

Borders add versatility to Merino flock

For many years Border Leicester breeders have been trying to encourage farmers with traditional self replacing merino flocks to use Border rams over a proportion of their flock. Thus giving them another sources of income, with out impacting on their other farming operations.

When David Shannon of Kapunda was asked why he choose to add Border Leicester rams to his wool and cropping enterprise six years ago the answer came without hesitation, diversification. By using Border Leicesters it has given him the opportunity to market the wether portion of his August drop lambs early as trade lambs, or take them on to heavier weights and sell them after grazing on his legume stubbles. In the early years ewes lambs would either be sold for slaughter during the autumn or kept and sold as breeding ewes in the spring. Now only the cull ewe lambs are sent to slaughter with the tops being carried through winter and sold at the Strathalbyn first cross ewe off shears sale in November. He also can see the opportunity in the future of setting up alliances with prime lamb producers and selling direct.

Like all new enterprises there has had to be some fine tuning done along the way. In the early years cull ewes from across all ages of the merino flock were used. David felt however that by using his cull ewes in this way was giving him a lower lambing percentage than the rest of the flock and leading to too much variation in quality of the first cross ewes. While David still culls ewes from all age groups in his merino flock these are now sold and the five and six year old ewes are retained and used in the production of his first cross lambs. This has led to an increase in his lambing percentage and a much more even line of first cross ewes.

David has also looked to improve on the quality of Border Leicester rams he has been using. “In the first year we where a bit late in deciding to use Border rams so we had to take what was available” David said. He continued “while we were happy with the lambs in that first year and decided to go on with the project. We now purchase better quality rams using LAMBPLAN information as a guide and concentrating on rams with good early growth rates and high indexes”.

While David has increased the area of the property sown to lucerne and also plants a vetch crop to run his weaned lambs on, the production of first cross lambs fits in very well with his wool and cropping enterprises. With the most important thing being that it is generating more income for the farm. With versatility essential in any farming enterprise today if it is to be successful Border Leicesters are well worth considering.