



Western Murray Land Improvement Group

Striking a Balance

M E D I A R E L E A S E

Tuesday 9th March 2021

For immediate release

GEARING UP FOR GROWTH

Last week 30 local sheep farmers attended two Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Bred Well Fed Well Workshops at “Scotsburn” in Mallan and “Lauridale” in Wakool. The hands-on workshops delivered by Geoff Duddy from Sheep Solutions and supported by Western Murray Land Improvement Group (WMLIG) were centred around breeding and feeding to make more money. Topics included breeding better ewes, improving ewe nutrition, developing a feeding goal, and developing a feeding budget.

The groups were taken through an overview of selecting rams based on industry standard Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs). ASBVs allow the buyer to select for traits of interest and accounts for known environmental influences on performance and provides the likely impact of the animal’s genes to a breeding program. With these statistics in mind but not on hand, the group were asked to take their best guess from a mob of rams picking the highest and lowest performing in different categories. The results indicated the importance of using objective measures to make informed ram selection decisions.

Duddy further outlined the importance of investing in genetics and demonstrated this by providing a quick cost-benefit analysis on number of lambs reared from a higher and lower performing ram based on its ASBVs, demonstrating how much farmers can afford to spend on their genetics. Barham Farmer Tom McConnell who attended the Scotsburn workshop felt that this affirmed the point to “not be afraid of paying up for superior genetics if the increase in production justifies the increase in price”.

A second practical activity involved body condition scoring. After running through the theory, the group took to the yards again to take a guess at body condition scoring a mob of ewes. A quick survey before and after the practice demonstrated that those who considered themselves as “not very confident” or “not at all confident” felt that they were more prepared and surer of their ability to score their ewes moving forward.

According to MLA’s Industry Projections 2021 report released last month, the Australian sheep market nationally is projected to reach 67.3 million head by mid-2021, an increase of 5.2% year-on-year. With strong sheep and lamb prices expected to remain due to favourable conditions it is essential that farmers are focusing on both breeding and feeding best practice to capitalise on their returns. WMLIG’s Rick Ellis coordinated the workshops at a local level and was “impressed with the participation and number of questions that were raised in particular from young farmers that were present”. Burraboi Farmer James Martin



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who attended Friday's Lauridale workshop thought that while "it can be hard to take the day off, it was well worth attending to go through things properly".

The workshops were delivered free of charge to sheep producers under MLA's Accelerated Adoption Initiative and were supported locally by the Australian Government under the Murray–Darling Basin Economic Development Program. WMLIG would like to thank Sean and Helen Collins, Laura and Peter Kaylock and Guy Treweek for providing workshop venues and sheep for the practical activities, and for their hospitality.

WMLIG will be hosting several more sheep workshops throughout the year. Upcoming workshops include Joining Ewe Lambs, Best Practice Lamb Marking and Electronic Identification (EID) technology. To keep up to date with upcoming events and workshops, subscribe to WMLIG's email list or visit www.westernmurraylig.org/upcoming-events.

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