



THE AUSTRALIAN POLL DORSET

JOURNAL

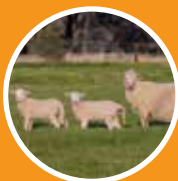
VOLUME 56 / NUMBER 1

MAY 2026



National Poll Dorset Conference 2026

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



There is no better way to work on and for the Poll Dorset breed than to come together, hear the latest information and use it to help shape the future.

That's exactly what happened at the National Poll Dorset Conference at Wagga Wagga, NSW, in February, and thanks must go to Joe Scott, Donna Scott, Jamie-Lee Oldfield, Scott Mitchell and the Mitchell family, the Johnson family and the remainder of their team for organising a wonderful program.

Two of the speakers who presented great take home messages were from Sprout Ag and Rabobank.

The founder of Sprout Ag, Troy Constance, spoke about succession planning and how it is never too early to start this process.

Angus Gidley-Baird from Rabobank made an impressive presentation on the processors dilemma for sourcing lambs. Lamb prices are determined by producer sentiment and the need to fill hooks on the chain.

Overall, the conference highlighted some of the bigger questions we face as the Poll Dorset breed and opportunities we can take.

One issue that raised its head was acknowledging the change in the prime lamb dam base.

A declining Merino flock and fewer first cross ewes being bred means that the lamb production system is changing and the breed needs to be able to meet these needs. Now the prime lamb producers' options for their ewe flock have never been greater with the rise in popularity for breeding prime lambs from a Merino, a composite or even a clean skin.

Poll Dorset breeders now have to cater for a number of different breeding objectives to be able to produce sires for their clients' various ewe flocks. The key is that every breeder has the information to tailor their breeding strategy effectively to suit their clients' ewe flocks. The cornerstone of the Poll Dorset breed's success will be a common language to get the right mix of traits. That's why the

use of Australian Sheep Breeding Values will be vital for a progressive Poll Dorset breed, especially with a combined database across all breeds, which can show how our breed can match or even out perform our competitors.

To be a leading breed, the ability to adapt to different market requirements cannot be stressed enough. A poll taken during the conference showed that more than half the voters felt there was a need to accept change and this reflects a willingness within the breed to look at our future.

What is worrying though is the resistance to using performance data, and while that can be a personal position, it's important to recognise and accept what our customers – our ram buyers both corporate and the younger breeders – are looking for. They have almost certainly been exposed to breeding values during their recently completed education.

It's time to think about the bigger picture for the Poll Dorset breed. We need everyone working together to provide trait knowledge, and that means measuring and feeding that information into Sheep Genetics. Together, we can then work to deliver the right rams to maximise prime lamb returns for our clients and for the prime lamb industry as a whole.

That's the key point – we need our Poll Dorset buyers who put their faith in our breed to be the most profitable they can be, so the breed remains the first choice for the commercial producer.

A final thought - if Poll Dorsets wish to drive the next generation of growth, it means we have to act like a breed that's just starting out. We need not be fearful of breeding values and data and it's not one camp or the other. Just because you have figures does not mean you throw out what has made the breed so successful in terms of growth and structure, and they will always be key. But to forge ahead, we need to listen to our customers who are increasingly data-aware and want to buy rams that not only look good but have the statistics to back that up.

May we, as a breed, be brave enough to take stock and to surge ahead in being the dominant prime lamb sire of choice.

The board would also like to welcome Charlotte Cain, who applied and was accepted. Her skill set includes a strong understanding of social media which was a weakness identified in the current board. We look forward to seeing how Charlotte can add value to the breed by improving our social media presence.

George Carter

PRESIDENT



THE AUSTRALIAN POLL DORSET JOURNAL

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 22-24	NSW State Sheep Show, Dubbo, NSW
June 19-20	NSW Dorset Championships, Cowra, NSW
June 21	Victorian Sheep Show, Ballarat, VIC
July 8-10	LambEX, Adelaide, SA
July 17-19	The Australian Sheep and Wool Show, Bendigo, VIC
Aug 2-3	Hamilton Sheepvention, Hamilton, VIC
Aug 8-16	Ekka Royal Queensland Show, Brisbane, Qld
Aug 28	Bowan Park Open Day
Sept 5-13	Royal Adelaide Show, Adelaide, SA
Sept 11-13	Australian Dorset Championships, Bendigo, VIC
Sept 24-Oct 4	Royal Melbourne Show, Melbourne, VIC
Sept 26-Oct 3	Royal Perth Show, Perth, WA
Oct 21-24	Royal Hobart Show, Hobart, TAS

ACROSS THE PENS

The recent National Poll Dorset Conference in Wagga Wagga was a tremendous success and a great reflection of the strength within our Association. It was encouraging to see such strong attendance, valuable discussion, and a shared commitment to progressing the breed. Thank you to in particular Jamie-Lee Oldfield and all in the Albury Wagga region who put this together and to the speakers and the members who travelled to be part of it.



Having now been in the role for just over six months, I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge how welcoming and supportive the Poll Dorset community has been. It has been a pleasure getting to know many of you, learning more about your operations, and gaining a deeper appreciation for the passion and professionalism that underpins the breed.

We are also seeing positive momentum with the Poll Dorset Journal. Each edition continues to build in quality and reach, strengthening its role as a key platform for communication and promotion. Congratulations to Stephenie on her work driving advertising outcomes, and to Fiona for delivering engaging and well-crafted editorial content — a true team effort that is delivering results.

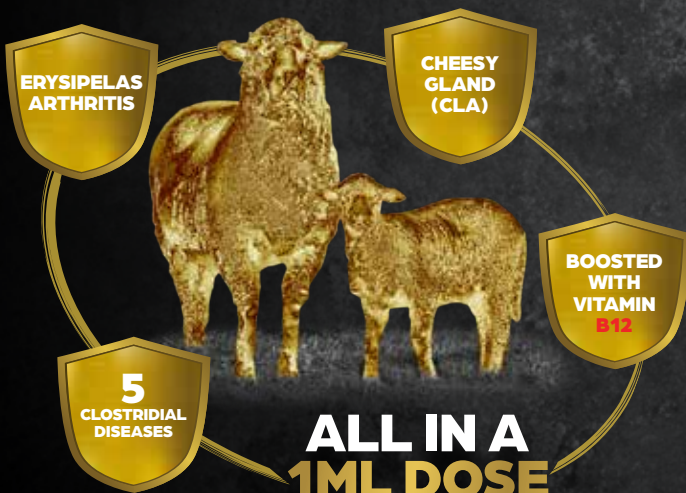
Behind the scenes, Keryn has been managing the annual flock returns and is doing an outstanding job in keeping this critical process running smoothly.

Thank you to all members for your ongoing support and contribution.

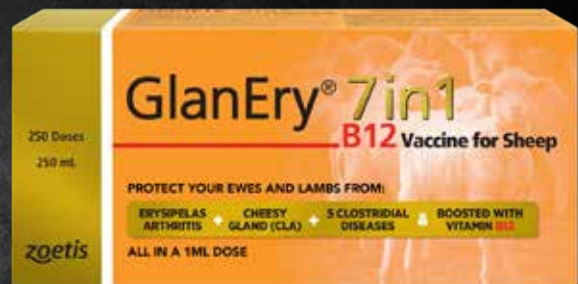
Sue Opie

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PROMOTIONS REPORT

The Australian Poll Dorset website is having a refresh, designed with one clear focus: making it easier for producers to access the information they need, when they need it.

We've delivered a new look, improved layout, and a more user-friendly experience. The main driver behind the update was simple: the old site was starting to show its age. It worked, but it wasn't doing the breed, or our members justice. Finding key information could take longer than it should, and it didn't reflect where our industry is heading.

The new platform improves functionality and reduces ongoing hosting costs, an additional win for the Association.

Importantly, the website is often the first point of contact for younger producers and those new to Poll Dorsets. A modern, easy-to-navigate site makes it easier to learn about the breed, locate a stud, and prepare for ram-buying decisions. For existing members, it means quicker access to news, updates, and resources during a busy time of year.

This isn't just a visual update. It's about building a platform that continues to evolve with industry needs, creating a foundation for sharing timely updates, research insights, and extension resources into the future.

The refresh also supports a broader push to strengthen our digital presence. Marketing and Administration Officer Stephenie Rigney (who joined us last year) has been focused on building our social media reach and sharing the Poll Dorset story with a wider audience. One of the most valuable ways we can support this is through your content. We encourage members to get involved. Photos, videos, and updates from your farm help bring the breed to life and drive buyer engagement. If you have something to share, please send it through.

The website is due to be ready by the end of May so we encourage you to explore it, make sure your details are up to date and use it to support your program.

As always, we welcome your ideas on how we can continue to promote the breed and support members throughout the year.

Brittany Bolt

PROMOTIONS CHAIR

AMENDMENT:

Please note amendment to the award given to the late Max Douglas from Abelene Park, Woolomin, NSW and reported in the December edition of the journal. The award was given as a posthumous distinguished award (as set out in the APDA regulation 36). We apologise that this has caused any confusion.

FEBRUARY BOARD MINUTES

The board meeting of the Australian Poll Dorset Association was held in person on Sunday, February 22.

All members were able to join in person at Wagga Wagga.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

The following resolutions were resolved:

That the fee for ewes be increased by 5c to \$1.15 and the cap be increased to \$9.20 and that all fees are GST inclusive.

That the flock ram levy will be reviewed at the September meeting in preparation for the following financial year.

That the expense budget for money coming in from the flock ram levy be held until promotional decisions have been made.

That the \$7000 allocation for the website redevelopment becomes a capital expense item.

That any non-fiction region – one that does not hold an AGM and is not submitting financial period for two years – is not entitled to rebates.

MAJOR EVENT FUNDING

The following were approved:

That APDA donates \$1500 plus merchandise to the SA Sheep Expo.

That APDA spends \$775 on live streaming the Australian Dorset Championships.

That the APDA provides the WA region with \$2000 of sponsorship and merchandise.

REGIONAL ADVERTISING PROPOSALS

That regional advertising levies remain as they are: up to 1000 rams, \$1000; 1000-3000 rams, \$2000 and more than 3000 rams, \$3000 for the 2027 financial year and that the figures are reviewed annually.

Central Victoria - \$2000 for mixed media

Albury/Wodonga - \$2000 for newspaper advertising and banners

Wimmera - \$1000 for radio advertising

Naracoorte/Hamilton - \$3000 for mixed media

Central Western NSW - \$2000 for mixed media

Goulburn Valley - \$1000 for newspaper advertising

WA - \$2000 for print media and sale sign

JOURNAL RATE CARD/DEADLINES

That an enews with a link to the journal be sent out the day the journal is available online.

That in this year's flock return, there is the option to opt to receive the journal online.

That commercial rates in the journal are increased by 10 per cent but member rates remain the same.

FLOCK COMMITTEE

New stud: Killandayle (in progress)

GENERAL BUSINESS

That a subcommittee be established to investigate a succession plan, structure and pathway for the regions moving forward.

Damon Coats was thanked for 14 years service to the board.

JUDGES FOR 2026 SHOW SEASON

Canberra Royal, Canberra, ACT
February 20-22
James Frost, Hillden, Bannister, NSW.

Sydney Royal, Sydney, NSW
April 2-13
Andrew Scott, Valley Vista, Coolac, NSW.

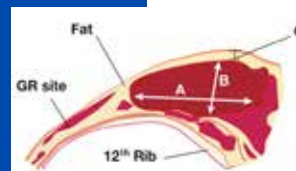
NSW Dorset Championships
June 19-20:
George Carter, Linton, Walcha, NSW.

Victoria Sheep Show (Ballarat)
June 21
Damon Coats, Ilfracombe, Donald, Victoria

Australian Sheep and Wool Show, Bendigo, Victoria
July 17-19
Tania King, Shellal, Hawkesdale, Victoria

Sheepvention, Hamilton, Victoria
August 2-3:
Sam Armstrong, Armdale, Marrer, NSW.

Adelaide Royal, Adelaide, South Australia
September 5-13
Alistair Sutherland, Konongwootong, Konongwootong, Victoria



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TREASURER'S REPORT

Fee Increases

The APDA fees have not been increased for a few years, and unfortunately like everything else our costs of running the association are increasing, especially with inflation currently estimated to be between 4-5%. After discussion at the Board meeting in February it was decided that we needed to increase the price by 5 cents per ewe, bringing the cost to \$1.15 from 1 April 2026, and increase the cap to \$920.

As we are still to make changes to our chart of accounts to accurately track our promotional spend the decision was made to leave all ram associated fees at the current level, but a review of all ram associated fees is planned for the September meeting in preparation for the following financial year.

Major Event Funding and Regional Advertising

Thanks to those regions who submitted applications for the Major Event Funding and Regional Advertising which were considered at the February meeting. Response letters have now been sent back to the regions notifying if the application was successful.

In conjunction with these applications the decision was also made to keep the regional advertising levies at the current level for 2027, i.e. if a region sells 1000 rams then they receive up to \$1000, 1000-3000 rams \$2000, and over 3000 rams \$3000.

Regional Audited Financial Statements, and Minutes

Each year following regional meetings, regions are required to forward Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December., and AGM minutes. This year some regions did not forward these. Subsequently a motion was made and passed that any non-functioning regions are not entitled to any rebates, with a region being declared as "non-functioning" if they have not held an AGM and have not submitted financial reports for a period of two years.

Annual Returns

Annual returns are now open and late fees will once again be applicable after 31 May. If you have any issues with submitting these using the online database please contact the office prior to 31 May for assistance.

Liz Mann

TREASURER



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Fire and ice - the two extremes of breeding

Breeding Poll Dorsets does not need to be a battle of “fire and ice” or the numbers camp and the phenotype camp. Blending both together will create the demand for Poll Dorsets into the future.

And speakers at the National Poll Dorset Conference were quick to show respect to both sides as they suggested the way forward for the breed, highlighting the value of using performance data alongside visual trait selections.

Sheep Genetics operations manager Peta Bradley told delegates that while seedstock producers were constantly monitoring sires, the commercial producer essentially made a ram selection decision once a year.

And that decision making process will come down to which driveway they are going to drive down when they buy their rams.

“As we move forward, commercial producers are more and more astute,” Ms Bradley said.

“They are more financially aware, they need to make a quid and look at different ways to do that.

“They are asking for more data and more information to help make an informed decision on which genetics they are going to purchase.”

Ms Bradley likened the selection process on the best performing rams to a sporting team, where looking at its logo did not tell anything about performance.

But with a sporting team, talking to the coach, finding out about training regimes and how well they travel to play at different venues does provide data which can help assess the potential.

And she said sheep breeding should be considered the same way, with the sheep version of the sporting questions asked of the breeder.

“Once you have picked your team, or in case of commercial buyers, which driveway you are going to drive down, the next question is which ram or which pen of rams will select or take home,” Ms Bradley said.

“That’s like taking the team, and saying which player has scored the most tries in the past season.

“It’s difficult to make a decision by just looking at the team photo, but if you have more data, you can start to make a bit more of an informed decision.”

Ms Bradley said commercial breeders were thinking about two main questions when they bought rams.

“The challenge for a commercial business is to assess if they are happy with where the breed is and whether the breed is heading, and if the answer is no, and you want a different outcome, you are going to have to do something different,” she said.

There was also now the ability for commercial breeders to use combined Lamb Plan evaluation, for sheep breeders to access data and compare terminals and maternals.

“This is a one-stop shop for genetic evaluation for prime lamb sire breeds,” Ms Bradley said.

“It allows a greater comparison of breeds, compares genetics of different breeds, and more data therefore can better predict genetic merit.”



Erica Halliday from Ben Nevis Angus at Walcha, NSW, spoke at the National Poll Dorset conference in Wagga Wagga, NSW.

NextGen Agri director Mark Ferguson said Poll Dorsets had been overtaken as the premier terminal breed in about 2013-2014.

He said it was important to think about things that breeders might need to change to reclaim some of that ground or all the ground.

And part of that was the breed's competitors' willingness to get on board with figures.

"The number of Poll Dorset animals being submitted to Lambplan was overtaken by our competitor in about 2013," Mr Ferguson said.

"There were a few reasons behind that as there was a higher uptake of Lambplan in our competitor than Poll Dorsets and the breed was perceived as the best alternative to use over Merinos.

"But I'm not worried about the past and it now doesn't matter because as a breed, Poll Dorsets need to design animals that can be dominant in the industry and suit what it needs."

Mr Ferguson said customer focus was critical, and there were two "very clear" customers.

"At one end, there is the consumer of the product, and we used to think of families in Australia eating a chop," he said.

"Now 68 per cent of lamb is consumed off shore at high end restaurants, eaten by people who are willing to pay for it.

"If they are not enjoying it, the whole thing doesn't work so we need to think about that when breeding."

The other customer for a ram breeder was the client - the person who will turn up to ram sale and buy rams.

"The two very clear customers are equally as important," Mr Ferguson said.

"While the one that pays the money is the most important on the day, as an industry, we need to think about other customers as well."

Mr Ferguson said everything in breeding objectives should be focused on one of those two customers - either the end consumer eating the lamb or the producer driving up your driveway to buy your ram.

"Every good business is focussed on customers, and those that don't, don't do that well," he said.

Mr Ferguson said intramuscular fat was a good example of how to ensure quality.

"We have heard about it for years, and we finally have tools in place where the IMF can be measured, and we are starting to see differentiation in the market," he said.

"Beef is well ahead of us in this game, obviously through breeding for IMF.

"Perhaps we lost our way when we focused on growth and muscle too much and not enough on meat eating quality and we've all heard that.

"Now we are now well and truly back on track with genetic trends for IMF ticking away beautifully up again.

Mr Ferguson questioned just how hard the push should be for IMF.

"How far should we go and do we need to be 10 per cent?," he said.

"The answer is probably not as we all love and eat lamb at 4-6 per cent marbling and we really enjoy it.

"In your breeding objective, it's up to you whether you make that 7 and above or happy to keep it where it is.

"But it needs to be part of the breed objective because letting it slip makes it tough to eat.

And while effort had been focused on the IMF part of the eating quality equation, shear force must also be part of this.

"So when you put a butter knife through a bit of lamb loin, it is easy to cut and easy to chew and is a fantastic eating experience and so IMF is good, really tender even better," he said.

He said this was where genomics was important as in the next two decades, there was nothing else that would give breeders shear force data with the inability to determine shear force based purely on IMF.

"The breed needs to keep topping up the genomic database to keep forcing shear force lower," Mr Ferguson said.

"I think we forgot about shear force, because Wagyu told a story (high IMF, tenderness) but shear force is equally as important."

Mr Ferguson said it was important to make decision that would have the breed, and breeders, ready for 10 years time

Angus breeder Erica Halliday from Ben Nevis Angus at Walcha, NSW, said it was possible to breed for type and for numbers, something they had done in their own business.

"We decided we wanted to do something different and used the fire and ice model to get where we wanted to go," Ms Halliday said.

"There are some Angus breeders who breed for type and some people who breed for numbers.

"We decided we liked the type of cattle my father and grandfather had, which were successful and worked in our country.

"That type of cow was important for her constitution, ability and all those things you breed for.

"At the same time, we wanted to ensure that customers had a good eating experience.

"It seemed like people wanted to be in one of each camp, but we decided we wanted to do both.

"To do that, I think you needed to do things differently and a lot of genetics wasn't working for us that others were choosing."

That led to Ben Nevis to test internally within their herd to find animals that worked for them.

"This has been the culmination of type and genomics," she said.

"We looked at every female on the place, rated her on how her progeny performs and progeny sales.

"We developed indexes in the herd to determine the cows we would have as donors and the rest we made as recipients and we made real genetic progress."

APDA NATIONAL CONFERENCE



Garry Armstrong from Marrar, NSW, and James Frost from Bannister, NSW, at the National Poll Dorset Conference.



Laurie Fairclough, York, WA and Ross Winfield from JBS Feedmill at the National Poll Dorset Conference.



George, Sarah and James Carter from Walcha, NSW, at the National Poll Dorset Conference.



Pat Flanagan from Comadai and Shannon Sutherland from Koonongwootong at the National Poll Dorset Conference.



Robert, Jane and Mark Yates from Yerong Creek, NSW, at the National Poll Dorset Conference.



Sally Scott from Coolac, NSW, and Charlotte Cain from Carisbrook, Victoria, at the National Poll Dorset Conference.



Scott Mitchell from Culcairn, Joe Scott from Coolac and guest speaker Richard Hamilton at the conference dinner as part of the National Poll Dorset Conference.



Scott Mitchell, Culcairn, NSW_ Angus Howard, from Sprout Ag and Maddie and Sam Armstrong from Marrar, NSW, at the National Poll Dorset Conference.

Same breed, new thinking

Poll Dorsets have the opportunity to be a designer terminal breed should they choose.

And offering specific traits that address challenges or offer extras could be a tipping point to encourage prime lamb breeders to select Poll Dorsets.

Dr Mark Ferguson from NextGen Agri said the prime lamb industry was changing, and there were opportunities for Poll Dorset breeders.

This included the prime lamb dam base, which traditionally focused on first cross ewes.

“The message is you don’t have to decide on the one direction or to target one ewe base (Merinos, first cross, composites, shedding) and you can have different directions,” Dr Ferguson said.

“It might be sensible to say you are a specialist that is going to provide for one of these ewe markets and be really good at that and tell your story clearly and then potentially you are able to nail that segment of market.”

The other major change to the prime lamb industry was the increase in lot feeding of lambs.

“We have all heard of the increase in feedlotting, and with grain prices at pretty low levels and lamb prices very good, feedlots range from small to big specialist operations,” Dr Ferguson said.

“Infrastructure is being built and I am sure we will see more of it.”

While lamb feedlotting is a new industry, it’s de regueur for the beef industry, and the newness could offer something for Poll Dorset breeders.

“There is an opportunity for Poll Dorsets, not only to compete on traditional traits like growth but to go hard on whether we can have the healthiest lamb into the market,” he said.

“Aa lot of traits are not thought about but because lambs could be going into a feedlot, we want to have a lamb that will thrive and not cause grief.

“They may be bred to be finished on grass but a feedlot can be a dusty environment with different feed and with different diseases.”

Dr Ferguson said one of the biggest diseases affecting lambs in a feedlot was pneumonia, which he said did have a genetic component. Pleurisy and pneumonia were both heritable traits which were correlated with the immune system of the animal.

“Should these be in our breeding strategies now because industry has more and more feedlots so lambs are more and more prone to disorders?,” he said.

“Some cohorts of lambs have up to 60 per cent trimming due to lung issues going on.

“Things like this are not terminal traits that a breeder would think of immediately but I think these could be part of a future breeding direction, to set up for an industry that does not exist yet.”

Another issue in feedlots is pink eye due to the dusty environments, but a lamb with a better immune system stays healthier in general.

“Many of the issues have a genetic component,” Dr Ferguson said.

“A whole raft of things in a breeding objective will become increasingly important.”

And dag score was one where the Poll Dorset breed could take a lead.

Dr Ferguson said breeding for low dag scores was the “closest thing to magic that I have ever seen in genetics”

“When you have a superior ram for dags and put it over ewes where they tend to have dags, there are none in the lambs,” he said.

“In your own enterprises, how lovely would it be to not have to crutch those sheep.

“But equally for your clients who are trying to finish lambs and don’t have to crutch those lambs, has to be one of the most marketable things you could have.

“This is the kind of trait you can lean into.

“It’s free to measure, ridiculously repeatable and quite heritable and has to be one of my more favourite traits.

“There is massive potential and it will be exhibited in the terminal lambs.”

Working on a breed value for footrot or scald and selecting for sheep with good feet would also be a boon for clients.

“I encourage Poll Dorset breeders to think outside the box on what they can do with genetics,” he said.



The outlook for lamb

The outlook for the lamb industry is bright but any price expectations need to be built around the ever increasing role of exports.

Rabobank animal protein analyst Angus Gidley-Baird said demand was growing at a faster rate that the industry could supply.

And at the same time, prices had doubled in price in the past 25 years, even when adjusted for inflation..

“There are not a lot of commodities that can look to that,” Mr Gidley-Baird said.

“The beef guys got really excited back in 2022 as they finally set prices in real adjusted terms that were better than back in the 1970s.

“It has taken that long for the beef guys to get there again but lamb prices have continued to go up.

“What underlies that is that there is more demand than there is supply.”

The lack of knowledge about the number of lambs available was driving the market, he said, and it was not so much the physical number but expectations people have about how many lambs were out there.

“You are sitting there as a processor, trying to make a decision about what your price will be and you are trying to guess not only how many lambs are out there but how many lambs the processor next door to you is going to have and what his price will be,” Mr Gidley-Baird said.

“They are second guessing what the competition is doing, and that is what is driving competition at the moment.”

Mr Gidley-Baird said processors were trying to get as many of lambs and sheep they could through the system to keep their plants running as efficiently as possible.

That led to competition forcing prices up, and smaller margins for processors.

“By doing so, it’s setting prices well above what a market efficient price could suggest we should be at the moment,” he said..

“That’s why we continue to see \$11-\$12/kg lambs and will see forward contracts that are very healthy.

“This is despite when you look at the fundamentals like production numbers and export markets and supply, it’s saying prices should be \$9/kg.

“We’ve got this situation where processors keep bidding them up and it’s great from a producer point of view because supply is limited and they are competing for it

“We all know that times will change, and the shoe will be on the other foot when there is more supply.”

One of the difficulties in the market was the uncertainty about lamb and sheep numbers. Official statistics are “scratchy at best”, Mr Gidley-Baird said, even from using slaughter data and working backwards.

“The national lamb and sheep slaughter in 2024 was a record and theoretically, you could say we have taken more breeding ewes out of the system, therefore we should have less lambs in the system,” he said.



MARKET UPDATE

“Lamb slaughter did drop 7 per cent in 2025, but we still got the second highest number of lamb slaughter despite record sheep slaughter in 2024.”

“There are two instances in the past 20 years when we have sold more sheep as a result of dry conditions and the subsequent year, increased lamb production.

“It doesn’t always hold that an increase in sheep slaughter will lead to a decrease in lamb production.”

There were also questions around the current supply.

Mr Gidley-Baird said weekly lamb slaughter would have to be down 10 per cent year-on-year for his model to produce lamb prices of \$10-\$11/kg.

“Even if we assume lamb production is down 7 per cent, we are seeing some of the biggest year on year changes in the past 20 years,” he said.

“There are more questions than answers.”

Export markets

What is more certain is the level of demand internationally for Australian lamb.

Mr Gidley-Baird said Australia exported 68 per cent of lamb produced, compared to 50 per cent 10 years ago.

“We are now almost exporting three quarters of what we produce,” he said.

He said this had a bearing on what lamb producers bred, because the majority of customers were not buying in supermarkets but in export markets.

“Do they want a different product or something different, what cuts are they looking at, what size are they looking at,” Mr Gidley-Baird said.

“As lamb goes, domestic consumption is relatively steady and all growth in production has been going into the export markets.

“You would think that the domestic customer is starting to feel the pinch on the price of lamb.

“In the CPI figures, lamb is the one that has gone up the most in terms of price, lifting 14 per cent compared to beef up 10 per cent and pork and poultry less than 1 per cent.”

Lamb also suffered from having fewer price points it could be sold for.

“There are a lot less lamb products on that supermarket shelf at different pricing points compared to beef,” he said.

“Generally, consumers can justify spending \$18-\$19/kg for beef mince when you know top range steak is selling for \$40-\$50/kg but for lamb, the fewer options in terms of price points, makes it a lot harder.”

On the export front, the news was promising.

Volumes to the United States were up 7 per cent last year and China was up 11 per cent.

And the biggest growth had been seen in Europe and the United Kingdom.

The UK_Australia Free Trade Agreement provides beneficial access to that market but still will take time to grow. Even still, volumes grew by 30 per cent to Europe and the UK last year.

“The EU/UK market is half the size of the US market and it’s interesting in terms of growth,” Mr Gidley-Baird said.

“We will have to cannibalise someone else’s share of the market.

“I don’t believe UK consumers will eat more lamb, but they might just choose to get from a different source and their own production is static to slightly declining.

“New Zealand production is also slightly declining so we have the opportunity to grow into that market but probably not the same growth in volume as the US market”.

The major player remains the US market, which Mr Gidley-Baird said had been growing well despite prices lifting.

“US lamb volume and sales were up by 16 per cent last year, and it’s possible record US beef prices have had a bit of a rub on effect to lamb prices,” he said.

“I don’t think it’s the only reason though and there is a great opportunity to grow that share into the US market and convince US consumers that lamb is a great alternative red meat.”

There was a challenge in the US market, in terms of how they consume meat.

“They like a big product and they also eat a lot of product in ground form, with more than half their beef consumed in ground form as in burgers and patties,” he said.

“The biggest market is carcass cuts and manufacturing, so we need to convince them that cuts of lamb are a good alternative.”

Future for lamb prices

Mr Gidley-Baird said there were lots of positives about the lamb market. There was a sound production system, a great ability to share information across all the breeds from genetic point of view, and developments in the processing sector around value add marketing and eating quality.

He said this was important because if Australia wanted to sell some of the highest priced red meat to a retail customer, the consumer needed to be confident in what they were buying. In turn, producers needed to be confident lamb was meeting the consumers specifications.

He predicted lamb prices would remain around \$11/kg for trade weights, even though the model he used suggested the price should be lower.

“I think we will see prices remain relatively strong through the first half of the year and as increased numbers come in during the second half of year, we may see the price ease which will provide a bit of breathing room from a processor point of view,” Mr Gidley-Baird said.

But the long term trend was “very positive”, he said, with great opportunities into new export markets like India and into other areas of Asia, as well as the possibility to leverage Australia’s position into existing markets such as the US and Europe.

“What we do need is to work on product consistency and quality, to ensure we can continue to convince the consumer they are buying what they want to buy,” he said.

“At the end of day, lamb is going to be a high price protein - it can’t compete with chicken - so we need to give consumers the reason to buy it.”

MLA predicts smaller flock

Australia's sheep industry is heading into 2026 with tighter supply and reduced flock-level flexibility, particularly across southern production regions.

The national flock is forecast to decline 2.7 per cent to 67.1 million, reflecting ongoing seasonal pressure and several years of elevated turn-off.

For producers, the key takeaway is that rebuild options are likely to remain limited in the short-term.

Dry conditions across Victoria, SA, Tasmania and southern NSW continue to weigh on pasture availability, fodder reserves and confidence. While recent rainfall has offered some relief in parts, many producers remain cautious around stocking rates, retention and replacement decisions.

This caution is reflected in the 2026 slaughter outlook.

Lamb slaughter is forecast to fall 11 per cent to 21.86 million, while sheep slaughter is forecast to decline 30 per cent to 7.13 million. This points to a smaller pool of available stock and a slower pathway to rebuilding.

Heavy turn-off in recent years – including breeding females – has reduced the industry's immediate ability to lift numbers.

On farms, this means flock decisions will hinge on seasonal confidence. Producers with tight feed supply may weigh up whether to retain breeders, sell earlier, or adjust their enterprise mix to manage risk and cash flow.

In many regions, meaningful flock rebuilding is unlikely until feed conditions improve more broadly and consistently.

Production is expected to remain relatively resilient despite reduced slaughter, supported by continued gains in average carcass weights. Lamb production is forecast to ease 10 per cent to 537,000 tonnes carcass weight, while mutton production is expected to fall 29 per cent to 184,770 tonnes.

This underscores the value of finishing systems that maintain performance when numbers tighten.

Sheep feedlots are becoming an increasingly permanent feature of the Australian sheep industry. While they remain less formalised and less advanced than the cattle feedlot sector, there is a clear shift toward more professional and structured feeding systems, alongside a growing prevalence across the industry.

Producers are increasingly investing in containment feeding infrastructure to manage animals during dry conditions. This typically includes the use of self-feeders and smaller, contained paddocks designed to maintain condition and improve control over nutrition.

At the same time, there is a rise in larger, more professional feedlot operations, with some businesses now turning off more than 100,000 annually.

The expansion of lot feeding is delivering several benefits to the industry. It is helping to smooth seasonal and highly variable ('lumpy') supply patterns – providing a more consistent flow of finished stock to processors.

Containment feeding systems are also allowing producers to wean lambs earlier and better manage pregnant ewes, supporting improved fertility outcomes and overall flock productivity. Sheep lot feeding is also contributing to heavier carcass weights and will continue to do so going forward as it is established as a proven sales channel.

A requirement for lot feeding to become engrained as a long-term option, is a shift away from sheep producers not tending to market or sell lambs as stores.

A key challenge for the sector is the lack of comprehensive data around sheep lot feeding. Much of the current understanding of sheep lot feeding is based on anecdotal evidence rather than formal measurement.

However, available survey data indicates that at least 23 per cent of sheep receive a minimum of 35 days of exclusive grain feeding prior to sale, highlighting the growing importance of supplementary feeding in production systems.

This points to a clear need for further data collection and analysis to better understand the grainfed sheep sector.

Ongoing improvements in genetics, grain feeding, containment feeding and demand for heavier lambs will continue to support this trend.

Wool is also re-emerging as an important part of the production equation. Stronger wool prices are improving returns from Merino enterprises, potentially encouraging producers to retain sheep where conditions allow.

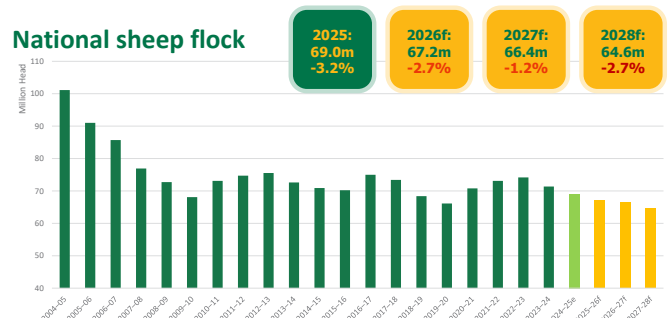
For Merino and mixed-enterprise operations, this shift could increasingly influence flock structure and retention decisions over the next 12 months.

Finished lamb prices are expected to remain firm, though restocker demand may stay softer if seasonal conditions remain uneven.

The outlook suggests 2026 will be a year where management matters as much as market direction. Feed budgeting, protecting core breeders and targeting weight and market specifications are likely to be more important than chasing volume.

Overall, 2026 is shaping up as a year to protect flexibility. Tighter sheep numbers and mixed seasonal conditions are likely to keep rebuild decisions cautious, while strong finished markets continue to reward weight, timing and meeting specification.

Businesses that manage feed carefully, retain productive breeders and maintain finishing performance are likely to be better placed to respond when seasonal confidence lifts.



Source: ABS, MLA Forecast



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Poll Dorset lambs set national high of \$500

A tough start did not stop the lambs from the Dean family at Tourello setting a national record in autumn in a stellar result for Poll Dorsets.

With records broken almost on a weekly basis, the Deans were the first to crack the \$500 mark, thanks to a careful breeding and feeding strategy in their mixed farming operation.

The Deans farm in central Victoria, north-west of Ballarat and run a prime lamb breeding operation based on using a Poll Dorset ram over a Border Leicester-Merino ewe.

Ewes are lambed down in early May, with the goal of putting the ewes and lambs onto a grazing crop through winter.

That didn't happen in 2025 due to dry conditions and a very late break, which Darren Dean said made it a tough start for that year's drop of lambs.

It meant ewes and lambs had to be fed through to spring, before the lambs were shorn and run on a crop of rape and then onto lucerne, where faba beans were available in self feeders to supplement the grazing.

The Deans grow their own faba beans specifically to feed to their sheep, as part of the mixed farming operation.

Each year, the crop of lambs is shorn. None are sold as suckers with the goal of hitting the highest export weights in early March.

This year was no different and while they came into the Ballarat saleyards a little later than normal, the first cut ended up setting a national record at \$500.

Darren was not there on the day, as he was working on the tractor, but watched the sale live and said he was thrilled to see the result.

The pen of 70, which had an estimated carcass weight of 40-44 kilograms, sold to Thomas Foods International.

And the following week, the Deans sold another line of similar weight lambs for \$487.

The Deans are no strangers to being at the top of the price lists and setting records.

In 2025, they were the first to reach \$400 and at the time, Darren said he thought it was a stellar result, not knowing that 12 months later, rates would be even higher.

His strategy to take all lambs up to heavier weights is a deliberate move to maximise income from each lamb.

"If we can put another 10 kilograms on a lamb, then at these rates, that's another \$100 or more we can earn," Darren said.

"We have the feed so it's worth the effort as we always try to sell grazing wheat each year to allow the ewes and lambs feed through winter."

Rams are selected from Mallee Park at Hopetoun, Victoria, and selections are made by looking at the physical attributes of the sires.

"We are wanting rams that have a lot of length, and we buy long rams," he said.

They have dabbled with using another terminal sire, buying enough rams to join about 150 ewes, but weren't happy as they "didn't turn out like the Poll Dorset lambs did".

The Deans are happy they have stuck with keeping sheep in their mixed farming operation, resisting the temptation to go solely cropping, and hitting a national high reinforced their choice.

"It's very special to hit \$500 for lambs," Darren said.



National record holder lambs sold by the Dean family from Tourello, Victoria



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Getting social with your message

Social media can be a huge asset for a business but knowing the right way to use it is critical.

That's the opinion of Heidi Wright, who runs the social media company Wright Social which has a mission to help those in agriculture connect to people using social media strategies.

Ms Wright said social media could be new for people and could look scary and uncomfortable.

"It is important to look at it through the right mindset and why we are doing something, as it can be really rewarding and profitable for businesses," Ms Wright said.

She said while customers go away, advocates stayed.

And it was important to look at social media learnings, and how to increase reach and visibility to an ideal ram buyer.

"How do we take the attention we have earned through content, and through leaning into algorithms and convert it into prospects," Ms Wright said.

"It's not just more ram buyers we want but more repeat ram buyers."

Ms Wright said it took work and investment to have social content do achieve connection with clients.

"The content needs to connect with the right person at the right time in their decision-making journey, then they become a customer, and if a repeat purchase, that's a powerful place to be," she said.

Ms Wright said there was a difference between strategy and tactics when it came to social media.

"Strategy is the destination and how you are going to get there while tactics are what specific actions are you going to take to help you reach your destination," she said.

"We need tactics and we need strategy to show up to our ideal ram buyer and convert that to a sale."

Ms Wright said in Australia, people spent about six hours on the internet every day, and 20 million of the 24.5 million internet users were on social media, with some users having up to six social media sites on their phones.

But as producers, it was important to know how to attract attention and how retain attention and convert it and mobilise people into action.

Analysis by Wright Social of the farming population showed 86 per cent of the 35-54 age group had visited one or more social media sites in the past seven days, 78 per cent of the 25-34 age group and 80 per cent of the 18-24 age group.

On average farmers were spending an average of two hours and 23 minutes on social media each day.

Ms Wright said while initially people had used Facebook as a means of "killing time" and post used images and text to create connection, a different purpose had evolved.

"On Facebook, you get the attention of people and we can advertise," she said.

"Businesses saw potential in Facebook and since then, businesses have had a big role to play."

She said social media was now classed as a discovery platform, along with AI and Google, to research brands and find solutions.

This purpose could be used by ram producers.

"When you think about ram sales, you will find in the lead up period, people searching and looking for information," Ms Wright said.

"At that time, it is sensible to show up in a higher frequency manner."

Ms Wright said it was helpful to look at how other businesses utilised social media.

"It is important to build trust with a brand and send a clear message that this is what we do, this is who we are, this is the value we offer, these are the results, this is how we can provide you with the outcomes you are looking for," she said.

Some of the tips for social media include:

- Create value and share a story
- Be authentic and helpful, solve a problem
- Be helpful
- Build trust
- Establish networks
- Foster relationships
- Grow influence

In terms of posts, Ms Wright said videos were useful, with 60 per cent of people on Facebook spending time watching videos.

"Faces and voices stop people - people trust people," she said.

Posts that do well lead with value and then educated.

"Posts that generate the high visibility on social media hook attention fast, lead with value before education, feature faces and people, lean into trending audio and storytelling formats and keep captions short and punchy," Ms Wright said.

And while attracting attention was one thing, driving awareness to action was the next. This could be done by downloads of catalogues, direct signups like SMS or email, traffic to sites analysis or even event registrations.

Posts should also:

- Be clear and specific and tell the user what to do;
- Tell them what they can expect;
- Create a gentle nudge of urgency, and
- Have a call to action that was visually easy to spot.

"You need to build the brand first, and sales come later," she said.

The different social media platforms could be used for different purposes:

Facebook - best for building brand awareness, building communities, Facebook groups, advertising events and capturing leads.

Instagram - best for visual storytelling, reaching the younger market and generating quick shares for content, and big for e-commerce.

X (Twitter) - works well for live commentary, public conversations and brands that can engage consistently.

LinkedIn - remains the top platform for business-to-business marketing, thought leadership, employer branding and professional visibility.

YouTube - supports long term visibility, education, and trust through both short and long form video.

TikTok - popular social media platform that drives fast discovery and reach through short form, trend-based video content.

Why is succession still tough?

The topic of succession within agribusiness is increasingly more difficult to navigate in comparison to what it used to be.

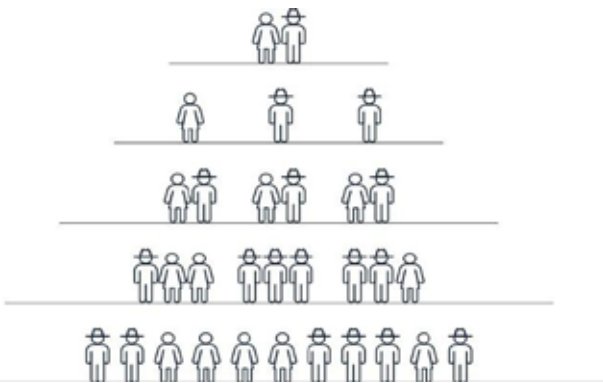
Succession within agribusiness is becoming increasingly complex compared to what it once was.

So, in a world where there is more discussion and greater proactivity around succession planning, why is it still so difficult to navigate?

The biggest challenge all families face is communication.

Communication is often the key factor that determines the success or downfall of a family's succession.

At SproutAg, one of the most common things we see when working with farming families is that communication doesn't evolve as the family grows. A family unit of mum and dad (the owning generation) plus three children can quickly become mum and dad, three children, their spouses and their children — and they are only the family stakeholders. You also need to consider the external stakeholders involved in the business: the agronomist, accountant, stock and station agent, solicitor and others.



Suddenly, the owning generation has moved from managing relationships with three children and a handful of advisers to navigating communication across multiple generations and a larger advisory network. However, their communication approach often hasn't grown alongside the family.

As families expand and welcome new members, dynamics and goals can change. How will two generations work together over the next two decades? Does the owning generation plan to step back or spend more time travelling? Perhaps the incoming generation wants to take on more responsibility, debt and growth plans.

While communication within the business must evolve, the leadership of the business also needs to evolve.

Succession planning today looks very different to what it did two decades ago. We are increasingly seeing up to four generations still alive, compared to three in the past. At the same time, asset values have risen significantly, and more recently, higher living costs have impacted the retiring generation and non-working family members, as there is often less free cash flow available.

These factors alone can shift family dynamics and influence how succession conversations should be approached. This is why both leadership and communication within the family business must evolve.



Troy Constance

At SproutAg, we believe there is real value in hearing from each family member, understanding what they want and working

towards balance across the family. While the owning generation will often have the final say, giving everyone the opportunity to share their perspective helps ensure people feel heard, whether they are part of the owning generation, working in the business, or involved as non-working family members.

This process allows the owning generation to develop a balanced view and understand the different perspectives across the family. From these conversations, they can establish clear guardrails for the business, taking a “nose in, hands out” leadership approach.

Establishing and communicating clear guardrails sets expectations within the family, particularly in situations where what is fair is not always equal. These guardrails can also create an opportunity for the owning generation to step back from day-to-day operations and move into a more strategic leadership role as the business and its assets continue to grow.

So how do you move succession forward in a large family?

Through strong leadership, regular communication and clear guidelines.

Another critical step in the succession process is ensuring the right people are involved. In addition to hearing from all family members, it is important to have one aligned team of professional advisers. Accountants and solicitors both play key roles in this process. Accountants help establish the right business structures, whether that be partnerships, companies or trusts, while solicitors ensure the arrangements are properly documented in line with the owning generation's wishes.

Families who navigate succession successfully often have three things in common:

1. They start the process early.
The owning generation takes the initiative, sets clear expectations and begins the conversation early with family members.
2. They focus on clarity and avoid a “set and forget” approach.
They continue to review the structure of the business and recognise that circumstances change over time, whether through family growth, health considerations or business opportunities.
3. They prioritise clear communication.
Roles, responsibilities and expectations are clearly defined and regularly discussed.

By starting early and putting the right structures in place, these families are better positioned to successfully transition their businesses across generations.

This article was contributed by Sprout Ag.

How Poll Dorsets stack up in the Combined LAMBPLAN analysis

The average of the 2025 drop for all Poll Dorsets has remained relatively unchanged in their position in Percentile Bands for key traits as shown in Figure 1. Overall, the Poll Dorset breed average for 2025 drop has remained in the same Percentile Band for post weaning eye muscle depth (PEMD) and intramuscular fat (IMF), being the 30th and 60th Percentiles respectively. Poll Dorsets have seen a slight increase in Percentile Band ranking for post weaning weight (PWT) and lean meat yield (LMY), going up a Percentile. However, Poll Dorsets have dropped a Percentile for post weaning fat (PFAT) and shear force (SHEARF5) in the Combined LAMBPLAN evaluation.

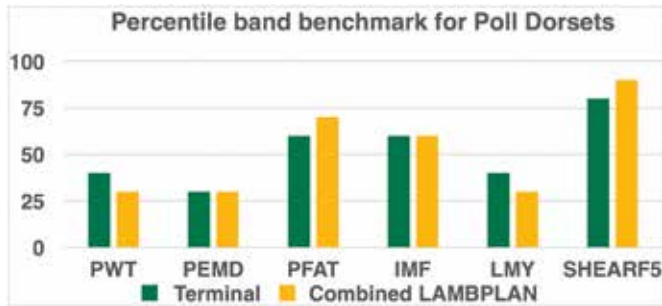


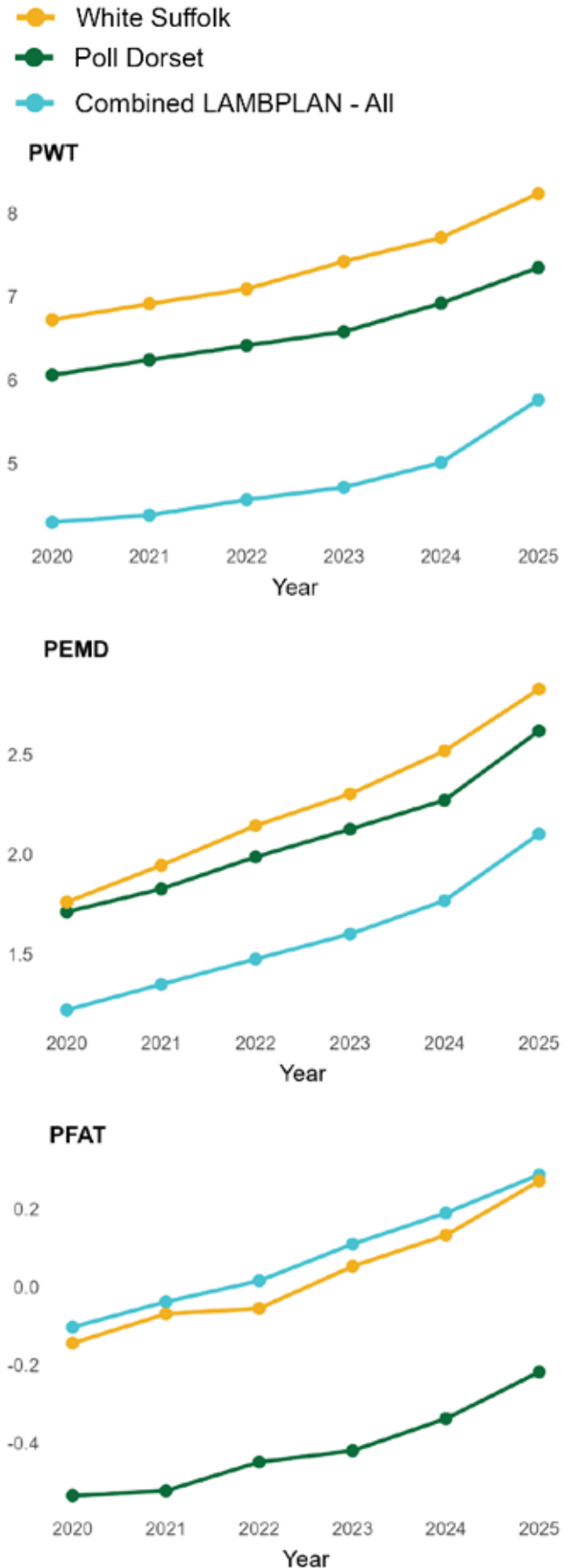
Figure 1 - Percentile Band benchmark for Poll Dorsets in the Terminal and Combined LAMBPLAN analyses

In the Combined LAMBPLAN analysis, the genetic trends for Poll Dorsets are tracking in the desired direction for the majority of traits, with some steady gains being made for IMF, PEMD, and SHEARF5 (Figure 2). However, Poll Dorsets are still quite below the average performance of White Suffolks for all traits reported, as well as being below average for the entire Combined LAMBPLAN analysis for eating quality traits. It's important that the Poll Dorsets don't take their foot of the peddle and let the gap between them and the White Suffolks or other key breeds in the Combined LAMBPLAN evaluation for key traits of importance to Terminal sheep breeding objectives.



Combined LAMBPLAN breeding values for all key traits in a Poll Dorset breeding objective have now been released (apart from indexes). If you haven't already, review your flocks changes for Combined LAMBPLAN.

To see all enhancements made for the Combined LAMBPLAN analysis, please scan the QR code



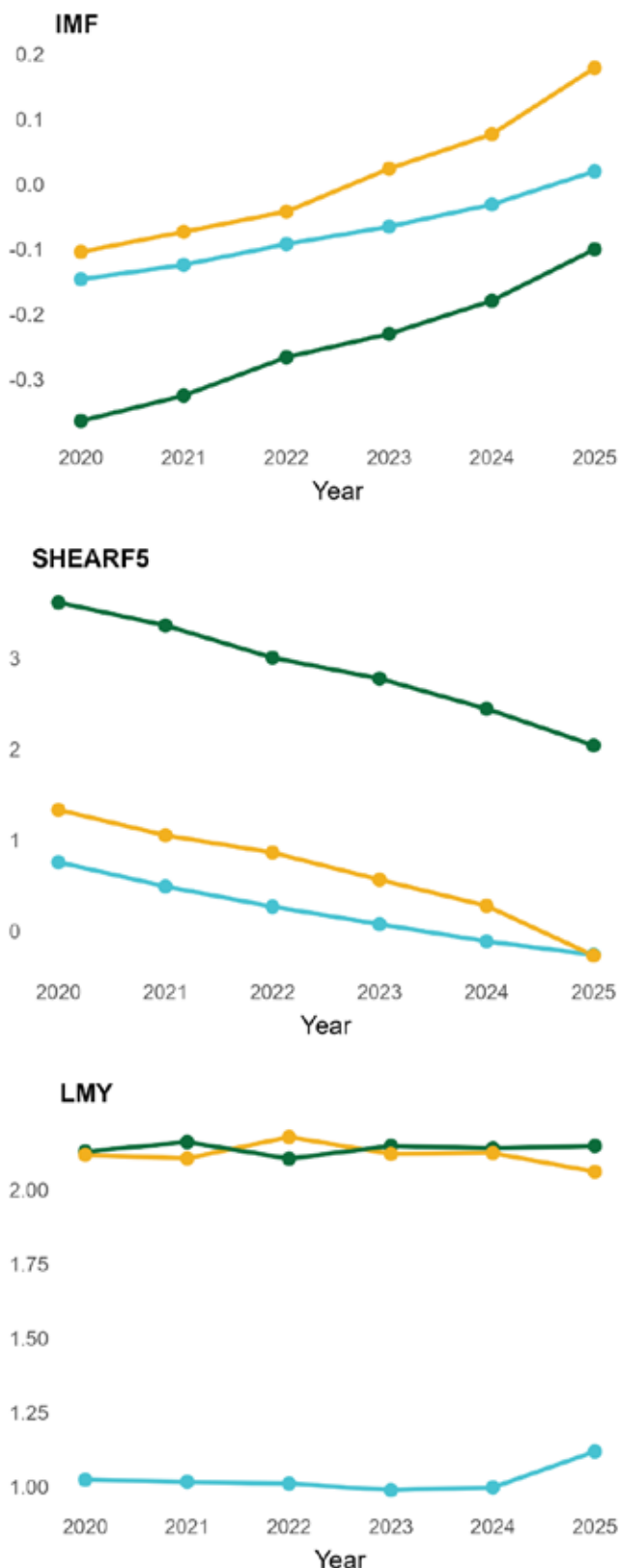


Figure 2 - Genetic trends for Combined LAMBPLAN analysis average, Poll Dorsets, and White Suffolks

Making more genetic gain

Poll Dorset breeders could improve their rate of genetic gain substantially by improving some key data quality metrics. Table 1 shows the average, minimum, and maximum values for some key data quality metrics, with quite large ranges across all Poll Dorset flocks. Poll Dorset breeders could:

- Improve the proportion of full pedigree (both sire and dam pedigree) recorded on animals
- Reduce the generation interval of sires
 - Strategically genotype ~20% of potential young ram lambs well before joining to help improve ASBV accuracy of unproven ram lambs
- Increase effectiveness of data by ensuring large numbers of animals within a contemporary group, and more than two sires represented within the animals in the contemporary group
- Select animals with higher ASBVs and use ASBVs in conjunction with visual/structural classing to help inform classing and breeding decisions
- Record more animals for important traits like body weights, fat and muscle scans, lambing ease, etc.
- Do more daily lambing rounds to capture important environmental influences on performance like birth type, rear type, dam ID (and age), etc.

Data quality metric	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Full Pedigree (%)	89	21	100
Male generation interval (years)	2.8	1.6	6.8
Female generation interval (years)	3.2	0.65	4.1
Effectiveness of data (%)	64.5	4.4	90.7
Accuracy of lamb eating quality (LEQ) index (%)	39.9	17.4	60.2
Trend of lamb eating quality (LEQ)	2.5	-1.2	6.5
Male selection intensity of LEQ (%)	17.5	-18.5	52.8
Female selection intensity of LEQ (%)	6.9	-383	58.7
Proportion of flock recorded for weights (%)	97.7	33.7	126.3
Proportion of flock recorded for carcase (%)	58.1	4.2	100
Unique dates of birth (days)	43.3	1	137.4

Table 1. Key data quality metrics for Poll Dorset flocks (average of past 5 years)

To discuss how to improve your flock's genetic merit, please contact Sheep Genetics

Marnie Hodge
 Senior Development Officer at Sheep Genetics
 mhodge@mia.com.au
 0400 948 784

Pre-lambing management

The most appropriate management of pre-lambing ewes can pay off and it's a matter of management.

And giving a vaccine in a critical period will not only boost ewe health but the lamb as well.

Dr Tom Burke is the veterinary operations manager for NSW and said there was a series of strategies that should be followed.

"You need to provide adequate nutrition, and you've heard that many times before, and you should use a pre-lambing vaccine to improve colostrum, vaccinate around lambing time to protect the ewe and we need to manage our worms really well around this period because that is when they are very susceptible to worms," Dr Burke said.

"And it's not just the vaccination but the timing of it."

He said birthweight was a key factor for lamb survival, and this was mostly influenced by adequate nutrition, providing enough energy so that ewe can grow that lamb appropriately.

And while sheep people love to talk about genetics and love to talk about nutrition, animal health was third in line and sometimes an afterthought, Dr Burke said.

Two pre-lambing issues which need to be monitored for were pregnancy toxemia and hypocalcemia, which he said could present in a similar manner.

"In terms of pregnancy toxemia, it is not a bad idea to have a glucose-like product available at that time around lambing," Dr Burke said.

"It is basically caused when the lamb is consuming more glucose than the ewe is able to provide and it sends the ewe into a comatose state.

"It's a very complex condition but basically once they go down for a long period, ewes have a poor prognosis."

Ewes with pregnancy toxemia can be treated with oral glucose.

Dr Burke said it was typically seen in triplet-bearing ewes which may have been in quite good condition and run out of feed at the end of gestation.

Another issue could arise with hypocalcaemia, and typically occurred when moving sheep in late gestation.

This presents with typical neurological behaviour, with ewes showing an S bend in their neck.



ANIMAL HEALTH

Dr Burke said ewes responded well to treatment so if given calcium, they should recover.

Vaccination to protect against disease was well accepted, but the knowledge around how this influenced colostrum in ewes was less well known.

"I'm not worried about what you are using but it is important to make sure people have vaccine programs that make sure ewes are getting a shot every year," Dr Burke said..

Vaccination at the right time will ensure antibodies created in the ewe are passed into the lamb.

"If you have specific diseases you want to vaccinate against, you can supercharge your colostrum to make sure you are vaccinating in that pre-lambing period," Dr Burke said.

"The important thing to realise with sheep is within two to three weeks they start making it, but they stop making it the minute they start to give birth.

"That means the timing of vaccination is really important."

Maternal antibodies protect the lamb until marking, then another shot at lamb marking gets them over the next four to six weeks until a second shot, which creates a profound immune response, which can last around 12 months.

"What we know, when we vaccinate ewe and she's not been vaccinated for a year, she will have peak antibodies about two to three weeks after vaccination," Dr Burke said.

"There is no point putting a vaccine into the ewes one week before lambing and thinking the closer the better, which is a common enough misconception.

"You want to be four weeks or more out, as you have two weeks for the ewes immune system to create antibodies and two weeks for her to put all that into the colostrum.

"Even though you could think the closer to lambing the better, really being a bit further away is getting the most bang for your buck out of pre-lambing vaccine."

The final part of pre-lambing management, and possibly most important, was worms.

This was due, Dr Burke said, because of the depletion of a ewe's immune system around lambing.

"A ewe puts a lot of energy into growing a foetus, and a lot of immune cells into colostrum, so this is why they are so more susceptible at this time," he said.

"This is why even if you are breeding good WEC genetics, you should still support ewes over this period."

Checking egg levels using a faecal egg count was a good idea to give an insight into how the ewes are travelling and doing it six to eight weeks prior was a good idea.

Dr Burke said WormBoss recommends every ewe receive a pre-lamb drench but testing would gauge what drench and how long acting it needed to be.

"Getting a drench test will help with the decision you are trying to make, whether to use a short acting or long acting drench," he said.

"Since the downfall of capsules, this has become less complicated with moxydectin the only long acting product on the market."

Short acting products, used with combination therapy, can pick what works for each individual farm and what doesn't.

But using a short acting product needs a low worm burden pasture.

"If you can drench them and put them onto a pasture that is full of larvae ready to eat, you will be back in the same spot you are now within two weeks," Dr Burke said.

"And guess what you don't want to do when your ewes are about to lamb? Bring them back in and drench again."

If a low worm burden pasture is not available, it is recommended to use a long-acting product.

Long acting products should be given well prior to lambing so the ewe gets the benefit, rather later, when small amounts of the drench go into the milk.

- Manage ewes, make sure they have appropriate nutrition
- Make sure that thinking about lambs ability to drink colostrum and they are getting those vaccine boosters four to six weeks ideally out from lambing
- If need to move away from that point, then go further back, not closer to, lambing
- Picking how you manage worms over the pre-lambing period is really important and consider using a long-acting product if you don't have the ability to use a low worm burden pasture.



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Dan Roe, Danroe Poll Dorsets, Gawler, SA

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

I have been on the board for two years in September. I joined the Board as there was a vacancy in South Australia and was encouraged to do so by some current Board members and by a previous Board member in the Adelaide Region. Having been involved at an operational/member level, I felt I could bring practical experience and a fresh perspective to board discussions, while helping to deliver value to our members.

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

I see the future of the Poll Dorset breed as very strong, provided we continue to maintain the traditional strengths that built its reputation while evolving to meet the changing demands of the modern prime lamb industry. Our breed remains highly relevant due to growth, muscling and early finishing ability, but today's ram clients are increasingly focused on the traditional selection methods while adding in measurable performance, alongside consumer expectations for consistent, high-quality and sustainably produced lamb. As breeders, our responsibility is to respect the breed's heritage while delivering genetic improvement and innovation to ensure Poll Dorsets continue to deliver commercial value and remain a leading influence within the prime lamb industry.

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

One of the biggest positive changes I've seen in the Poll Dorset breed over the past decade has been the strong uptake of genomic technologies. The use of genomics has improved pedigree accuracy and, through its inclusion in Lambplan analysis, has increased the accuracy of ASBV reliability at a much earlier age. This is giving us far greater confidence in using objective data to guide selection decisions, allowing faster genetic progress in traits that matter most to commercial producers such as growth, carcass performance and fertility, and ultimately helping us deliver more consistent and predictable outcomes for our ram clients.

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?

I believe the Poll Dorset breed maintains its relevance by continuing to focus on what matters most to commercial prime lamb producers — profitability, reliability and performance. As breeders, we need to ensure our sheep deliver fast growth, carcass quality, fertility and structural soundness, while also embracing objective measurement through Lambplan and genomics to provide ram buyers with confidence in predictable outcomes. Just as importantly, the breed must stay connected to industry and supply chain expectations, including efficiency, eating quality and sustainability. By maintaining the traditional strengths that Poll Dorsets are known for, while continually evolving to meet the changing needs of ram clients and consumers, the breed can continue to position itself as the logical first choice terminal sire for prime lamb producer



Trans Tasman visit a win

A trip to Australia has opened the eyes of New Zealand Poll Dorset breeder Pete Gardyne and he's keen to keep monitoring what's happening over the ditch.

A mixed farmer from the far south of the South Island, Pete and wife Esther and their four boys took over the Ohio Poll Dorset stud about three years ago.

The commercial arm of their operation had been using the Ohio genetics for decades to produce prime lambs, and Pete's interest in genetics prompted him to talk about acquiring the stud if it was ever available.

That opportunity came up in 2022, when Trevor Potter sold the stud to the Gardynes, but still has an advisory role in the operation.

The Ohio stud has used Australian semen in the past, and Pete said he was keen to see first hand the kinds of sheep here.

Pete and a group of other NZ breeders, visited the Australian Sheep and Wool Show at Bendigo, Victoria, before going on a tour of local studs to the area. He then extended his visit, travelling in a zig zag pattern across south-eastern Australia and taking in as much as he could before flying out of Sydney.

That itinerary included visits to studs and the Bowan Park Research Flock near Cudal, NSW.

Pete said Australian Poll Dorsets were impressive, not only in the quality of stock but also the number and scale of operations.

"In New Zealand, it's normal to sell about 100 rams but we saw studs in Australia that were doing well in excess of that," he said.

He also saw the push by some breeders into working on eating quality traits, particularly intramuscular fat and shear force.

"As an industry, it is important that there is a push to get rid of bad eating quality lamb," Pete said.

"In Australia, the industry tends to kill lambs later (older age) so eating quality plays into this, with the average kill weight in Australia much higher than it is in New Zealand, where the average kill is probably 18 or 19 kilograms carcass weight."

In his own commercial operation, where he joins about 5000 ewes, lambs come out at about 22-23 carcass weight.

The doing-ability of Poll Dorsets was also on show, he said, when visiting studs in Victoria where the season was not favourable.

"What was really impressive was to see Poll Dorsets which looked in good condition and they were doing this in poor feed conditions," he said.

One factor which he noted in discussions with Australian breeders, but which isn't an issue in New Zealand, was birthweight. While it is a factor in selection here, Pete said selection pressures which culled ewes with high/low birthweights or problematic birthing/poor mothering, had made the trait that was not a factor in commercial ram buyers decision making.

"I was surprised with the focus on this in Australia," he said.

Pete is keen to access Australian genetics, but will not lose focus on what he said made his clients money, which was quick growing lambs which were able to be finished to kill weights.

He knows his goal - to be one of the top 10 Poll Dorset studs in New Zealand - will only come if his clients make money.

And that means using a mix of indexes and phenotype for selection, making sure the feet are right on rams given the wet climates they go into, and have survivability and constitutions which can handle the climate.

Pete has found he has been welcomed into the Poll Dorset breeding world in NZ, and said there was a collegiate and co-operative attitude to fellow breeders.

"New Zealand Poll Dorset breeders are very supportive, and the breed is healthy here - we are seeing an increase in market share for terminal breeds," he said.

"The key thing we all have to do is keep breeding rams that are commercially relevant."



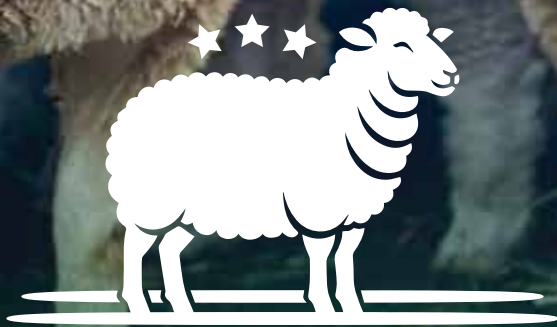
NZ breeders visited Australia last year to assess genetics.



Some of the rams from the Ohio stud in the New Zealand South Island.



Some of the rams from the Ohio stud in the New Zealand South Island.



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Breeding With Confidence: How Genomics Is Reshaping Poll Dorset Studs

When Poll Dorset lambs hit the ground each season, breeders are thinking further ahead than ever before. Beyond structure, muscling, and type, there is growing emphasis on the unseen traits that ultimately define how a sire performs for clients. Increasingly, studs are turning to genomics to provide clarity, accuracy, and confidence in the rams they present for sale.

The shift is subtle but significant: DNA now sits alongside visual appraisal as a core pillar of modern stud management.

A Breed Leading the Industry Forward

Poll Dorsets remain the powerhouse of Australia's prime lamb industry. As the leading terminal sire breed, they influence growth, carcass traits, and market outcomes across an enormous portion of the national flock. For breeders, this leadership role comes with responsibility, clients expect consistency and reliability, year after year.

At the Poll Dorset National Conference in Wagga, Neogen's Dr Greg Sawyer captured this long-term view clearly.

"Every ram sold today influences performance in commercial flocks until 2040 and beyond."

His message to breeders was simple: genomic insight strengthens the decisions that shape the breed's future.

Seeing What the Eye Can't

While Poll Dorset breeders have a keen eye for structure and type, many of the traits that drive commercial profitability cannot be assessed visually. Eating quality, post-weaning performance, lamb survival, and even some aspects of carcass merit remain hidden without objective data.

Genomic testing fills that gap.

In structured breeding programs, such as those demonstrated through long-term resource flocks, genomics has shown consistent improvements in growth rates, carcass composition, and uniformity. These programs highlight how early genetic insight helps studs identify elite animals sooner while avoiding the cost of running inferior sires to maturity.

The outcome for breeders is a more predictable, data-backed ram team that gives clients confidence in every purchase.

Genomics Strengthens Stud Integrity

For many studs, the first step into genomics begins with parentage verification. Ensuring clean, reliable pedigrees allows ASBVs to be calculated more accurately, ultimately lifting the credibility of a stud's data.

Once collected, a single Tissue Sampling Unit (TSU) sample can support early-life genomic predictions and later enhance ASBVs as phenotypic records come in. This creates a seamless flow of information through an animal's life, from marking to sale time.

Dr Sawyer emphasised that this level of transparency is becoming increasingly important:

"Buyers want to know the data is solid, genomics underpins that trust."

For studs selling high-value rams, the benefits are substantial. Genomics reduces uncertainty, strengthens selection decisions, and provides buyers with an additional layer of assurance that the sire they are investing in will deliver.

The Risk of Not Testing

In a competitive stud market, relying solely on phenotype introduces real risk. With rams frequently selling for \$1500–\$2000 or more, both breeder and buyer face financial exposure when selection is based only on what can be seen in the yards.

Without genomics:

- high-value sires may underperform
- stud reputation can be impacted by inconsistent progeny results
- long-term client trust becomes harder to maintain

As market expectations shift, studs that do not incorporate genomic insight may find themselves at a disadvantage compared to those who do.

A Breed Moving with Purpose

Across Australia, Poll Dorset studs adopting genomics report that the transition has been smoother, and more impactful, than expected. The tools are practical, the sampling process is simple, and the long-term benefits compound rapidly.

The message emerging across the breed is one of momentum. Studs are recognising that genomics doesn't replace traditional stockmanship; it supports and strengthens it. It provides a clearer picture of an animal's potential and gives breeders the confidence that their selection decisions align with the high standards their clients expect.

As Dr Sawyer's message reminds the industry, the rams selected today will shape commercial performance for many years to come. With genomics now firmly part of the Poll Dorset toolkit, the breed is well positioned to continue leading Australia's prime lamb sector with precision, consistency, and forward-thinking breeding.



Dr Gregory Sawyer

Tattykeel takes top spot

A Poll Dorset ewe has capped off a collection of ribbons by claiming the supreme prime lamb exhibit of the 2026 Sydney Royal meat and dual purpose sheep interbreed, in a close contest with a formidable Border Leicester ram rival.

Tattykeel 250095, for the Gilmore family of Tattykeel, Oberon, NSW, was named the supreme overall exhibit after earlier taking home the ribbon in the all other, non-ASSBA breeds ewe category.

The April 2025-drop ewe is a full ET sibling to supreme all other breeds ram Tattykeel 250033, who she edged out to make it to the final round.

The Australian Stud Sheep Breeders Association classes delivered a Border Leicester ram, Wattle Farm 320, from Wattle Farm Border Leicester, Temora, to the endgame contest, who won the supreme ASSBA ram and overall exhibit.

Sheep judge Matt Redmond, Malcolm Downs, West Haldon, Qld, said it was an “extremely close” contest between two “exceptional examples of their breeds”.

Growth for age and plenty of years ahead for the ewe put the Poll Dorset in front for Mr Redmond as well as Andrew Scott, Valley Vista, Coolac, who himself has bred Poll Dorsets for 50 years.

“She’s a tremendous representative of the breed,” Mr Scott said.

“Taking nothing away from the Border Leicester, who’s a terrific ram.

“But just in my opinion, for me to come across a ewe like that, you don’t see, within our breed, a representative displaying correctness and meat and growth for a lamb.”

The supreme exhibit win was the cherry on top of a successful show for Tattykeel.

Tattykeel co-principal James Gilmore said it was exciting to see the legacy of the older lines of the closed flock.

“It’s a bit of a reflection of the program we’re running and the type of sheep we’re trying to breed,” Mr Gilmore said.

“[The supreme ram and supreme all other breeds ewe are] out of a flush and I guess that shows you the heritability of the flush.

“There’s older genetics back through there. If you go back four generations, there’s a ram from 1997 on the ewe side.”

The Tattykeel duo of ram and ewe also won the J A and M Y Gilmore Perpetual Trophy for the best grand champion pair.

Their sire, Tattykeel 230014, was the supreme exhibit at 2024 Sydney Royal interbreed and 2024 Dubbo sheep show.

While the supreme exhibit Tattykeel ram had the potential to go up for sale in September, the ewe was booked in for a flush in November and the following March.

The stud doesn’t sell semen or produce lambs, but does sell embryos internationally.

Mr Gilmore said the supreme ewe’s genetics would be staying at home, however.

“If I sell them out of her, I’ll have trouble catching someone,” he said.

“She’s a pretty special sheep. Now the aim is to replicate her in numbers.”

Tattykeel’s Poll Dorset team of Tattykeel 250031, 250104 and 250097 also claimed the Peter Taylor Memorial Trophy.

Article courtesy of Dakota Tait, The Land.



Rachael Wheeler, Della Gilmore, 4, James Gilmore, Jackson Short, and Graham Gilmore, Tattykeel stud, Oberon, NSW, with the supreme prime lamb meat and dual purpose sheep exhibit of the 2026 Sydney Royal Show, a Poll Dorset ewe, Tattykeel

Wagin Woolorama

The Poll Dorset breed section is consistently a strong presence at the Wagin Woolorama British and Australasian Sheep Breeds competition and this year it continued its strong tradition, being the second largest number of entries for a breed.

There were 59 entries this year, showing the depth of genetics and numbers each stud was able to draw from.

In charge of the judging proceedings were judge Paul Day, Sunnybanks Poll Dorset, Faraday Park White Suffolk and Sunnylands Charollais studs, Penguin, Tasmania,

who was assisted by Poll Dorset Association of Western Australia president, Brittany Bolt, who was steward.

The Poll Dorset rams and ewes entered the show ring as the third breed of the day to be judged and three of the six studs that exhibited left with broad ribbons and group sashes.

Mr Day said entries were of a high calibre and he was really impressed with the sheep presented, saying the local breed was a lot longer and more robust than in Tasmania.

"In Tassie we have the colder climate, we want to be getting sucker lambs off at an early age," Mr Day said.

"You (Western Australia) need a bigger-framed sheep that you can stack the weight on.

"That is the beauty of the Poll Dorset breed, they are adaptable to different environments and can be bred to suit."

Mr Day said WA breeders had a very uniform style.

"There is a lot to like about the sheep that have been shown here today," he said.

"There was a very even line-up right throughout.

"The quality on display is definitely a credit to the breeders."

When it came to the day's top award, it was an upstanding ram from Max Whyte and

Gail Cremasco's Brimfield stud, Kendenup, which shone through and was sashed the grand champion Poll Dorset exhibit.

Mr Day said he was impressed with the ram's sheer volume and capacity – as well as how correctly it walked.

"He also won his class at the Perth Royal Show in 2025 and it was another Tasmanian judge who decided that too," Mr Day said.

Prior to being sashed the grand champion exhibit, the Brimfield ram was sashed the champion Poll Dorset ram.

The ram is by Ridgehaven 113/21 out of a Brimfield dam.

Standing next to the Brimfield ram and competing for the grand champion ribbon was a ewe also from the Brimfield stud, after it had been sashed the champion Poll Dorset ewe.

Mr Day said the Brimfield ewe was a very impressive ewe with good structure and plenty of growth.

"She is extremely long and well-muscled," he said.

"In the end I choose the ram over the ewe as the grand champion because he just carries meat everywhere.

"He is very correct, has a smooth top line and a nice amount of meat through the loin."

The reserve champion ram sash went to a ram from the Squiers family's Shirlee Downs stud, Quairading.

Mr Day said the reserve champion ram from Shirlee Downs was extremely unlucky to not be sashed the champion, and on any other day it may have won the title.

"It has muscle right through the shoulders and a very smooth top line," Mr Day said.

"Both the Brimfield ram and the Shirlee Downs rams are very good examples of the breed."

The reserve champion ewe ribbon was collected by a ewe from the Shepherd family's Leween stud, Narrogin, which Mr Day was also full of praise for.

"She is an extremely impressive sheep," Mr Day said.

"Unfortunately she just came up against a ewe that just had a little more growth on the day."

In the group classes, the Brimfield stud was the winner of the group of one ram and two ewes, and the group of two rams and two ewes, while it was Leween stud which won the group of three ewes.

Article and photos courtesy of Farm Weekly.



Elders financial services manager north, Sheena Healy-Pickwell (left), Brimfield Poll Dorset stud co-principal Gail Cremasco, Kendenup, judge Paul Day, Penguin, Tasmania and Brimfield co-principal Max Whyte, with the grand champion Poll Dorset.



Elders stud stock sales specialist Michael O'Neill (left), judge Paul Day and Shirlee Downs stud, Quairading, co-principal Sascha Squiers, with the reserve champion Poll Dorset ram.

Canberra Royal

Results from the Canberra Royal in the Poll Dorset ring were dominated by

Judge: James Frost, Hillden Poll Dorset stud, Bannister, NSW.

Champion Ram: Armdale Poll Dorset stud, Murrulebale, NSW (Armdale 250036 sired by Armdale Park "Elvis" 220200)

Reserve Champion Ram: Armdale Poll Dorset stud

Champion Ewe: Armdale Poll Dorset stud (Armdale 250088 sired by Armdale Park "Elvis" 220200)

Reserve Champion Ewe: Armdale Poll Dorset stud

Group of one ram and two ewes: Armdale Poll Dorset stud

Group of three rams: Armdale Poll Dorset stud

Most successful exhibitor: Armdale Poll Dorset stud

Supreme interbreed short wool Champion Ram: Armdale Poll Dorset stud

Supreme short wool group: Armdale Poll Dorset stud.



Charlotte Close from Finley, NSW, with judge James Frost from Hillden at Bannister, NSW, and Sam Armstong, Armdale Poll Dorset stud, Murrulebale, NSW with the reserve and grand champion rams at the Royal Canberra Show.

A large photograph of a flock of sheep in a green field. A circular logo is overlaid on the right side of the image, featuring a close-up of a sheep's face and the text "POLL DORSET" at the top and "LAMB SUPREME" at the bottom. The background shows a field of sheep under a blue sky with white lightning bolt graphics.

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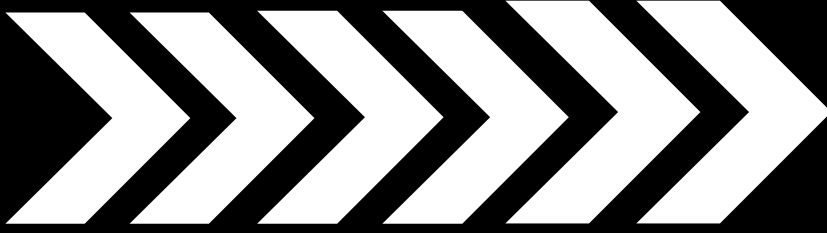
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¹Toribio, J; Bush, R; Windsor, P. (2004). A Study of the Biological and Economic Impact of OJD in affected Sheep Flocks in NSW. OJD.023, MLA Limited.

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