



Craig & Jacinta Grant, Pidgeon Ponds, Vic

IMPROVING LAMB SURVIVAL

For Pigeon Ponds prime lamb producer Craig Grant, making the change to a maternal composite flock has boosted lamb survival rates by more than 40 per cent and improved overall ewe resilience and hardiness.

Mr. Grant, his wife Jacinta and their family run a self-replacing flock of 5500 composite ewes across two properties in southwest Victoria and have been using Chromedale rams since Chrome Sheep Studs began 16 years ago. They also own the Lindsay Murray Grey stud, joining about 160 cows each year. “Originally we ran fine wool Merinos and as the meat industry became more appealing, we moved into first-cross ewes,” Mr. Grant said.

“We then decided to trial the Tonissen’s Chromedale rams over our first-cross ewe base so we could start to self-replace our own sheep rather than having to buy in ewes each year.

“We kept all the Chromedale-cross ewe lambs and very quickly worked out how maternal and productive they were.”

Now they join two-thirds of their composite flock to Chromedale maternal rams to supply replacement breeders, while the two oldest age groups of ewes are mated to terminal Poll Dorset sires, also sourced from the Tonissen family.

“At the end of the day the result that did it for me the most was that we knew we were scanning 120 per cent in lamb in our Merinos, but still only marking 70pc of lambs,” Mr Grant said.

“The first-cross ewes were better but there was still a real fall out of potential foetuses that we weren’t bringing back to the lamb marking cradle.

“Once we started getting into the composite sheep, we were scanning 140 to 145pc and still marking 125 to 130pc, that lamb survival is critical, and all adds up to how tough and robust they are.” This season, the maiden ewes have pregnancy scanned at 145pc and the adult ewes at between 150 to 168pc, with their lambs just starting to hit the ground now.

The Grants have established a strong market for their composite ewe lamb replacement breeders, which are keenly sought by repeat buyers.

They keep about 2000 ewe lambs each year, with half retained in their flock and the remainder sold through the Chrome Genetics Maternal ewe sale in December and a special ewe sale at Casterton, Vic, in January, topping this year’s market at \$350/head.

Mr. Grant said they aim to sell most of the wether lambs over the hooks by December at a dressed carcass weight of 22 to 24 kilograms. Some lambs are also kept to finish on summer crops.

“The carcass merit of the maternal composite sheep is getting better all the time,” he said.

“Not only are we getting bang for our buck from the maternal side, the wether lamb portion is also becoming a high value product as well, a lot of the lambs we feed on are extremely good doers and yielding very well for us. “We recently hooked lambs that dressed very close to 50pc and killed at the top end of the Safeway specifications and still made more than \$200/hd in May.”

Mr Grant uses a combination of visual appraisal and Australian Sheep Breeding Values for his ram selection, with an emphasis on fertility, moderate growth, positive muscle and neutral fat. Structural soundness and a tight skin type is also important.

“What attracts me to Chrome is their consistent uniformity of type, when we’re selling our ewes or putting together lines of lambs to get that consistency of type definitely adds market appeal,” he said.

“I think the type of sheep we have now are just so much more robust and their maternal attributes, doing-ability and toughness is what I really enjoy about them.

“They are rewarding sheep to own as they give you back so much of what you put into them.”



Another top line of Grant family’s 1.5yo ewes