



Chairman's Corner

The achievements made by your co-operative were recognised when we were named the **Austrade Australian Regional Exporter of the Year** at a ceremony in Sydney in early December. Although we do not set out to win these awards it is pleasing that the achievements we have made in the lamb industry on behalf of our members were acknowledged. I was very proud to accept the Award from the Hon. Mark Vaile, Federal Minister for Trade, on behalf of all members and staff.



As part of our ongoing commitment to the industry and our members we have just completed an **upgrading of our slaughter chain at Katanning**. Several pieces of equipment have been installed at a cost of approximately \$1.2 million, including automatic head and hock cutting, new skin pullers and flanking tools. The upgrade will assist in **ensuring Katanning remains one of the leading prime lamb processing facilities**.

We have also taken-up a **shareholding in the Australian Lamb Company (ALC) in the USA**. ALC imports, distributes and value adds prime Australian Lamb. ALC's customers include leading supermarkets, restaurants and food service companies throughout the US and Canada. The investment will help ensure **continued access to these markets** as well as **providing us valuable feedback on market trends and outlook**. Other shareholders include Southern Meats in New South Wales and Castricum in Victoria.

A good start to the season resulted in us processing a larger than normal volume of **fat score 4 & 5 lambs** during spring. This often raises the point why we discount them. The simple answer is that the markets we sell into will not accept this level of fat and we must trim them, resulting in loss of product as well as incurring additional cost. From time-to time I hear of producers who have sold fat lambs to eastern state processors without incurring similar discounts. This does not reflect the correct market message and I believe those same producers would have maximised their return had they produced their lambs as fat scores 2 and 3. It is worth remembering it takes more energy to produce a kilo of fat than a kilo of meat.

Skins, by-products, casings and offal are often referred to as the "fifth quarter" of a carcase by meat processors. They have an important influence on the final price the producer receives. Often there are substitute products that are available, an example being palm oil, to replace tallow making them very price sensitive. Unfortunately record high prices that have prevailed in recent years have seen an easing in demand and this is flowing into producer returns. The most obvious the producer sees is the price paid for skins, which is back as much as \$10 per skin with many skins now unsaleable.

Despite these ups and downs that occur in all commodities I remain optimistic about the long term outlook for prime lamb. As producers we will need to **focus more on maximising our margins rather than looking for higher selling prices every year**. To assist members in this regard members have access to free advice from our Supply Development Manager, Rob Davidson in regard to raising and finishing lambs that meet market specifications. The co-operative is the only meat processor offering this service and I encourage you to take full advantage of it.

Remember we exist to provide service to our members. **In recent months near 90% of our purchases have been from our members on a direct basis**. They have benefited from receiving prices well above prevailing saleyard prices for heavyweight export stock meeting market specifications. If you are not already doing so I encourage you to plan well ahead and support your co-operative to maximise your returns.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Mating ewes from February onwards	2
Editorial	3
Vitamin E and growing lambs	4
NLIS	4
Member of the Month	4

Disclaimer

WAMMCO International makes no representation as to the accuracy of any information or advice contained in the LambLine newsletter and excludes all liability as a result by any person on such information or advice.



Mating ewes from February onwards – what’s important? – Prof Graeme Martin and Dr John Milton, School of Animal Biology, The University of Western Australia

Whilst many rams across WA have completed their annual work load, in other parts of the state where a later lambing is preferred, the next few months are vitally important if producers are to achieve above average lambing percentages.

So what is different about joining from February on? Namely, **mature ewes will cycle spontaneously and not need to be stimulated by teasers.** After February, approximately 6% of ewes in each mob will be displaying oestrus behaviour every day rather than in a teased mob where the majority of Merino ewes have 2 distinct periods of oestrus.

Ideally, **ewes should be in condition score 3 at mating.** In this condition score, the ewes would be “prepared to gamble” on twins (if their genes would allow). However, with mating from February onwards, the ewes are often grazing feed that is declining in nutritive value (particularly after the recent summer rains) and, even if they start in good body condition, losing condition sends panic signals to the reproductive system and the ewes seem to “choose the conservative pathway” and go for a single lamb. If a flock of ewes lose too much condition, some may not even get-in lamb, especially light weight weaners.

Feeding lupins for a few days seems to trick the ewes into thinking they are in good condition so they may again gamble on twins. **To achieve this, feed the ewes (daily) with up to 500g/h/d of lupins for the 7 days before and the 7 days after the rams are put with the ewes.** This fortnight of feeding lupins is cheaper than maintaining ewes above score 3. **Why stop after a fortnight?** Some research suggests that ewes fed at a high level in the second week after mating will lose embryos due to a fall in the level of progesterone - the major hormone of pregnancy.

The age, health, fitness, experience and joining percentage of the rams used in the mating program will all influence the potential lambing percentage.

Although it is getting a bit late for this season, all rams should have a health inspection 8 weeks prior to the start of the planned joining program. Ensure the rams are shorn, jetted,

treated for internal and external parasites, that their teeth, testes and penis are all sound and if necessary trim their hooves. **Why 8 weeks?** This is the time it takes sperm production to be completed (ie cell initiation to viable sperm). Any stress during this period can adversely affect sperm production and thus mating efficiency.

Ram testes respond rapidly to nutrition and when correctly fed, their testes grow. The number of sperm produced per gram of testes per day is constant hence the larger the testes at the start of joining, the more sperm there are available for fertilising ewes. **Offer rams daily feeds of 500 – 750 g/h/d of lupins for the 8 week period leading up to joining to maximise testes size.** Keep in mind however that over fat and unfit rams perform poorly.

The aim is to achieve a short and successful mating. **A well prepared, healthy, mature ram should be able to handle 50 mature ewes for a joining from February onwards (ie 2% rams).** However, if the ewes are well synchronised, if joining maiden ewes or if using young inexperienced rams then at least 3% rams is recommended. **Remove rams 35 days after introduction.** This gives the ewes 2 opportunities to mate and the concise mating allows some clever management of ewes later in their pregnancy to maximise lamb survival.

Why pregnancy scan? When a short mating period has been used, **ewes can be scanned 45 days after ram removal.** The scanning will inform you if the mating has been poor, allow you to put a backup plan into action rather than getting a big surprise at marking time. If the mating is successful, scanning allows you to plan resources and timing for lambing. Scanning allows non-pregnant and twin bearing ewes to be identified and managed accordingly. Some scanners can even estimate when a ewe conceived (in the first or second cycle of the joining program) to further refine and plan for lambing.

More information on the managing lambing ewes will be published in future editions of LambLine and John Milton (92425876) or Rob Davidson (0429380195) can be contacted for more information on the above.

WAMMCO CONTACTS

Perth

Phone 9262 0999

Fax 9355 0961

Email info@wammco.com.au

Website www.wammco.com.au

Katanning / Booking Officer (Fiona Clay)

Phone 9821 2000

Fax 9821 2731

Livestock Manager

Peter Krupa

Mobile 0427 810 613

Livestock Buyers

Wayne Radford

Mobile 0429 944 733

Brian Norsworthy

Mobile 0427 955 694

Supply Development Manager

Rob Davidson

Mobile 0429 380 195



Editorial

We hope this newsletter finds you refreshed from harvest and recharged after the festive season to make 2006 successful.

In early October, I had the fantastic opportunity to travel with our Marketing Manger, Damien Giumelli to Europe. We visited three existing customers in Switzerland, France and Belgium, finalising Christmas and early 2006 orders before displaying at the **Anuga World Food Trade Fair in Cologne, Germany**. The size of the trade fair is staggering. There are 14 halls, some with three split levels, each as big if not twice as big as the Silver Jubilee hall at the Perth Royal Show.

Approximately 6000 exhibitors from 150 countries display their products to 160,000 visitors attending the Anuga Fair over five days. WAMMCO was part of the MLA Australian Meat Industry Stand and gave us a fantastic opportunity to meet existing customers and develop new international contacts. At Anuga, it wasn't only red meat displayed but also poultry, sausage, fish and delicatessen products along with dairy, bakery, drinks and catering and retail technologies. The trip reinforced that WAMMCO is one of many companies selling product on the world market and that attention to detail is essential to maintain and develop new markets.



Sandy McTaggart (PGA President), Ian Longson (Agriculture WA Director General), Noel Ashcroft (WA Government Agent General, London) and Trevor De Landgraft (WAFarmers President) discuss lamb markets with Damien Giumelli at Anuga 2005.

We have had a fantastic response to the **2005 WAMMCO State Carcase Competition** with 80 entries received up from 51 in 2003 and 2004 and over 16,000 lambs evaluated, more than double slaughtered in 2004. A presentation to the successful entrants will be made in February or March at Katanning to coincide with a visit from one of our customers.

The widespread rain from ex-tropical cyclone Clare has dominated rural press recently. Whilst it is well received by livestock producers with native and perennial pastures or summer crops, the rain has caused paddocks to be eroded and brings some issues listed below that may need to be addressed.

Despite the wide usage of Phomopsis resistant lupin varieties, **Lupinosis** may still occur. Affected stock stop eating, lose condition, stand apart from the rest of the mob, often stagger if the mob is driven over a distance greater than 500m and have yellowed membranes of the eyes and gums. The general recommendation has been to remove stock after 10mm of rain and not to return them until the stubble has completely dried out. On return to the stubble, observe the stock daily, ensure the stock are not returned to the stubble hungry and provide a "run-off" paddock of dry pasture or cereal stubble to dilute any toxin picked up from the lupin stubble.

Worms – Normally few worm larvae passed in sheep dung survive the hot, dry summer. However, with moisture and shelter from summer grasses and weeds, more worm larvae will survive this summer and high faecal egg counts are possible by the end of summer. If you have recently purchased livestock from coastal regions be aware that the moist warm condition are perfect for Barber's Pole worm to become a serious issue.

Pulpy Kidney is caused by Clostridial bacteria and mainly occurs when unvaccinated stock graze rapidly growing pastures, cereal crop regrowth or when introduced to high levels of grain. Usually the better conditioned stock are affected with most affected stock found dead. Affected stock appear dull, have a staggering gait, froth at the mouth and death occurs soon after.

Plant poisoning can occur when stock graze plants with high levels of oxalates (ie Soursob) or nitrates (mint weed, capeweed, cereal stubble regrowth). Hungry, poor condition stock are most at risk. Stock suffer muscle tremors and breathing difficulties but often die before treatment can be given. Pre-feed with good quality hay and restrict access to several hours per day until adjusted to the new feed.

Salmonellosis is a bacterial infection causing fever, severe scouring and rapid deaths and can occur when stock are forced to drink from a dam, soak or trough heavily contaminated with faeces, washed in by flooding.

WAMMCO will release forward **Merino and Prime Merino Lamb Alliance contract prices in February** for delivery April to August 2006. Producers that require changing their booking dates are requested to provide 1 week notice. Finally, there are still some heavy weight forward contracts available from March through to August. To obtain these please contact Fiona Clay on 98212000.



Vitamin E and growing lambs – a case study

Dr Ray Batey, Sheepvet Australia

Lambs grazing green feed easily consume enough vitamin E to meet their needs. **However, dry feed and grains are generally low in vitamin E creating a deficiency that is an important cause of ill thrift in lambs over summer and autumn period.** History states, the generally accepted method of overcoming the deficiency is to administer a large single dose (2.4 to 3.6 grams of vitamin E), often repeated every 6-8 weeks. Sheepvet Australia tested deficient lambs at the end of 2004 on farms in Brookton and Beverley, and **revealed that large single doses DID NOT elevate blood vitamin E to acceptable levels.**

Spraying onto grain

One of our clients had been successfully administering vitamin E by spraying onto grain and a study on 3 occasions subsequently confirmed that:

- single doses again failed to achieve adequate blood levels (except on one occasion in a single lamb!), but
- the same dose administered on grain over 3 or 4 feeds, resulted in adequate vitamin E levels in blood.

The study used water miscible vitamin E (available as 200 grams per litre) sprayed onto oats. A similar study with oil-based vitamin E (400 grams per litre) sprayed onto lupins, produced less consistent results.

The outcomes have led to a suggested protocol using **water miscible vitamin E available as 200 grams per litre sprayed onto grain (preferably oats) at the rate of 2.5 litres per tonne prior to feeding out.** When sprayed evenly at this rate, the grain can be fed out by the usual methods. **Each lamb should receive a TOTAL of 2.5 kg of treated grain in 4 or 5 feeds over a two-week period.** One tonne of treated grain is sufficient for approximately 2000 lambs at each feed.

This method of treating grain should be commenced 4 weeks after pastures hay off and then every second month over summer and autumn.

Other vitamin E supplements

A satisfactory alternative for administering vitamin E may be to use a loose mineral mix containing vitamin E. However, some may not be suitable because they do not contain adequate levels of vitamin E, and farmers may need to seek professional advice if considering a particular preparation. Vitamin E is relatively expensive, and many of the cheaper supplements may not have sufficient levels.

Some farmers have used injectable vitamin A D & E. These preparations generally do not contain sufficient levels of vitamin E for lambs over summer in WA.

Acknowledgements: Dr Jeremy Allen and the Animal Health Laboratories.

Ray can be contacted on 1800651226

NLIS introduced 1st January 2006

The National Livestock Identification System for sheep is Australia's system for the identification and tracing of sheep and lambs for food safety, product integrity and market access purposes. The system uses visually readable ear tags printed with your property identification code and NLIS logo that are designed to remain in the animal's ear for life. When the tags are used in conjunction with National Vendor Declaration forms it allows trace back to the property of birth or last property of residence.

Two types of tags are used as part of the NLIS for sheep

- 1) Sheep breeder tags – standard WA ear tags, colour coded to the year of birth and must be applied before lambs / sheep depart from their property of birth.
- 2) Sheep property tags – pink tags applied to lambs / sheep no longer on their property of birth and these must not be removed from the ear. If these animals are on-sold, a further pink tag carrying the new Property Identification Code (PIC) must be inserted. (WA will continue to use the established 3 letter / number brands until PIC legislation is introduced).

Lambs consigned from their property of birth direct to slaughter via over the hooks trading do not require a sheep breeder tag.

Member of the Month

Katanning SAMM producer, Chris Pollock (below) is WAMMCO's Member of the Month for December. His winning consignment of **117 SAMM/Merino lambs averaged 25.16 kg** with 88% in the premium 22.1 to 28kg premium category returning \$3.17/kg (\$79.76/hd) for the contracted lambs.

"There was a real onus to get some good lambs into WAMMCO in December when **business partner Haydn Beeck won the title in November.**" "I believe SAMMS offer the best opportunity to reach the heavier weights required by the US market and although the lambs take a little longer to start they keep going easily beyond the 21 kg point." Chris said.

WAMMCO's buying and contract systems were a major bonus for WA producers and feedback from the cooperative was excellent. A keen student of VIAscan he said the system initially showed up the variations in his lambs and was now enabling him to optimise production.

