



SHEAR FORCE: Sally Smyth shearing ewes at Wilandra near White Cliffs, NSW.

Smyths capitalise on good wool country

By ALISHA FOGDEN

DESPITE many producers in their pastoral district changing to meat sheep to chase strong lamb prices, the Smyth family believe improved Merino genetics are allowing them to produce good carcasses without sacrificing fleece weight and quality.

“A lot of our neighbours have changed to Dorpers but we believe the country here is good wool country, because it’s very clean, your yields are high and your vegetable matter is low,” Sam Smyth said.

Sam and wife Natasha run 4500 Merino ewes, alongside 200 Charolais and Charbray breeders, on their 37,250-hectare station Wilandra near White Cliffs, NSW.

They also have a 91,000ha property Erudina near Hawker, bought last year, where son Ashley and wife Hannah reside.

Their other children, Sally, Tom and twins Jake and Angus, come home at various times of the year to help out on-farm.

Sam said they bought Wilandra about 10 years ago, after previously working on a station in the region.

“We wanted to grow our own wool,” he said.

The flock averages 21 micron and is based on Nyowee bloodlines, with rams bought from the Michael family at Balaklava.

“We buy from Nyowee because the stud has been in the Poll Merino game a long time and we have always bred Poll Merinos,” Sam said.

“We are also chasing well-nourished,

bright white, well characterised wool, which they provide.”

Sam said the quality of their wool was high because the sheep run on stony ground, keeping grass seeds and dirt to a minimum.

Their fleece yields average about 68 per cent.

Last year’s wool prices rewarded their hard work on producing quality fleece, making up to 1050 cents a kilogram at auction in Melbourne, in Landmark Adelaide’s catalogue.

The 270 bales were sold in August, averaging about 1000c/kg.

“Price were magnificent,” Sam said.

“The 1050c/kg is our highest ever.

“We were lucky though, because when we decided it was time to sell, it rained and we couldn’t get our wool out.

“During the hold-up, there was a price lift, which we were able to capitalise on.

“We also had extra wool because we were holding sheep to run on another property. We normally cut about 200 bales.”

Shearing is in mid-June to enable the flock to put on good condition from winter feed, in preparation for lambing in spring.

Feed sources include copper burrs, saltbush and bluebush, while flood country provides ample amounts of clover.

No supplementary feeding is required.

Wilandra’s average lambing percentage is 85pc, but in the past two years has been up to 100pc because of good seasons.

Lambs are weaned in summer.

“It’s not ideal timing for when you want to sell sheep but our lambs grow well with this

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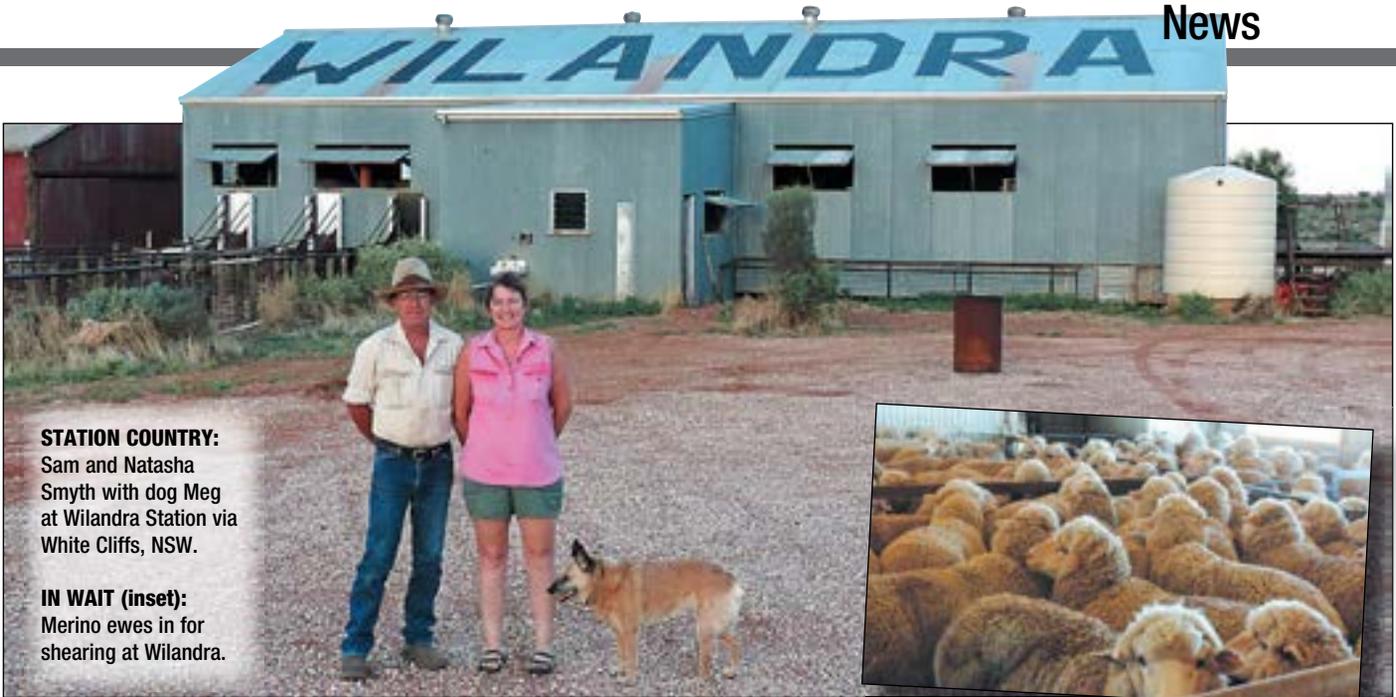


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STATION COUNTRY:
Sam and Natasha
Smyth with dog Meg
at Wilandra Station via
White Cliffs, NSW.

IN WAIT (inset):
Merino ewes in for
shearing at Wilandra.

process," Sam said.

Lambs are sold as off-shears in September-October, depending on season, to the best price.

"A lot have been going to Ararat Meats lately," Sam said. "The last lot was 12 months old, averaging about 22-23kg dressedweight, sold at \$125 a head.

"Young stock agents are always surprised at how well they do weigh for Merino lambs from pastoral country, but I find Merinos will weigh if they have plenty to eat."

Surplus young ewes are sold after shearing, while older ewes, generally 6.5-year-olds, are culled at crutching in the summer, post weaning.

But last year, 1500 young ewes and 1500 wethers were kept to stock the new property at Hawker, to also run alongside cattle.

The property is similar country to Wilandra – saltbush/bluebush-type country with a major creek system through it.

"Merinos do it for us, so we will stick by them, particularly when we are getting up to \$125 a lamb," Sam said.



CLIP OFF: The Wilandra shearing line-up of Angus, Ashley, Jake and Tom Smyth.

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