



## Books, Book Reviews, Extracts

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Sheep CRC Update seminars held in eight locations across Australia between February and May 2010 provided a valuable summary of progress achieved by the Sheep CRC and our Participants in our first three years of operation. The Sheep CRC publication '2010 Sheep Focus' captures key messages and results presented in the seminars in a form that provides an easy reference document. It should be cited as:

Sheep CRC/Graham Truscott – *2010 Sheep Focus – Industry Overview*

# SHEEP INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

## *New opportunities in a changing industry*



Photo: Sheep CRC

Graham Truscott  
Deputy CEO

The Sheep CRC aims to transform sheep, wool, meat and the rate of adoption of improved technology and practices, with research programs impacting all along the wool and meat production chains.

The sheep industry continues to undergo significant changes with increasing value of sheepmeat and decreasing contribution of wool to farm gate earnings. The decline in the flock size from 173m in 1990 to 73m in 2009 was associated with a decrease in the real farm gate value of wool from \$6.4bn to \$2.4bn. Over the same period the real farm gate value of sheepmeat increased from \$0.5m to \$1.4bn and an increase of over 40% in the number of lambs slaughtered.

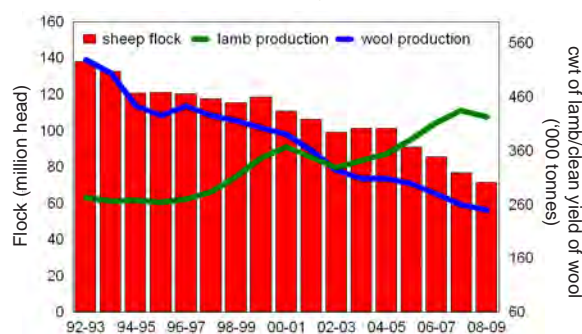
The changing focus from wool to meat in the Australian sheep industry creates challenges to improve productivity and demand for wool and to maintain or improve sheepmeat quality as growth rate and muscling continue to increase. There are also new challenges in managing parasites with increasing incidence of drench resistance and in understanding what implications there are for the sheep industry in relation to greenhouse gas emissions.

Factors leading to the decline of the Australian sheep flock include widespread drought, low wool prices compared to grain prices, higher labour cost, and variation in lamb prices over the last three years.

The availability and cost of labour is a major factor for the sheep industry and this is compounded by the relatively high average age (around 58 years) across the industry. As an industry we need to ensure that profitability and lifestyle are attractive and bring more young people into sheep production. There also needs to be more effort to increase skills levels as a means of increasing labour productivity and to breed sheep requiring less labour input.

***Genetic gain in sheep provides long-term cumulative improvement at relatively low cost.***

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Meat and Livestock Australia



ABOVE: The change in Australian sheep flock, lamb and wool production

On the whole, terminal breeds have strongly utilised genetic analysis and selection for 20 years, with their rate of genetic gain over \$2/ewe/year—at least double that of Merinos—resulting in the average lamb carcase increasing by almost 4kg since 1990. However, maternal and Merino breeders are increasingly adopting new genetic tools and are catching up, with use of ASBVs greatly increasing the accuracy and precision within breeding programs.

The Sheep CRC is investing significantly in genetic improvement. This is seen as the best approach to improving productivity and profitability in a sustained and cost effective way. Delivery of the genetic outputs and products of the CRC's Information Nucleus program is via Sheep Genetics and there are already a number of valuable improvements through increased accuracy of some existing breeding values and assistance in developing new ASBVs. The CRC is also working with industry ram breeders to pilot a genomics project using DNA-based analysis on 300 young industry sires. The results of genomic predictions will help in the selection for difficult to measure traits and in the early selection of promising young sires.

The Sheep CRC Updates and the summary in this publication provide some exciting insights to promising new technologies and some ready-to-use opportunities for ram breeders and commercial producers.

***It's a great time to be in sheep!***



Photo: Sheep CRC

*ABOVE: Autodrafters and other modern equipment make sheep easier to handle and manage*



Photo: Sheep CRC

*ABOVE: Progeny groups from the Rutherglen Information Nucleus site*

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