Merino ewes able to lamb more easily and the lambs more resilient in the first few days after birth.

The ewe and lambs were then run on a mix of pastures and stubbles before the lambs were weaned.

Each year, Glenn traditionally puts his Merino wether lambs and cull ewe lambs into a feedlot to finish them.

And this summer, the mix has included not only the pure Merinos but Poll Dorset-Merino cross, which allowed a direct comparison of performance.

What Glenn noticed immediately from the June-drop lambs was that the Poll Dorset-Merinos were heavier at weaning.

And this has given them a head start when they went off stubbles and into the feedlot in February.

The lambs are fed a grain mix initially, and when this runs out, or when there is less time, the ration is switched over to finisher pellets sourced from Kojonup Feedlots.

Clearly there are big costs in terms of feed and time in running a feedlot, so the quicker lambs can be finished to target weights, the better.

The Poll Dorset-cross lambs went into the feedlot a week earlier than the Merinos, given their heavier weights at the time, and the first loads have shown the decision to use terminal sires is delivering benefits.

"The first lot yielded up to 3 per cent more than the pure Merinos have in the past, and they are also sold earlier, which means we have not had the cost of feeding them for longer," Glenn said.

That first draft averaged 25-26 kg carcass weight, and he said he noticed the Poll Dorset-Merino lambs seemed to be able to convert the feedlot ration more quickly into meat than the pure Merinos did.

"When you have a pure Merino lamb in a feedlot for too long, they seem to want to put that feed into wool rather than meat," he said.

"The Poll Dorset-cross has less of a jacket (skin) and so it wants to put that feed into growing meat."

Glenn had booked 2500 lambs in before harvest last year, worried about how the market may turn, and it has proven to be a good decision.

Knowing he has a market and a price for all his lambs is one thing, but watching the Poll Dorset-Merinos coming in at a higher weaning weight, finishing more quickly in the feedlot and then yielding at up to 3 per cent higher than the pure Merinos has been a welcome result.

Glenn will still join a large majority of his Merino flock to Merinos again, but said early results from his crossbred lambs were giving him something to consider carefully.

"We have joined about 500 of the 3500 Merino ewes we have to Poll Dorsets to lamb again this winter because that is the number of rams we had on hand," he said.

"At this stage, though, we are pretty happy with the way it's all gone but want to be able to analyse the full drop before we make any more decisions down this path."



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Zarah's love of learning

In her own words, West Australia's Zarah Squiers thinks participating in junior judging is "is worth taking the time and giving junior judging a crack".

There's plenty of experience behind these views. She began her journey in junior judging at the age of nine, starting initially with junior handling. Each year brought new lessons, learning what to do and definitely what NOT to do, gradually enhancing her skills and knowledge.

"This progression naturally led me to venture into junior judging, and from there, I delved into other aspects of the industry, including meat sheep judging, wool handling, shearing competitions, and merino junior judging," Ms Squiers said.

"With every experience, my confidence grew, fuelled by desire to continuously improve and excel within this industry.

"The thrill of pushing myself to go one step further each time keeps me coming back for more- I simply love the challenge and the opportunity to immerse myself in the world of livestock judging."

Ms Squiers said participating in junior judging has provided her with invaluable perspectives and insights into the intricacies of the industry.

After many years of observing animals in the judging ring, this experience has offered her a deeper understanding of what truly defines excellence. Learning from seasoned overjudges and incorporating their advices and combining it with her own learning has been instrumental in refining her own judgement skills.

"Engaging in junior judging has not only equipped me with a comprehensive understanding of industry standards but has also underscored the nuances in breed types," she said.

"I've come to realise that opinions on animal placement can vary significantly among judges, highlighting the subjective nature of the process."

Junior Judging has also been instrumental in familiarising her with the correct terminology essential for effectively communicating about various breeds. Learning the appropriate language and techniques for assessing different breeds ensures a more accurate evaluation of the animals.

And one of the most rewarding aspects of junior judging was the opportunity it presents to network within the industry. Shadowing overjudges and interacting with producers and breeders has not only expanded her knowledge base but has also allowed her to observe the subtle difference between breeding practices and philosophies. These experiences have been invaluable in broadening her understanding of the industry as a whole.

Ms Squiers said Junior judging can serve as a stepping stone for individuals interested in pursuing careers in the livestock industry or related fields by providing a diverse skill set in industry knowledge, networking opportunities, experiential learning, exposure to different perspectives, and personal development.

"The networking opportunities at Junior judging events allows you to connect with experienced professionals, including overjudges, producers, and breeders," she said.

"Building these connections can open doors to internships, mentorships, and job opportunities within the industry.

"I believe networking is a crucial aspect of career advancement, and junior judging provides a platform for young enthusiasts to start building their professional network."

Some of the skills she attributes to junior judging include communication, critical thinking, confidence building, organisation, adaptability, receiving constructive feedback, and speaking in a public environment, with others learning and attentively watching you, that may never have seen or understand the process at which you are taking part in.

"All of these things become a part of the junior judging process; they are all things to take into consideration of what you learn from this competition and the various skills you can build on and all of these can be applied to many areas of life in general and any professional endeavours," she said.

And with her Poll Dorset on, Ms Squiers is optimistic about the breed's place in the sheep world.

"The future of Poll Dorsets in the sheep industry appears promising, driven by their favourable traits, adaptability, and commercial appeal," she said.

"With ongoing advancements in genetics and a growing demand for high-quality meat products, Poll Dorsets are poised to remain a valuable asset to sheep producers worldwide."

Her win at Wagin Woolorama earlier this year will allow to continue to build on her skills set.

"Winning at Wagin Woolorama has opened up even greater opportunities for me in the competitive livestock judging circuit," she said.

"I have had the privilege of competing at the Royal Perth Show, where I get to use my skills on a larger stage.

"Last year, my success at the Perth Royal Show catapulted me to the national level, where I represented Western Australia at the Tasmania Royal Show, earning a place in the national judging competition.

"This year, I'm thrilled that I get another chance, and I'll be heading to the Melbourne Show, to continue my journey as a competitive junior judge."



Sam's big Poll Dorset step

Being young is never going to stand in the way of Sam William's dreams in the sheep world.

The 15-year-old has already got one spring selling season under his belt, and is truly excited about where he wants to go in the Poll Dorset world and what the breed can do for the lamb industry.

The end goal is to hold his own on-property sale for the La-Mar Poll Dorset stud which he has established at Culcairn, NSW, with the support of his parents Rod and Marita.

There was already a love of Poll Dorsets in his blood, thanks to his grandfather Laurie Thompson, who ran the Gartlee Dorset stud at Myrniong and who started his own stud at just age 15.

And while the Gartlee stud was sold before Sam decided he wanted to be part of the industry, he managed to source some of the genetics his grandfather had bred to establish his own stud.

He's constantly adding to his knowledge, and in the past couple of years won the junior judging at the south-west NSW Poll Dorset Youth Day, which in turn, gave him the chance to be an associate judge at the Australasian Poll Dorset championships.

And last spring, he took his team of rams to the Culcairn and Walbundrie shows, in southern NSW, in a brave move to put his stock on the map.

It was a good decision - he had a total sell out of all 23 rams and now is excited about how the next crop of young sires looks as they land on the ground this autumn.

There are a couple that have already caught his eye - twin ram lambs from a ewe that produced a ram lamb last year that he has retained in the stud.

At 15, Sam has plenty of competing interests for his time. A talented cricketer and a dedicated student means he always has something happening, but his sheep are his passion.

Once he has been in the industry a little longer, he hopes to show his Poll Dorsets to see how they rates against other sheep, and that on-property sale remains a key focus. Getting to show at the Bendigo Sheep Show is definitely on his "to do list".

But he never wants the stud to get too big.

"I always want to be able to spend time with my clients and to be able to understand their operations and what they want," Sam said.

"There are so many great people in the Poll Dorset community and that's what you get from showing: that interaction and feedback on how your sheep are performing."



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Andrew Scott, Valley Vista Poll Dorsets, Coolac, NSW

How long have you been on the board and why did you join?

Andrew has been a board member on the Australian Poll Dorset Association for 13 years and joined to be able to contribute to the future of the breed. After starting the Valley Vista stud at the age of 9 thanks to his grandfather buying him more than 20 ewes, Andrew has grown with his flock and said he wanted to be involved with decisions about the breed he is so passionate about, especially as it was such a big part of their farming business. It was also about giving back to the breed and being able to contribute to its future and its success.

Where do you see the future of the Poll Dorset breed and how does it fit with the modern lamb industry?

The consistency of the Poll Dorset breed is something that has always held it in good stead and will continue to, Andrew said. The big plus of the breed is it has been continually able to move to meet market needs. There has been huge improvement in the breed, Andrew said, including growth rates. He said he remembered when he was excited by growth rates of about 400g/day 20 years ago, but now growth rates were up to 600-700g/day.

Poll Dorsets are able to fit with the modern industry because they have carcass characteristics and high growth rates.

What are some of the changes you have seen which have benefited the breed in the past decade?

One of the biggest changes that Andrew has noticed is that Poll Dorsets have become easier to manage. There are few if any lambing problems now in his own flock and the easy-care nature of the breed makes it very popular with commercial breeders. With sheep producers having increasing pressures on time, the easy care nature of the breed adds to the traits which boost its popularity.

How does the breed make sure it stays relevant within the industry and how does it make sure that it is the first choice for prime lamb breeders?

Carcass characteristics are the next big goal to include in terminal sire breeding and Andrew said this was emerging as important traits to consider in "new territory" for Poll Dorsets. But he said it was vital that the breed did not lose what made it so popular and that was early growth. Andrew said many lamb producers wanted to turn 70-80 per cent of their lambs off as suckers, as quickly as possible, and this was where the Poll Dorset breed was renowned. The inclusion of meat eating quality should not come at the expense of the ability of the breed to produce consistent lambs which could hit a range of target weights.

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Sydney Show

Oberon Poll Dorset stud Tattykeel has claimed the grand champion double at this year's Sydney Royal Show, although it was a very close run thing in the ewe competition.

Tattykeel have enjoyed previous success at Sydney Royal and this year's event, judged by Ruth Klingner, Forbes, was no different.

The closeness of the ewe competition made the win all the sweeter for Tattykeel according to James Gilmore.

"We're very pleased to win both grand champion competitions. It's never easy to keep doing it, to be honest," he said.

"The reserve champion ewe from Cranbrook stud was 100 per cent our genetics and so that is never easy.

"It's never been easy and I doubt it ever will be."

Sired by Tattykeel ET 200060 and out of Tattykeel 160882, Tattykeel ET 230014 was named grand champion ram after winning the pair of rams showing milk teeth only, shorn class and champion senior Poll Dorset ram.

Tattykeel ET 230014's sire was the supreme exhibit at Sydney Royal in 2021 while three flush brothers out of his dam, Tattykeel 160882, sold at sale for an average of \$30,000.

Mr Gilmore said the rams breed type is what really stood him out from the competition.

"I think the most important thing would've been his true-to-breed type," he said.

"He has good body length and depth, and has a good head.

"But being true to type back to an animal which was so dominant in the meat breed market is what really stood out.

"In the past few years, that has been somewhat lost a bit at times.

"Overall, he doesn't really do a lot wrong."

Mr Gilmore was also pleased with the ram's carcass traits.

"He was carrying some pretty solid meat in all the right places," he said.

"He is 130 kilograms at 11 and a half months and is still flush with his lambs teeth.

"It's incredible growth for that sort of age which in turn relates to dollars for the commercial producer."

Junior Poll Dorset ram was won by a ram exhibited by Eugowra's Brendan Mansbridge and Dr Lydia Herbert.

The grand champion ewe, Tattykeel ET 230031, also has some significant pedigree.

Her sire, Tattykeel ET 200034 was supreme exhibit at the Cowra Poll Dorset show in 2021, the second largest Poll Dorset event in Australia.

Both the sire and the dam were sired by Tattykeel AI 180859, who was sired by Tattykeel 970080, genetics from 1997.

"So basically it's a double cross of 970080, genetics we reintroduced back in 2020 just to put some of the old traditional traits back in and it's really starting to show through," Mr Gilmore said.

"We used it to see how relevant we have been on gain.

"We never make erratic decisions when we change our breeding goals, we move in directions slowly.

"The things that we're chasing are very relevant animals that are easy doing, but that have the breed type.

"We're just going back to the simple things that made our breed so dominant - at one point it had 70pc of the meat sheep industry.

"And it had that because it was the best alternative.

"So we're committed to concentrating on the things that made it dominant, which are early growth time, consistency and carcass.

"They're the things where we've always been focusing on, but we're certainly focusing very heavily on that.

"Now 90 per cent of the team of sheep are embryonic transferred animals, so they're the top 5pc of our flock."

Article courtesy of Denis Howard, The Land



Tattykeel Poll Dorset's James Gilmore from Oberon, NSW, with the Supreme prime lamb exhibit, Tattykeel ET 230014



Graham Gilmore from Tattykeel, Oberon, NSW with the Supreme prime lamb ewe Tattykeel ET 230031

Adelaide Show

It was an emotional moment for the Davies family, Wrattenbullie stud, as well as many fellow breeders ringside when one of the rams bred by the stud's founder Rod Davies was named supreme exhibit in the Poll Dorset judging at the Royal Adelaide Show.

Rod, who passed away in April, 2023, was a tough critic of stock, especially his own sheep but his son Brad said he would have smiled at the stud's second supreme win.

He said it was a nice lift in a tough year.

"Dad would always say what was wrong with them so it is nice to get one right," he said.

"I'll give him the credit for this one- next year's lambs are on me."

Wrattenbullie stud's first Adelaide supreme title was in 2018.

Judge James Frost, Hillden stud, Bannister, NSW, gave the nod to the grand champion ram over the grand champion ewe exhibited by the Davidson family, Morton stud, Lucindale, South Australia.

"I am splitting hairs here," Mr Frost said.

"They are both great examples of the breed but the reason that I have gone with the ram is just a bit more depth of hindquarter."

The May-drop ram which weighed 126.5kg came through a class of 20 entries and impressed Mr Frost for his "sire power".

He also had some tremendous scan data with an eye muscle depth of 53mm and fat depth of 7mm.

A half brother to the supreme exhibit- both by a Warburn ram - sold for \$10,000 in Wrattenbullie stud's annual on-property sale last year but Brad said they would not be parting with their supreme exhibit. They will instead offer semen for sale.

"There was him and another one all the way along that were bigger volume, bigger boned better headed sheep, I didn't expect him to win but I hoped we had a chance of a ribbon," he said.

"He will breed a type, he has length, he has depth and a good head."

After a successful debut showing in 2022 where they won reserve junior champion, Lachie and Sophie Kelly, LSK studs, Hexham, Vic, went one better on their Royal return with junior champion ram.

"When I got them side by side it was pretty easy, he is a very correct ram, good on his feet, good neck extension, good through the shoulder and carries himself right the way through," Mr Frost said.

"We need to acknowledge Aaron and Dee Pascoe from the Clarendon stud with the dam's side of the ram from a ewe flock we bought through 2019," Mr Kelly said.

"We are absolutely thrilled for Brad Davies and his supreme result."

Reserve junior champion was awarded to a ram from the Hart family's Glen Devon stud at Two Wells, while the reserve senior champion sash was won by Mallee Park, Hopetoun, Vic.

The strength of the May-drop ewe class shone though with Mr Frost selecting the first two place getters as his champion and reserve champions.

Mr Frost described the 100.5kg ewe which had a 42mm EMD scan as a "complete package".

"She is well balanced with a great head, beautiful wool, soft and easy doing," he said.

"She carries her topline really well and there is a lot of meat through that twist and behind."

Morton stud's Emily Davidson said it was great to notch up their second consecutive ewe title with their Mullinger Park 528/19 daughter.

"Winning back to back cements that we are on the right genetic pathway," she said.

"We are finding it easier for some reason to produce the good ewes, they seem to pick themselves, maybe they are a bit more self sufficient than the rams."

Mr Frost said deciding the champion ewe was a very close decision with Alastair and Jayne Day, Allendale stud, Bordertown, exhibiting the reserve champion which he praised for its femininity and neck extension.

Allendale finished the day strongly with wins in the breeders group, sire's progeny group and were named most successful Poll Dorset exhibitor.

Poll Dorsets will be the feature sheep breed at the 2024 Royal Adelaide Show as they commemorate 70 years of the breed.

Article courtesy of Catherine Miller, Stock Journal.



Judge James Frost, Hillden stud, Bannister, NSW with the supreme Poll Dorset exhibit at the Royal Adelaide show being held by proud owner Brad Davies, Wrattenbullie stud, Naracoorte



Scott, Emily and Jack Davidson, Morton stud, Lucindale, SA with their champion ewe at the Royal Adelaide Show

The Royal Canberra Show

The Royal Canberra Show was held in February, with the Poll Dorset classes judged by Chris Marr.

The champion ram was shown by Gordon Close and his daughter Charlotte, Closeup Poll Dorsets, Finley.

He was shown in the bare shorn ram class.

"He has tremendous growth for his age," Mr Marr said.

"He is well fleshed, with a great outlook and tremendous bone.

The reserve champion ram was shown by the Cooper family, Ashcharmoo Poll Dorset stud, Marulan.

Coming through the pair of rams class, Mr Marr considered the ram had a beautiful Poll Dorset outlook.

"He was very well finished with good bone and length of body," he said.

The champion ewe was shown by the Closeup stud, Finley, and had been successful in the milk tooth class.

The reserve champion ewe was also shown by the Closeup stud.

"There were only two ewes entered but they were still worthy of their ribbons as being very good examples of the breed," Mr Marr said.

Report courtesy of Stephen Burns, The Land



Gordon Close from Closeup Poll Dorsets at Finley, NSW, with his champion ram, with Ben Campbell, Kelvin Cronk, Chris Marr and Ric Houlihan at the Royal Canberra Show.



Gordon and Charlotte Close, from Closeup Poll Dorsets, Finley and judge Chris Marr. Gererdan Poll Dorsets, Goolagong, NSW with the grand champion ewe.

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Wagin Woolorama

There was a great cross section of Poll Dorset studs on hand for the Unigrain British and Australasian Sheep Breeds show at Wagin Woolorama, with the breed being the second largest penning in the shed.

While there were 70 entries from seven individual studs that competed across the classes and championships, it was one stud that scooped the grand champion Poll Dorset, all of the champion and reserve champion ribbons and all the groups classes including the pair of ewes.

The Squiers family's Shirlee Downs Poll Dorset stud, Quairading, is always a strong competitor that consistently participates in the Wagin Woolorama British and Australasian Sheep Breeds show and many others in the state and nationally, so it was well deserved to win all the broad ribbons and group classes for the section this year.

Given the task of presiding over the Poll Dorset competition was Ian Kyle, Ashley Park Poll Dorset, White Suffolk and Southdown studs, Bairnsdale, Victoria. Mr Kyle is a seasoned judge with ample experience assessing the Poll Dorset and other breeds in shows around Australia and he was extremely impressed with the selection of WA breeding on show at Wagin.

"The quality of the Poll Dorsets in WA is just outstanding," Mr Kyle said.

"They really are good sheep allround, but lucky for the Shirlee Downs stud, they just stood out on the day."

The grand champion Poll Dorset was the champion ram that Mr Kyle had at first seen among a class with 12 entries from six studs. When selecting the ram as champion first, he said it was a really complete sire.

"He is the ram that was more complete on the day," Mr Kyle said.

"He is very easy to work with, he has plenty of meat in all the right places and he is the type of ram that is actually going to go out and breed new rams and good quality rams.

"It is great to find a ram like this that is going to grow the breed and the industry."

Choosing the ram over the champion ewe was not a simple task.

"It was not an easy decision," he said.

"There were two animals out here that showed all the attributes that are required for the prime lamb industry.

"The ewe has plenty of scale and stretch and was beautiful through the back end.

"The ram to me looks like he is only going to get better and better.

"I really guarantee that he is a ram that will produce something great down the track, he has beautiful bone, parades himself really well and is certainly a standout."

The judge's eye for the evenness of quality between the two rams that were judged to be the best was made very clear when Shirlee Downs stud co-principal, Sascha Squiers, said the grand champion Poll Dorset (ram) and the reserve champion ram were both by the same sire Shirlee Downs 135/19.

Shirlee Downs 135/19 was the top-priced ram at the stud's 2020 ram sale when it sold to the Orrvale stud, Kojonup.

Mr Squiers said they really liked the sire of the champion rams, but unfortunately the sire was not taken to any shows due to COVID-19 in 2020, but from this show's results "it would seem the sire may well have been a grand champion, had he been given the chance".

The Squiers clean run in the groups was also easily explained by this as the groups had to be selected from the previous classes and obviously included the champions among them.

Article and photos reprinted courtesy of Tamara Hooper from Farm Weekly.



Judge Ian Kyle, sponsor Elders stud stock specialist, Lauren Rayner, and Shirlee Downs stud, Quairading, co-principal Chris Squiers with the stud's champion Poll Dorset ewe at Wagin Woolorama, WA.



Shirlee Downs studs' Zarah Squiers, Quairading, holds the studs grand champion Poll Dorset ram, with sponsor representatives Elders stud stock specialist Michael O'Neill, Farm Weekly's Linda Sharman and judge Ian Kyle, Ashley Park Poll Dorset, White Suffolk and Southdown studs, Bairnsdale, Victoria.



The champion Poll Dorset group was awarded to Shirlee Downs.

Domestic

As the 2024 AFL Premiership continues, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and its marketing subsidiary Australian Lamb are proud to announce the return of the Lamb Paddock, an innovative outlet featuring concept lamb products at the Melbourne Cricket Ground with Delaware North.

The return of the Lamb Paddock follows a project between MLA and CSIRO, Australia's national science agency, centred around increasing the number of value-added lamb products suitable for quick service restaurants (QSR).

According to MLA's product and business development manager and corporate chef, Sam Burke, MLA wanted to elevate lamb from a "limited offer" product to a regular menu item in QSRs nationwide.

"MLA worked with CSIRO to understand the barriers that QSRs and full-service restaurants (FSRs) had in featuring lamb products on their menus. The aim of the project was to identify and address these barriers, to drive the demand for Australian lamb products in this sector," Mr Burke said.

"To resolve this, we worked with over twenty fast food and quick service outlets to discuss how to overcome these barriers and increase the likelihood of lamb products in QSRs."

For Dr Aarti Tobin, who leads animal protein research at CSIRO, the interviews with key QSR stakeholders provided significant insight into understanding the role of lamb within fast food restaurants and hospitality venues.

"The interviews showed that lamb was traditionally eaten as part of a meal, as roasts and chops, hence is not considered a fast food," Dr Tobin said.

"According to the outlets interviewed, there are several challenges with featuring lamb on the menu. The main barriers that these companies identified were ensuring consistent product quality, reliability of supply and costs compared to other proteins."

Following the interviews, Mr Burke and CSIRO developed and tested two lamb products for these menus, a high-quality lamb burger patty which included minced lamb with a Middle Eastern spice blend.

"Similarly, a pulled lamb product was developed, where the lamb shoulder was covered with a rub, consisting of Middle Eastern spice blend and thickeners, vacuum packed, cooked at 75°C for 12 hours and then shredded into pulled meat texture.

"A 28-day frozen storage trial showed that both products maintained their sensory quality after cooking and reheating. These two lamb products will provide the industry with a great opportunity to value-add to lower value lamb cuts and trim, as well as address an unmet need of the QSR market."

Delaware North, Australia and New Zealand culinary director and chef Markus Werner, who was one of the chefs interviewed, noted that industry should continue to consider the findings from the interviews and address the challenges.

"When the issues around product quality, consistency, reliability of supply, and costs are addressed, lamb can feature on the

QSR/FSR menu all year round, rather than as a special occasion meat," Mr Werner said.

MLA will continue to work with food retailers around the country and share the findings of the research and its practical application. CSIRO will collaborate with the stakeholders on product development, product expansion and technology transfer strategies, based on their needs.

Meanwhile Australians have been able to "Share the Lamb" through a new range of lamb pizzas on Domino's menus, thanks to a collaboration with Australian Lamb and Meat and Livestock Australia.

The Domino's Summer Lamb Pizza and Meltzz range was spearheaded by the Lambassador Sam Kekovich as part of the incredibly popular and successful Summer Lamb Campaign.

Domino's used slow cooked pulled lamb on a Greek Lamb Tzatziki and Lamb Meatlovers pizza, as well as a Greek Lamb Tzatziki Meltzz, Slow Cooked Lamb pasta and moreish Cheese 'n' Mite scrolls, available exclusively in Australia.

According to MLA's domestic marketing manager, Graeme Yardy, the partnership between Australian Lamb and Domino's followed work by MLA's Business Development team in diversifying and expanding the relevance of lamb into quick service restaurants.

"Australians love their lamb and associate it with high quality and flavour. This means adding lamb to a menu allows foodservice operators to capture the opportunity to positively differentiate their business," Mr Yardy said.

"There is a significant opportunity for lamb to shine brightly on fast food menus due to its versatility, taste and quality. Partnerships with restaurants such as Domino's are a fantastic way to showcase lamb to younger generations and those of different cultural backgrounds, especially within metropolitan Australia."

Domino's ANZ head of new product development and innovation Michael Treacy said the launch was not only a fantastic opportunity for expanding Domino's menu options, but also about supporting Australian sheep and lamb producers.

"Our ongoing commitment to championing local produce allows us to proudly present Aussie classics made with ingredients grown and sourced right here in Australia," Mr Treacy said.

"Our connection with local Aussie producers runs deep, and we're dedicated to nurturing the growth of our local farmers. It's a partnership we take great pride in supporting."

Export

Country of focus: China

China has consistently been among Australia's top two largest sheep meat export markets by volume and value since 2013 along with the US.

While sheepmeat accounts for a small proportion of dietary protein in China, consumption has grown gradually over the past decade with rising incomes and urbanisation. Consumption was further boosted by the protein deficit caused by African Swine Fever from 2018 to 2020, with per capita consumption anticipated to increase from 3.7kg in 2018 to 4.2kg by 2027.

Having developed a taste for sheepmeat, it is anticipated that consumers will continue to enjoy more of it, even as the pork industry recovers.

MARKET FOCUS

The top barriers to affluent Chinese consumers buying lamb have been surveyed in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Chongqing cities. Those results showed the following:

- Lamb is too fatty
- Lamb is too expensive
- Don't know how to cook lamb
- Don't eat lamb at home but do eat it when dining out
- Don't like the taste of lamb
- Don't like the smell of lamb

(source: *MLA Global Consumer Tracker China, 2022.*)

About two-thirds of the sheepmeat in China is typically consumed outside the home. With the key motivators for eating out being the variety of dishes and cuisines, unique flavours and superior quality, lamb plays an important role in the foodservice sector.

China's total lamb sales are currently forecast to grow from \$US15.3 billion in 2022 to \$US18.6 billion by 2027.

The majority of Australian sheepmeat – both lamb and mutton – exported to China comprises frozen cuts such as breast and flap, manufacturing, carcass and neck, which are further processed in the market, with a large proportion in the form of thin-sliced rolls for use in hot pot restaurants. Hot pot is a popular way to eat sheep meat out of home.

Traditionally, sheepmeat consumption has been higher in the northern areas of the country and during the cooler months. However, in recent decades interest in the protein has grown faster in coastal cities, where wealthier consumers seek more protein variety with regard to taste and nutritional benefits.

Sheepmeat and ovine offal feature in a limited number of traditional home-cooked recipes – mostly stew and soup-based dishes – but are a popular street food in the form of spiced grilled kebabs and in thin-slice form in hot pot.

For affluent consumers, higher-end full-service restaurants are popular venues for enjoying lamb, where it features in a range of cuisines and dishes, including Western and Middle Eastern style.

Australian lamb can be found on menus in high-end Western-style restaurants and five-star hotels, as well as high-end hot pot establishments.

This has driven growing demand for higher value Australian sheep meat cuts such as rack, backstrap and loin cuts, as well as leg and shoulder.

China's total sheepmeat import volumes were up 12 per cent in 2022–23 year-on-year as food service demand recovered after lockdown was lifted in December 2022.

There are opportunities to increase lamb consumption by providing consumers with more knowledge to help them successfully cook lamb at home.

Some of the strengths for lamb are that it is considered the most superior meat; the meat is usually tender, and there is the perception the animal is well-cared for. Balanced against this is that lamb is not considered easy and convenient to purchase; nor is it thought to be easy and convenient to prepare, or that it can be used in many different meals.

But Australia does not have it all its own way when it comes to sheep meat in China

China is the world's largest producer of sheepmeat, with a sheep and goat flock estimated at around 303 million in 2023.

However, China is forecast to remain a net importer of sheepmeat over the coming years, with imports forecast to increase at 372,800 tonnes carcass weight in 2022 to 444,800 tonnes by 2027.

However, import demand, particularly for mutton, can be volatile depending on domestic production cycles. With environmental policies restricting flock sizes and gradual consolidation of larger-scale feeding operations, import demand is expected to become more stable in the future.

New Zealand is the leading sheep meat supplier to China, followed by Australia.

New Zealand has become increasingly dependent on China which, for the year ending June 2023, accounted for 58 per cent of its sheepmeat exports, compared to 34 per cent for Australia. Smaller volumes are supplied by Uruguay and Chile.

Several countries granted market access are not yet exporting significant volumes.

Australia and New Zealand are approved suppliers of chilled sheepmeat.

However, New Zealand has an advantage with a greater number of listed plants, including for tripe.

Articles courtesy of Meat and Livestock Australia.

Market access overview – sheepmeat – Mainland China

Trade agreements	Import tariffs	Competitors	Volume restrictions	Technical access
China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) (entered into force 20 December 2015) Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) entered into force 1 January 2022	Under ChAFTA : All product categories zero tariffs from 1 Jan 2023	New Zealand: Import tariffs zero from 2016 Multiple plant listings for chilled sheepmeat and sheep tripe	Zero	Restrictions on the number of approved plants, chilled plants and edible offal

Best access  Major challenges

Source: Trade agreements, DFAT, MLA Note: China applies a 9% VAT on most items



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