

Breeding objectives: setting and getting change

Producer Demonstration Site

Demonstration goal: To investigate and measure the benefits of benchmarking the genetic potential of six commercial Merino flocks and ensuring that genetic and phenotypic potential of weaners is aligned to a stated breeding objective, driving genetic progress.

Producer group: Lambs alive

Group coordinator: Jason Trompf

Agriculture Victoria coordinator: Nick Linden

Duration: 2020–2026

Breeding YOUR 'ideal' sheep = a goal and the right genetics

The path towards profit can have more than one route, and what everyone wants from their sheep might just be a little bit different. What is important is 1) knowing how you want your sheep to perform and 2) that their genetic potential lines up with your expectations.

The 'Lambs Alive' group run by Jason Trompf is undertaking a demonstration funded by Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and Agriculture Victoria, where all group members will have the opportunity to develop a breeding objective for their sheep enterprise. Further to that, six 'host farms' will benchmark the genetic potential and improvement of their flocks over five years. Genetic potential will be assessed via the 'Flock Profile'* tool which provides a flock average for key Australian Sheep Breeding Values, such as weaning and yearling liveweight, yearling clean fleece weight, staple length and fibre diameter, as well as eye muscle and fat depth. Assessments of genetic potential at the start and end of the demonstration will be used as an indicator of genetic improvement.

Group coordinator Jason Trompf said, 'While some sites will collect key phenotypic data to monitor changes in sheep (and ensure they are on track to meet the breeding objective), for others seeing the change in the genetic potential is what's really important and will cement if the ram buying decisions have been the right ones to deliver the desired outcomes'.

Host farms will undertake the initial benchmarking of genetic potential at the 2021 lamb marking; stay tuned for updates as the results come to hand. For any producers interested in setting a breeding objective for their own enterprises, please contact Nick Linden from Agriculture Victoria 0438 369 486.

* The 'Flock Profile' is a genomic test of a random group of 20 ewe lambs – the science behind the flock profile test was generated from research undertaken by the Sheep CRC. The materials required and the analysis of the samples is undertaken by Neogen. <https://www.neogen.com/industries/sheep-goat/>