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Western Murray Land Improvement Group Inc.
16th June 2015

Sheep EID Workshop Offers Continuous Improvement Opportunities, but you Need to Use the Data

Farm consultant Nathan Scott, Achieve AG Solutions, gave a crowd of 19 attendees an excellent overview of sheep electronic Identification (EID) at the Rick and Jan Ellis's property, Pental Island on the 11th June.

The information session outlined how the electronic identification equipment works and the different options available. Nathan discussed breeding objectives, data collection and management options that farmers can assess to determine if the technology is suitable for their livestock enterprise.

Nathan provided an overview of tag costs, the types available and design differences, giving the farmers something to think about. Some tags for instance protrude and have more of a tendency to get caught on fences or lick feeders. Some tags are more susceptible to getting caught on a shearers' hand-piece. Another item to think about is the orientation of the ear tag transponder in relation to the orientation of a panel reader, or influences of magnetic fields from radios or laptop interfering with the signal.

When looking at which ear tag stick reader to purchase there are big price differences, however so is the capability, ergonomics, weight, strength and readability, so you need to take these differences into account. Nathan said 'one important thing to remember is that the different reading equipment will read tags from different manufacturers, so you can mix and match. 'However, not all technology will interlink, for instance software and Apps on phones to readers'.

Photo: Students from the Barham High School, John, Maddy, and Amy attending the event to learn about Landcare and farming workshops as part of their Creative Catchment Kids program. Photo courtesy Caroline Ellis Photography.



Photo below: Nathan reading the Tag Reader to find out the lambing history of a ewe. This ewe had a history of 2,2,2,2 (twins every year!), whereas the next ewe read 1,1,1,0 (singles every year, then did not raise a lamb) Photo courtesy Caroline Ellis Photography.

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When the technology aspects of electronic ID were explained, Nathan discussed data use and how to overlay different sources of data for decision making purposes. For example, a ewe may be in the top percentile for fertility and growth rate of lambs, but a poor performer in relation to wool production, so you need to take the different layers of information into account before making culling decisions. ‘Don’t keep pretty sheep’, whilst the structure of the sheep is important, you need to overlay the other bits of data because pretty sheep could be costing you money. You don’t want passengers’, Nathan explained.

The audience found an interesting topic in ‘litter weight weaned’ as part of the ‘Pedigree Matchmaker’ program where Nathan outlined how farms gathered information on Kgs lamb produced vs Kgs ewe and growth rate information. This led to discussion around how data was tracked on the ewe progeny and the joining cycles, variations in lamb growth rates from different ewe conditions scores etc.

The data gathered can be as in depth as you want to make it, but collect data that’s good for your business’, Nathan stressed. ‘Remember that you don’t have to manage the data yourself and you don’t need your own equipment, but you will need to make management decisions with your data and this will give you the opportunity to make the next positive steps in continuous improvement. Tags don’t make you money, you do!’

A final question of the day was put to Nathan from the Barham Primary School students wanting to know how EID can help with parasite control, one of the focus areas in their Creative Catchment Kids project. Nathan said that ‘EID was a great tool to know exactly when a sheep is treated with a vaccine or drench and the type of treatment applied. This is especially important with livestock destined for export, as

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the withholding period prior to slaughter of 120 days is much greater than the domestic market. It is imperative producers know the export slaughter intervals of their flock and EID can simplify this process. One traceability mistake may cost producers a valuable market’.

‘EID can also be used to compile other animal health records such as worm egg counts, flystrike susceptibility and genetic resistance’.

The field day was an initiative of the Central Murray BestWool BestLamb Group through support from the Victorian Government (Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources) and the Western Murray Land Improvement Group via funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Programme and Murray Local Land Services.

Another electronic ID event is planned at Dennis Gleeson’s property at Wakool in the future. Information about this event will be provided at a later date.

Photo below: Nathan Scott delivering the presentation at Pental Island. Photo courtesy Caroline Ellis Photography.



Photo below: Nathan Scott, Barham High School Students, Amy, Maddy and John, and The WMLIG Community Support Officer, Roger Knight at the EID information day. Photo courtesy Caroline Ellis Photography.

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