

LIVESTOCK

Pastoral will-to-win means

WILTIPOLL

By LOUISE McBRIDE

A MOVE nearly 20 years ago into wool-shedding meat breeds has led to success for a Broken Hill pastoral family in supplying large lines of Wiltipoll breeding stock.

What started as a foray into the lucrative prime lamb market, has been surpassed by their production and sale of Wiltipoll pastoral breeding ewes for Fred Hughes and wife his Pip, Kars Station, between Menindee and Broken Hill, New South Wales.

The Hughes family has held the 60,000-hectare Western Division station since 1870, and the couple's son Dougall, 3, is the sixth generation of Hughes on the property.

Fred's parents Tom and Annie Hughes went into Wiltipolls in 1993 by mating Poll Merinos to Wiltshire Horn

5 Critical Factors

- 1 Seek hardy, easy-care breeds for meat enterprise
- 2 Sell prime lambs at local market
- 3 Sell breeding ewes privately, on-property
- 4 Minimise operating costs
- 5 Utilise flood-out country with cattle

sires for Prime Lambs.

An agricultural agronomist by trade, Fred came home to the station for a few weeks "in between jobs" and is still there 15 years later – and has not looked back.

He says there has not been a shearing at Kars now for five

years, because the flock of 6000 breeding ewes are now Wiltipoll "full wool shedders".

"We started out looking for an alternative to wool and were after a meat sheep without a horn," he said.

The sale of top-quality full-shedding Wiltipoll pastoral breeding ewes has grown to more than 50 per cent of their business.

"For the first 10 years we were supplying breeding ewes to smaller growers and lifestyle farmers looking for an alternative to wool," Fred said.

"However, in the past five to eight years, our business has expanded.

"Current high prime lamb prices have resulted in the strong demand for breeding ewes and we are now in a position to be able to supply lines of breeding ewes in commercial numbers to mainstream prime lamb producers."

They also produce flock rams and registered rams for sale, and for their own use.

Sales of Wiltipoll ewes and rams to the South East have been strong, backed by the increasing sales in the past three years to the pastoral sector.

Most stock are sold on-property, mainly without agents, and stock are picked up by buyers – cutting out freight and agent costs.

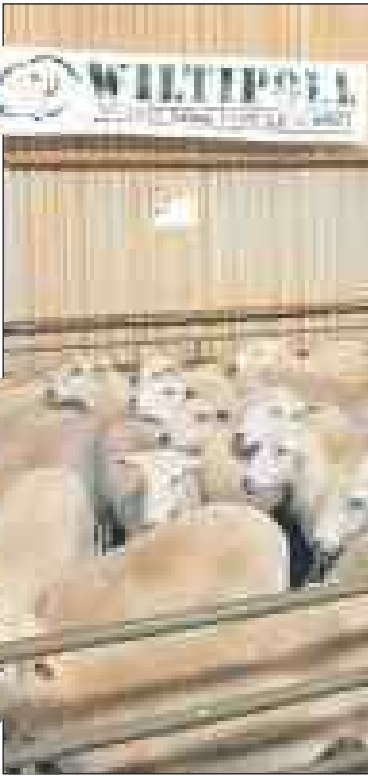
"We now have the stock numbers to be able to supply large lines of sheep, which is also backed up by growing interest in sheep again with good meat and wool markets, Fred said.

"With prime lamb markets going so well, the strong interest in the breeding ewes has been a big bonus.

"We didn't start out aiming for this – it has just been a continuous development."

Fred says other benefits of running Wiltipolls include the breed's hardiness in the pastoral country. They are easy-care and have no problems with flystrike, with no chemical use and no need to tail-dock.

"We are able to lead by exam-



MyTake

with LEN OWEN

Australian Wiltipoll Association Inc president

Overview:

Since developing the Wiltipoll breed in the 1990s, Annie Hughes and her family have worked tirelessly promoting the benefits of the sheep across the country. Today there are nearly 300 members of the Australian Wiltipoll Association across Australia (except the Northern Territory), successfully operating in a diverse range of environments. The Wiltipoll does well in all country from pastoral to wetter regions and is a good converter of feed to meat, producing a lean, meaty carcass. Many larger prime lamb producers are seeing the benefits of the breed and are either converting their flocks to Wiltipolls or using Wiltipoll rams to produce a vigorous crossbred lamb.

The good:

The Wiltipoll is an excellent wool-shedder, resulting in a low-maintenance animal that does not require shearing, crutching or mulesing and is highly resistant to flystrike, lice and grass seed problems. It is also a stay-at-home animal that is content in its own paddock and is not always looking for ways to escape. Multiple births are common, resulting in high lambing percentages. Wiltipoll rams make very good terminal sires when used with either wool or wool-shedding breeds, and can greatly improve the wool-shedding characteristics of the latter where shedding is a problem. Outstanding feet and legs enable them to handle wet conditions and walk long distances.

The bad:

The wool shed by the Wiltipoll is a short downs wool of little commercial value. The ewes are seasonal breeders, cycling in autumn, which means lambs are mainly dropped in July/August. Because lambs are later-maturing they generally need to be carried over summer and can be turned-off from March until May. But the upside of this is that this is traditionally a time of a shortage of lambs in the market and heavy lamb weights of 60 kilograms-plus can be achieved without them running to fat. Because Wiltipoll skins often lack any wool coverage, processors treat them more as hides for leather, and skin prices may be reduced.

The way forward:

The Wiltipoll is still not a well-known breed in the wider sheep industry, including with stock agents where there has traditionally been some resistance to wool-shedding sheep. This is slowly changing.

My top 5 tips:

1. Research the benefits of the Wiltipoll with existing breeders, including seeing them on-property.
2. Contact the Australia Wiltipoll Association for further information or questions.
3. If you run other wool-shedding breeds, trial Wiltipoll rams to improve shedding and to increase carcass size.
4. If you are prime lamb producer, trial Wiltipoll rams as terminal sires in a portion of your flock to produce a vigorous crossbred lamb.
5. Buy Wiltipolls only from members of the Australian Wiltipoll Association to ensure you are getting what you pay for.

Need to know more?

Len Owen 0419 239 214, www.wiltipoll.com

Cleanskin symposium invite

REGISTRATIONS are open for the 2012 Cleanskin Sheep Australia Symposium set for March 8 and 9 at Adelaide Showground.

In its third year, the symposium is a chance for breeders to share knowledge and information and help progress the expanding Australian cleanskin industry.

Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Society of South Australia rural services manager Malcolm Buckby says the symposium has gone from strength-to-strength in the few years it has been running.

"In the previous two years, it was about getting information out on these meat breeds out to interested producers," he said. "This year it is more about the management skills producers need to be addressing – which is why the event has been titled *Taking uour enterprise to the next level*."

Royal Veterinary College, University of London, senior lecturer in bioinformatics and genetics Geoff Pollott is this year's key speaker and will

add to a line-up covering several topics, from profit-drivers to ewe management.

Dr Pollott has a wealth of experience in shedding-sheep breeds and will share his knowledge in the genetics of wool shedding and selection with producers interested in progressing their flock to become fully shedding as quickly as possible.

There will be numerous breakout sessions in practical demonstrations with discussions with speakers.

Some examples include getting started with cleanskins, scanning for muscle and fat, pregnancy testing, carcass demonstration, condition scoring, AuctionPlus online sales, and auto-drafter demonstrations.

The symposium will be in the airconditioned comfort of the Wayville Pavilion and Ridley Centre.

Registrations cost \$150 a person and close on February 24.

• Details: More information and registration www.cleanskinsheep.com.au

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