Sheep CRC ASBV Case Studies

Document ID:	SheepCRC_29_3
Title:	Lyndon & Sharon Kubeil, Laurana, Violet Town, NE Victoria
Author:	Sheep CRC
Key words:	Sheep; Australian Sheep Breeding Values; Genetics

This Case Study was developed in conjunction with Sheep Genetics and should be cited as:

Sheep CRC (2012) – *ASBV Case Study: Lyndon & Sharon Kubeil, Laurana, Violet Town, NE Victoria*

LYNDON AND SHARON KUBEIL
LAURANA, VIOLET TOWN
NORTH-EAST VICTORIA

* Use ASBVs to maintain a balanced breeding objective

* Combine ASBVs with visual assessment for ram selection

* Use ASBVs for traits that are hard to see

In North East Victoria commercial Merino producers Lyndon and Sharon Kubeil are successfully breeding a profitable, early-maturing Merino whilst keeping an eye on wool cut and quality.

However, this has not always been the case. In 2000, when the Kubeils first purchased their property "Laurana", just outside of Violet Town in North East Victoria, they soon found that the sheep they were breeding were not ideally suited to their new environment, and the productivity gains they were looking for were not being realised.

So the Kubeils went looking for a source of rams with genetics proven in the local area and aligned with the direction they were heading.

"We settled on the Toland Poll Merinos as they were bred locally and we liked the breeding direction that Phil Toland was taking, with a greater emphasis on growth rates, worm resistance, fertility and a free growing type of wool," Lyndon said.

"The Toland sheep had been measured for key production traits over many years, so the numbers supported the direction that Phil was heading."

These days, the Kubeils are still purchasing their rams exclusively from Toland, but do so with the help of ASBVs provided on all the rams.

"ASBVs help greatly with the selection for traits you can't see like worm resistance, and to a lesser extent, muscle," Lyndon said. "It's also important to ensure you are comparing apples with apples when looking at sheep that have been managed under different conditions or born in different seasons."

Happy with their flock's micron and fleece weights, the Kubeils focus their attention on those ASBVs that are important for breeding a fast-growing, early-maturing animal.

LYNDON AND SHARON KUBEIL
LAURANA, VIOLET TOWN
NORTH-EAST VICTORIA

"We aim to buy rams in the top 20% for weaning weight (WWT) and yearling weight (YWT)," Lyndon said. "Above average eye muscle depth (EMD) is also important, as is a positive ASBV for fat depth (FAT) in our self-replacing flock, as fat provides the ewes with resilience when the seasons get tough and helps with increased ewe fertility and decreasing lamb mortality."

But Lyndon has a passion for wool quality and at times has to compromise on his selection for growth rates so as not to compromise his flock's superior wool quality and cut.

Fibre diameter has reduced from 21 to 19.5 micron since making the shift and fleece weights have been retained at around 6.5kg. On top of benefits that Lyndon is getting from his focus on growth, muscle and fat, this reduction in micron means Lyndon is receiving in the order of an additional $2 per ewe in wool revenue in today's market, whilst still allowing for increased selection pressure on those other traits.

"To maintain fleece weight I pay special attention to staple length (SL) ASBVs," Lyndon said. "We are currently still shearing every 12 months, but may move to more frequent shearing down the track if we can fit it into the management program."

Whilst the Kubeils have used ASBVs since they became available, visual selection is treated with equal importance when selecting rams.

Nearly the entire property is creek flats and can get very wet, so conformation in our flock, particularly feet, is critical," Lyndon said.

"It's important to us that we look very carefully at conformation when selecting rams, but we also know that Phil Toland is equally careful with conformation in his own flock, so that gives us a lot of confidence."

When it comes to researching before purchasing rams, Lyndon goes the extra mile. In addition to the information the stud breeder provides on the sale rams, Lyndon uses the Sheep Genetics website to focus on those traits that are important to him, as well as the performance of the sires of the rams he is interested in to check they match his breeding objective.

With the current selection emphasis, Lyndon is also finding an increase in fertility as his sheep become less complicated and freer growing.

LYNDON AND SHARON KUBEIL
LAURANA, VIOLET TOWN
NORTH-EAST VICTORIA

"Our weaning rate is around 110%, including maidens, which gives us plenty of replacement ewes to choose from and apply maximum selection pressure," Lyndon said.

Another benefit of the increasing fertility is the ability to join more ewes to maternal or terminal sires, and have plenty of surplus ewes to sell at a time that they are in high demand.

On farm the push towards early-maturing sheep through the use of ASBVs has led to both improvements in profit and management.

"We aim to finish our wether lambs 2-3 months faster now at the same weight. Breeding sheep with improved growth rates as well as muscle and fat traits will allow us to free up country to run more ewes," Lyndon said.

"This type of sheep also requires a lot less management with respect to flystrike, which means our time is available for other activities."

And with the next generation of Kubeils, Joshua, Elisha and Hannah, demanding their own slice of Lyndon's and Sharon's time, the push towards a profitable easy to manage sheep, looks set to continue.

"To achieve our breeding objectives we will continue to select rams that rank at the top of the traits we are focusing on to push the boundaries of early maturity in Merinos, whilst maintaining wool quality and fleece weight," Lyndon said.

"I don't think it will be too long before we are joining ewe lambs, then our productivity will really be taken to the next level."

"Using the figures"

Lyndon and Sharon use ASBVs to help them select rams that will pass on the right genetics in the flock.

A ram's appearance is affected by the level of feeding, its age, whether it is single or twin, if it was born in a good or bad season and if it's dam was a maiden or adult. ASBVs remove these effects so that sheep producers can directly compare the genetic value of rams with greater confidence.

ASBVs are reported as variations from the average of the animals in Merinoselect in 1990. This means that the average in 1990 is set to zero and all ASBV figures are deviations from zero.

For some traits the average ASBV for animals in MERINOSELECT will have increased since 1990 (Clean Fleece Weight), while others will have declined I(Fibre Diameter) or stayed about the same (Fat).

The MERINOSELECT Percentile Band Report is an important tool for selection of Lyndon and Sharon's rams. It provides a basis for comparing the performance of all rams born in 2010 and identifies the ones that meet their selection criteria.

TRAIT	WWT	YWT	YEMD	YFAT
What Lyndon & Sharon are looking for	Rams in the top 20%	Rams in the top 20%	Animals above average (50%)	Animals below average (50%)
ASBV value required	Rams with an ASBV greater than 2.8 kg	Rams with an ASBV greater than 6.5 kg	Rams with an ASBV greater than 0.5 mm	Rams with an ASBV greater than 0.0

Percentile Band Values from MERINO SELECT	Heavier	Heavier	Larger	Leaner
Top 20%	2.8	6.5	1.6	-0.1
AVERAGE	1.2	3.6	0.5	0.0
100%				0.2
	Lighter	Lighter	Smaller	Fatter