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SA MERINO SIRE EVALUATION SITE TRIAL NEWS – DECEMBER 2017

DIARY DATES

January 4th 2018

Insert CIDR's Group 1 & 2
Ewes – 2018 Entrants

January 16th 2018

Remove CIDR's & give PMSG
shots Group 1 Ewes – 2018
Entrants

January 17th 2018

Remove CIDR's & give PMSG
shots Group 2 Ewes – 2018
Entrants

January 18th 2018

AI Group 1 Ewes – 2018
Entrants

January 19th 2018

AI Group 2 Ewes – 2018
Entrants

June 1st 2018

Midside Sampling and Classing
– 2017 Progeny

June 22nd 2018

Field Day, Keyneton Station

Welcome to the first newsletter of the SA Merino Sire Evaluation Site.

BACKGROUND

The trial provides the opportunity for objective comparisons to be made between rams from different studs by evaluating their progeny for sheep type, structure, wool production and carcass traits. The progeny are all run together in the same environmental conditions with all male progeny marked. The site is important for South Australia's Merino industry given no other public Merino sire evaluation trials occur in SA. The site will make an important contribution to genetic improvement for Merinos in SA.

This is an accredited sire evaluation program run under the rigorous design, recording and data evaluation protocols of the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA).

HOST PROPERTY AND EWE BASE

Keyneton Station, Keyneton are hosting the inaugural trial. Keyneton Station is located in the eastern Mount Lofty Ranges and receives an average rainfall of 500mm in a winter dominant pattern. The Keyneton Station ewes are 65-70kg and produce 19-20 micron wool. The ewes mated for the trial are sourced from 2.5 year old age group.

SITE STRUCTURE

In 2017, the site evaluated 14 rams plus 2 cross-site link sires. 60 ewes were joined to each sire via AI in mid-January 2017. Sire pedigree is currently being established by DNA testing, from which we are still waiting results.

Traits evaluated include:

- Visually assessed traits – as per AMSEA protocols & include: classer's grade, wool quality, pigmentation, conformation.

DIARY DATES (CONT'D)

July 2018

Shearing – 2017 Progeny

Meat Sample – 2017 Progeny

Lamb Marking – 2018 Progeny

August 2018

Weaning – 2018 Progeny

- Fleece: greasy fleece weight, clean fleece weight, yield, fibre diameter, coefficient of variation of fibre diameter, fibre diameter curvature, staple length and staple strength
- Body weight: weaning, yearling and at second wool assessment (20 months)
- Body composition traits: eye muscle depth, fat depth
- Worm Egg Count (if conditions permit)

In addition, provided sufficient progeny numbers (66 lambs weaned per 100 ewes AI), it is planned that a portion of wether progeny will be evaluated for carcass weight, predicted lean meat yield and traits correlated to eating quality including intramuscular fat and shear force. A profit function (gross margin \$/Ha) for each sire is also expected to be developed.

2017 SIRE ENTRANTS

There was significant interest in the site from both SA and interstate ram breeders. The quality of rams nominated was of a very high calibre and will contribute to genetic gain for the merino industry.

AI occurred mid-January. At day 45, 610 ewes (from AI) were scanned as pregnant, representing the number of AI lambs. This gave a rate of 61% conception from the AI. There were no significant differences between the 16 different sires, nor the day of insemination.



Ewes and Lambs prior to lamb marking at Karinya yards, 26th July 2017 (photo courtesy of Georgie Keynes)

With regards to lambing percentages, unfortunately we are still waiting on DNA data to match up the sire to its progeny. This delay in obtaining pedigree results has not been anticipated and is largely out of our hands. We have been assured our 2018 DNA submission will return results in a more timely manner. Nevertheless, what we do know is at lamb marking on the 25th and 26th July, there were 545 single lambs and 318 twin lambs; a total of 865 lambs. Please note this number does include the backup lambs.



Alistair Michael, Jackson Adams, Mary Chirgwin and Toby Rosenzweig drafting lambs ready for lamb marking at Karinya Station, 25th July 2017 (photo courtesy of Georgie Keynes).

The average breech cover was visually assessed as 3.6/5 or 72%, and the average breech wrinkle was visually assessed as 1.3/5, or 26%. This indicates the lambs are reasonably plain.



Lambs at Karinya yards immediately prior to lamb marking, 26th July 2017 (photo courtesy of Georgie Keynes).

At 10 weeks of age, weaning weights were assessed, with single lambs weighing an average of 24.5kg and twin lambs weighing an average of 24.2kg live weight.

KEYNETON SEASONAL SUMMARY, 2017

The break was late at Keyneton, occurring mid-June. As a result, the ewes were fed in a containment lot in early Autumn. Also in response to the season, the ewes were divided into twin and single mobs after pregnancy scanning. This allowed twin ewes to be fed a higher ration from self-feeders through lambing. When the break finally occurred in mid-June, the conditions were cold resulting in slow pasture growth.

Lambs were weaned on to vetch and oat pastures at 10 weeks of age, and were tip shorn in early October to reduce potential grass seed issues. Currently, the lambs are now being fed beans through self-feeders due to the lower summer feed availability.

2018 SIRE ENTRANTS

There was solid interest in the site from both SA and interstate ram breeders again in 2018, with 16 sires being accepted. As per the 'diary dates', CIDR's will be inserted on the 4th January, removed and PMSG shots given on the 16th & 17th January, and AI is scheduled for the 18th & 19th January.

FIELD DAY

The site has scheduled its Field Day for **Friday 22nd June at Keyneton Station**. With Ram season approaching, it will be an opportunity to come along and receive valuable up-to-date information. Specific details of the day's schedule are still to be determined; guest speakers will be invited to present, sponsors will be given the opportunity to set up trade displays, reps will be invited to display their EID technology, and the 2017 progeny will be placed in separate pens for inspection with their traits available for viewing.

SA MERINO SIRE EVALUATION SITE COMMITTEE

Chairman	Roger Fiebig
Site Owner	Joe Keynes
Data Manager	Michelle Cousins
Classer	Bill Walker
Breeder Representative	Hansi Graetz
Finance & Administration	Jennifer Light
Site Coordinator	Anna Cameron
AMSEA Site Representative	Stephen Lee

SPONSORS, CONTRIBUTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

As a non-profit site, our sponsors provide a very important contribution, and we would like to acknowledge their generous support of the SA Merino Sire Evaluation Site in 2017. We would also like to thank those individuals, and/or businesses whom have volunteered their time in helping the site run as smoothly as possible throughout the year, whether that be in the form of providing labour, or helping with specific tasks as required by the AMSEA protocols. One of those business's that must be acknowledged is Keyneton Station, who importantly offered to be the host site for the first Merino Sire Evaluation Site in SA, as well as volunteering their own time in planning and labour.



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