



## Richard & Nikki Kirkland, Millicent, SA

HIGH growth muscular Chrome Poll Dorset rams are doing the job over composite ewes for the south-east South Australian prime lamb operation of Richard and Nikki Kirkland.

The Kirklands operate the family farm in the Furner area in south-east South Australia on about 2700 hectares of mainly black flat country in a normally 630mm+ annual rainfall.

The Kirklands predominantly ran Merino wethers, but over the past 20 years moved into a Merino ewe to Merino ram wool base then to breeding first cross ewes and to composite ewes for prime lamb production about four years ago.

Increasingly over recent years, the Kirklands have been making the trip to buy Chromedale and Icon Poll Dorsets from Matt and Tanya Tonissen near Hamilton in Victoria's south-west.

There are now about 9000 Chromedale ewes and ewe lambs in the Kirkland flock and the family crops 800-1000 hectare of broad beans, wheat, barley and canola depending on the stage of the rotation.

About 30 percent of the Kirkland Chromedale ewe flock is joined to maternal Chrome rams annually to keep the flock self-replacing, but this will go to 50pc next year. Richard said he is pleased with the growth of all the Chrome cross lambs.

"They seem to do as well, these maternal lambs, they finish just as quick as the others."

The Kirklands initially joined to Poll Dorset and White Suffolk rams from studs other than Chrome, but apart from new maternal Chromedale rams, for his terminal joining, they are now buying Chrome Poll Dorset rams to renew their sire bank. Selection of the Chrome Dorsets is based on physical examination and use of the breeding value figures available.

"I'm not after anything overly big, some of the Dorset studs around here have quite big rams now, massive really – they've gone a bit leggy with them," Richard said.

He looks for low birth weight, good muscle and growth in his ram purchases to give him easy-lambing ewes producing lambs for a quick turn-off and superior feedlot performance.

"Something tough, they don't have to be overly big, we can grow them big on our feed here.

"I don't mind a bit of (genetic) fat on them either."

The average carcase weight of the Kirkland May-June drop Dorset cross lambs sold by October has averaged about 25kg in recent years, targeting the domestic supermarket trade. More than half of the lambs are sold by October.

"We sell the majority in the wool, some will go on a summer fodder crop from November till January and the spring drops go onto bean stubbles.

"As soon as you go above 25kg, they take ages and need a lot of feed, especially if you are lot-feeding them."

He said lambs have gained 500gms-plus a day on clover pasture. "You've got to have the right genetics to do that."

He said lambs from the traditional Poll Dorsets grew long and big, but don't yield well, "whereas Matty's they tend to yield pretty well."

"The (Icon) rams themselves are nuggety fellas and because they are tough they tend to last.

"Whereas the other Poll Dorsets we've used ... we chew through them every year; they don't last long."

He estimates he averaged about \$200-\$220 a lamb for the 8500-9000 lambs sold annually for the last three years.

The Kirklands mark an average of about 130 percent lambs from their mature Chromedale ewe and about 100pc for the ewe lambs. High oestrogen clovers such as Yarloop are a limiting factor to conception, but generate high growth weights in the lambs. Lambing percentages were around 100pc with the previous Poll Dorset rams over first cross ewes.

This year the Chromedale cross ewes have scanned at 168pc and the first cross ewes have scanned at 148pc.

“Both lots were up a bit on last year due to different management of high oestrogen clovers,” Richard said.

Richard said the Chromedale ewes are also more efficient, with mature weights of 65-70kg compared to 80-90kg first cross ewes. He believes he is now turning off more lambs per ewe per hectare than with the first cross or Merino ewes, but has not calculated it. Last year the property was running about 17 dry sheep equivalents per hectare.

“We are running more ewes per hectare and generating 30-40 percent more lambs.”

Richard has also been able manage the Chrome sheep to minimize drenching. Worm egg counts taken recently came back at 30-60 eggs per gram in the ewe lambs and 0-30 in the grown sheep.

“They were all drenched at shearing in December.

“We didn't give a pre-lamb drench last year, but counts were up around 100-120 eggs per gram.”

Richard said he hasn't been targeting low egg count rams.

“That is something Matt (Tonissen) is doing with his breeding in the stud so it should flow through his genetics.”



Chromedale Ewe with twins at Funer



Another load of Kirkland lambs



Clover on Kirkland's property

