

STUART SHAND, Langkoop Vic



FORMER first cross ewe producer Stuart Shand has had an interesting journey looking for a sheep with fertility and structure with the hardiness to handle wet conditions at Langkoop in western Victoria.

But he reckons he has found his ideal sheep in the structurally sound and highly fertile, dark-nosed and black-hooved Chromedales from Matt and Tanya Tonissen, south of Hamilton.

He has settled on the Chromedales as their sheep of choice for their current flock-building phase.

Six years ago he stopped first cross ewe production and up until four years ago he was using Coopworth-White Suffolk cross composite rams, but couldn't get the fertility and structure he wanted.

"I went across to a closed flock with the Coopworth-White Suffolk composites and then decided I needed to chase better structure."

When buying rams at the annual Chrome ram sales near Hamilton, Stuart said he basically selects for black noses and black feet, and the highest fertility he can get. He also looks for rams with breeding values for worm resistance, early growth and genetic fat for lamb survival.

"The beauty of them is that you buy 5-10 rams and the rams in the back of the ute all look the same, so you get an even line of maternals."

"These sheep seem to have better structure and they are much sounder in the feet and we have fewer issues with worms and foot problems."

According to WillyWeather, the average rainfall at Edenhope has been 466mm since 2010, but Stuart said he is farming wet country where the sheep need to have structurally sound legs and hooves.

"We have harsh wet winters."

Stuart and his wife Edwina Shand, and Stuart's mother Janet, are running a self-replacing flock of about 5500 composite ewes on 1350 hectares at Langkoop, 16 kilometres west of Edenhope. About 2200 of his maternal ewes are joined to Chromedale rams and the remainder are joined to terminal rams. Rams are joined in early February for an early July lambing.

Stuart said his move to Chromedales had given him an even line of sheep, which produce even drops of lambs.

“The Chromedales give us even, fast growth rates with structurally sound sheep.

“If we don’t mark 150 percent lambs out of the Chromedales we are pretty disappointed and we get exceptionally low rates of dry ewes – the rams are just sound.”

The Shands are usually able to turn off from pasture direct to abattoirs under contract before Christmas at about 22-23 kg dressed weight to exporters or supermarkets.

“We’ve been spoiled the last few years with late seasons and we pushed the boundaries of our growing season with our late joining.

“But if we get an early finish to the season we sell a higher proportion of restocker or light trade lambs.”

Growth weight were also good from the Coopworth-White Suffolk cross ram progeny, but he is also now getting great fertility from the Chromedale blood ewes, he said.

“The last few years I have managed to hit export weight with most of my lambs.

“The last of our lambs are usually gone by the first week of December.”

Stuart said he believed the Chromedales with their medium to large frames would give him more potential to lift his stocking rate in the future.

“The sheep we were running before the Chromedales were very large.

“I think we will be able to run 20pc more ewes on the same country as we build our numbers and move to a pure Chromedale flock.”

Stuart said from his first cross days he has always scanned to identify his multiple lamb-producing ewes and managed them differentially. Any twinning ewe is now joined to a Chromedale ewe to build fertility into the maternal flock.

“That means the Chromedale rams are being joined to the most productive sheep and we are keeping the female progeny.”



Stuart Shand's lambs at marking