

Friday 27 August, 2021

Connewarran
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Dear Woolgrower,

Greetings from the team at Connewarran. What a year it has been. Plenty of summer rain, a seesawing wool price, great stock prices, a big ongoing blue with China, and of course COVID. Fortunately, as it has turned out, it's been a great time to be a wool grower: a work from home, socially distanced, solar powered, carbon sinking business!

At Connewarran, we've been grateful to keep progressing our business and our animals largely undisturbed. In the following letter, we outline a few of the things that have kept us busy.



More lambs through cold tolerance testing

- *Another string in our lamb survival bow*

2021 saw a very exciting development in our efforts to strengthen twin lamb survival. We engaged Lincoln University in New Zealand to conduct DNA analysis of our leading stud sires, looking for gene markers associated with an increased likelihood of lambs surviving a severe cold challenge.

- It is estimated that approximately 33% of lamb deaths are directly related to a severe cold challenge
- There is genetic variation between animals in their ability to cope with cold challenges
- One source of this variation relates to an animal's ability to rapidly metabolise fat in response to a cold challenge
- DNA tests can identify markers that indicate the degree to which the animal has this capability

Over the next few years we'll be analysing our lambing data to see how much influence this technology can have on our operation. This year's results are not conclusive. The animal with the best cold tolerance gene marker credentials did not have the highest lambing percentage. Rather, the animal with the highest fat did. However, there is evidence to suggest that the cold tolerance markers did have an influence, and we anticipate that when fat and the cold tolerance gene markers are combined, the results could be quite exceptional.

The results from tested sires in this year's lambing are as below, where:

- NLW = Lambs marked/ewes joined
- Cold tolerance marker = A is good, B is not good, C is bad. Each animal possesses two alleles (a bit like the poll gene)
- Fat = The animal's hogget fat measurement expressed as a percentage of his peers. 100% is average.

Sire	NLW %	Cold tolerance marker	Fat
19058	121%	BB	140%
19035	115%	AA	100%
19010	112%	AB	120%
19219	98%	BC	100%
19021	95%	AB	100%
19160	83%	BC	100%

We believe this is an exciting new technology which we can leverage to create a more productive animal whilst maintaining balance in our sheep. More information regarding cold tolerance testing can be found at:

<https://research.lincoln.ac.nz/resources/general/Cold-Tolerance-Gene-Marker-Test.pdf>

High quality wools

We haven't spoken much about wool quality over recent years. We consider it a given with our sheep rather than a new and notable initiative. The past year provided the conditions to remind many of us of the need to remain vigilant in this aspect of our breeding. It was pleasing to receive positive feedback from a number of clients on how well their wools held up. Please rest assured that, despite our newsletters primarily focussing on other aspects of our efforts to develop our sheep, a productive and rainfall tolerant wool will always remain a priority. We do, after all, live at Mortlake!

Managing the non-mules risk

- *No sheep mulesed in 2020/21 financial year*
- *Connewarran blood sheep able to transition to a non-mules environment if necessary*
- *Clear change in industry rhetoric relating to mulesing*
- *Premium received for Connewarran non-mulesed wool*

The 2020/21 financial year was the first year in which no sheep were mulesed on Connewarran. We are delighted with the balance we have struck between maintaining productivity and getting our sheep to a point where they can cope with a non-mules environment. A summary of strike incidence in non-mulesed sheep on Connewarran over the 2020/21 summer is in the table below.

Sample size	Sheep class	Shearing	Strike %
330	Aug/Sep 2020 drop commercial hoggets	May 2020 & March 2021	1/330 or 0.3%
600	May/Jun 2020 drop stud lambs	Mar-21	0/600 or 0.0%
1,100	Aug/Sep 2020 drop commercial lambs	May-21	7/1,100 or 0.6%



We consider this level of strike to be within manageable levels, especially in a year of very high summer rainfall. As an interim measure, we are choosing to freeze brand all our sheep. Although we are confident that we could operate with no form of breach modification, for our own operation, we are happy to take the conservative route and freeze brand for the time being.

AWI/MLA rhetoric and policy changes

It is interesting to note a significant change in the rhetoric of AWI and MLA in the last year through the recently released sheep sustainability framework. We believe the document gives a clear indication of the intentions of policy makers within our industry. Of the 21 focus areas covered by the framework, item 1.1 is *Reduce, refine, and **replace** painful husbandry practices*. We read this as a clear repositioning of the industry's stance regarding mulesing.

From our perspective, the debate over whether or not we should be allowed to keep mulesing is irrelevant. The question is **whether we will be able to continue**, and we are not comfortable running our business on the assumption that we will be.

Wool premium

In June this year we were able to market our commercial lambswool as non-mulesed (NM). It appears that the lambswool NM status did help it to gain a premium. Speaking to our selling agents after the sale, who had been in contact with the buyers, it was reported that

- The wool definitely sold to a premium
- The buyer could only take NM wool, which was being used for high end suiting
- The underbidder also required NM wool, thus neither bidder would have been in the market had the animals been mulesed
- Whilst the exact premium received wasn't clear, it was estimated to be somewhere between 50c and 200c clean



From Jan 1, 2022, with NWD 9.0, our wool will have the status of "LA", *"use of liquid nitrogen with an APVMA approved Analgesic product"*, and the property will have *"ceased mulesing"* status. Whether this will have any marketing benefit over mulesed wool remains to be determined.

Geelong Wool Museum – “On the Land”



Connewarran was privileged during 2021 to be selected as the showcase farm business for the National Wool Museum’s exhibit “On the land ”. It is the first major exhibit on Australian Wool in over two decades, and is described as “all about change, it is about people and places and our impact on the land.”

Unlike Richard and Jenny’s trip to Milan in 2019 for the Green Carpet awards, and much to Hamish’s chagrin, no down time with Cate Blanchett was involved. However, the fact that the exhibition exists is yet another example of how community expectations regarding our product are changing. More and more consumers are looking to hold us to account over how we produce our magical product. We are continuing to monitor this trend and adapt our sheep as required. Many people believe that lamb survival will be the next big welfare topic.

On-property field day. Friday 17 September,

10am to 4pm.

- *Preview stud sires, sale rams and hear guest speaker Rob Inglis speak on weaner management*

Sadly, Sheepvention was cancelled again this year. Our team were really disappointed to miss, for the second year running, the chance to catch up with current and prospective clients and learn a little more about what is going on in your businesses and lives. So, we’ve decided that if we can’t go to Sheepvention we’ll do it all at Connewarran! We are holding an on-property field day on Friday 17 September. We’ll display the rams that we would have displayed at Sheepvention, plus a large selection of rams that will be offered at our on-property sale on October 20. Lunch will be provided, including Eli’s famous coffee and brownies. And we will also be enjoying a presentation from Rob Inglis, Senior Livestock Production Advisor from Elders, regarding weaner management. Please do join us. We look forward to catching up in a slightly more relaxed atmosphere than that of sale day.

On-property ram sale

Wednesday 20 October, 2021

11am inspection, 1pm sale by Helmsman Auction

- *The intention is to hold a COVID safe on-property sale, according to prevailing conditions at the time*

We look forward to presenting another very strong offering of horned and poll rams at this year's auction. Whilst the goal posts keep changing daily regarding COVID restrictions, our intention at this point is to hold a COVID safe on-property sale as per previous years. If this is not possible, the auction will be shifted to Auctions Plus. As always, prospective buyers will be welcomed on-property prior to the sale to inspect rams if they wish to do so.



Best regards

Hamish, Eli, Richard, and Jenny Weatherly
Connewarran Merino Stud
Mortlake, Victoria