

WAMMCO *Info*

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WAMMCO *International*
A DIVISION OF THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MEAT MARKETING CORPORATION

Labour shortage bites at Katanning

WA LAMB producers who are battling critical feed and water shortages, are waiting for up to six weeks to get their lambs processed at WAMMCO's Katanning plant.

WAMMCO Katanning manager Tony Bessell said a critical labour shortage at the plant was now impacting directly on lamb producers who were trying to get stock off their drought-affected properties.

He said the cooperative's deferred booking list was increasing every day as more and more producers tried to offload stock.

"We will be unable to take most of these lambs until well into April, because the worker shortage is restricting our daily kill rates," Tony said.

"The situation will become even more acute if there is a late break to the season and feed and water problems increase."

Gnowangerup producer Greg Stewart said he had 1100 lambs on the WAMMCO waiting list, that were unlikely to be processed before mid-April.

"Some of our dams are already dry, and with no pasture left, it is costing us around \$10 per head per week on grain rations to maintain these lambs. Our country has become very fragile over the past few weeks and there could be serious environmental problems if there is a late break to the new season."

Hugh Roberts of Dandaragan said he had been able to offload several hundred lambs to ease stocking pressure, after he had been advised of the delay at Katanning.

"I have ample water to carry some lambs through, but many people in the area already have dry dams and most are hand feeding," he said.

Cuballing farmer, Chad Hawksley said he had also managed to find alternative outlets for some of his lambs. However he would miss the

WAMMCO premium for heavier lambs suited to the cooperative's US market, and was still maintaining on-property feedlots at nearly \$3,000 per week.

WAMMCO CEO Des Griffiths said the labour shortage was making a difficult season more difficult for everyone.

"WAMMCO is maintaining its price schedules at high levels compared with saleyard rates, because we want to support members who are trying to maintain supplies of high quality lambs.

"However overseas lamb markets are highly competitive at the moment and the labour shortage at Katanning means that we are unable to achieve better volumes and viability."

Des said moves to bring in more skilled overseas workers remained stalled over the failure of the Federal and State governments to complete a new Labour Agreement for WA.

"We cannot accept terms and conditions for new migrant workers that are far in excess of those we provide for long-standing employees, under our existing EBA."

He said the value of migrant workers had been clearly demonstrated by the 30 special visa holders from China and other countries, who joined WAMMCO at Katanning last year before the federal government suspended the scheme.

"The productivity of the Katanning plant has increased significantly over the past 12 months with these extra workers, confirming how much extra efficiency we could achieve with more skilled labour."

Mr Bessell said WAMMCO was also intensifying its efforts to introduce more automation to the cooperative's processing functions at Katanning.

"Apart from reducing reliance on manpower, there are significant quality assurance and other gains possible through robotics," he said.

Upgrades on track

The arrival of a new specialty boiler is expected soon as base for a major upgrade of WAMMCO's rendering section at Katanning.

Capital improvements worth nearly \$2million are taking place at the Katanning plant under the cooperative's policy of regular upgrades to increase efficiency.

A new autowrap machine was also recently installed to replace the cryovac unit in the boning room.

Katanning manager, Tony Bessell said the plant was achieving new productivity benchmarks. Boneless leg production had

tripled and French rack production had more than tripled over the past 12 months.

WAMMCO's \$2.4 million coldstore investment at Katanning three years ago, was also paying dividends – not only saving \$800,000 a year in offsite storage, but also improving food safety and providing absolute control of product, with increased flexibility.

Further investment in robotics was under consideration to deliver a new range of benefits, including yield improvement, improved safety, hygiene and work environment, and higher welfare standards.



WAMMCO's Peter Fowler with one of the large, dense WA lambskins processed for medical use.

Getting more for your skins

WORLD PRICES for shorn lambskins have improved on last year but there are opportunities for producers to glean even more from new trends in the industry.

WAMMCO's skins manager, Peter Fowler was busy at the recent Wagin Woolorama, showing lamb producers why some skins are far more valuable than others and how the Cooperative hopes to reward producers who can supply the denser, larger, fault-free pelts.

Peter said the WAMMCO Board was keen to assist producers with better feedback and incentives to take advantage of the market.

"If WAMMCO can attract more large, rib-free, higher density skins without seed damage, brand stains and other faults, we can generate better returns," he said.

"There is firm demand for double face clothing, as well as a niche market for high quality skins for the medical industry. We are servicing major buyers in China, Turkey, and Russia, as well as Japanese owned processors in New Zealand," Peter said.

Producers interested in assisting the Cooperative to maximise their lambskin returns, should contact Peter at WAMMCO on 9262 0999

AUDIT APPROVAL

WAMMCO has been added to the list of approved suppliers to Somerfield Supermarkets in the UK. The listing follows an audit of WAMMCO's Katanning plant conducted by the UK retailer in February.

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2007 monthly winners

COMPETITION for WAMMCO Producer of the Month titles has intensified in 2007, with Coolalee and Prime SAMP breeders taking the honours for January and February.

Prominent Newdegate farmers, Julie and Rob Newman produced their first Coolalee crossbred lambs for WAMMCO in 2005 and repeated the formula with another 1,000 prime lambs in 2006.

A large consignment of 822 lambs took out the January title, weighing an average of 22.46 kg to return \$73.26 per head.

Ross Taylor of "Tiarra" Lake Grace and daughter Kelly-Anne Gooch, scored the February title with a line of 404 Prime SAMP cross lambs that were killed at Katanning on February 19.

These carcasses weighed an average of 25.88 kg and averaged \$91.68 per head including \$5.44 for skins.

Ross said Prime SAMPs are ideal for WAMMCO's US markets for heavier,

leaner lamb and says they also excel in tight seasons.

"We had floods the previous year, then very little rain during the growing season and it was remarkable how the Prime SAMPs outperformed our other crossbreds."

"Some of the higher cross Prime SAMPs were reaching bodyweights of around 80 kg after six months on limited paddock feed.

"The lambs went off lupin stubbles onto a feedlot diet prepared on the property, with the Prime SAMP cross lambs maturing faster, without any excess fat problems."

Ross introduced Prime SAMPs four years ago using rams from 2006 State Lamb Competition winners, Haydn and Mark Edwards' and their Rockdale Prime SAMP stud at



WAMMCO's Rob Davidson was on hand (left), to congratulate Ross and Kelly-Anne on their February producer of the Month win, and also on the success of the Tiarra SAMP stud at Woolorama. Pictured with them were show helper Barry Killick (right) of Gairdner River and Kelly-Anne's 7 year old son Dale.

Dumbleyung. He plans to mate around 2,000 ewes to Prime SAMPs this year, depending on seasonal prospects.

New Managers

WAMMCO recently farewelled Terry Dunlop as operational supervisor of 21 years with WAMMCO and previous operators, Metro Meats.

Terry was educated in Katanning and joined Borthwicks in Albany before the plant was taken over by Metro Meat. He returned to Katanning with Metro in 1991 and was integral to the transfer of ownership to WAMMCO.

Gary Hunter, formerly of Conroys in South Australia, has moved to Katanning with his wife Cristine to replace Terry.

Andre Opperman, an experienced meat industry participant from South Africa who joined WAMMCO just over a year ago, has taken over as boning room superintendent, and is supported by



newcomer Nichol Smithies as boning room supervisor.

Gary, (left), Andre and Nichol were pictured at Katanning last week with the recently installed autowrap equipment in the boning room.



Albert Baker discusses WAMMCO's prime lamb product range in Dubai with a local customer.

Dubai interest

WAMMCO marketing manager Damien Giumelli and marketing executive Albert Baker represented the Cooperative at the recent Gulf Food Trade Fair in Dubai to promote WAMMCO's product range in the booming region.

"There are around 50 world class hotels under construction in the Dubai region, creating strong interest and many opportunities in the food service sector," Damien said.

State winners

WHILST the tough season reduced entry numbers and carcass weights for WAMMCO's 2006 Prime Lamb Carcass competition, supply manager, Rob Davidson said the even again served as WA's key benchmarking and feedback tool for lamb producers.

The winners of the \$4,000 WAMMCO cheque with \$1,000 worth of product from Milne Feeds, were first time entrants Haydn and Mark Edwards of Rockdale Prime SAMP stud at Dumbleyung with a line of 102 Prime SAMP and SAMP cross lambs averaging 25.41 kg with a lean meat yield of 53.5 percent and a loin meat yield of 13.4 percent.

Katanning farmers, Berry and

Sheldon Kowald of Capemont Farms took second prize of \$2,000 with \$1,000 of product from Superior Livestock Services, with a line of 101 Poll Dorset/Merino cross lambs averaging 25.31 kg with a lean meat yield of 13 percent.

Tim Stephenson of Kauladale, Kojonup was third with a line of Suffolk/Poll Dorset/SAMP-Merino cross lambs averaging 25.48 kg with a lean meat yield of 50.8 percent and a loin meat yield of 12.8 percent. Tim received a \$1,000 cheque from WAMMCO with \$1,000 worth of product from Ballard seeds.

Rob Davidson said the 2006 competition was noted for high lambing percentages – an average



Henry Strating (left), Superior Livestock Services, Dawson Bradford, second place getter Barry Kowald, Katanning, first place getter Mark Edwards, Dumbleyung, Greg Kanny, Milne Feeds and Leigh Ballard, Ballard Seeds.

percentage of 103, with 130 percent the highest of 59 entries. Poll Dorset and Prime SAMP breeds dominated the entries with 30 percent each, and Afrino lambs from Evan and Ruth Maddock at Mukinbudin appeared

for the first time.

Merino ewes were still the dominant mothers at 67 percent, but down from previous levels of 75-80 percent, with more first cross ewes making their way into the competition.