

Quality genetics lift demand

BY KYLIE NICHOLLS

AN INVESTMENT in proven Border Leicester genetics, combined with quality Merino breeding stock, continues to pay off for the Gadsby family, with their first-cross ewes in strong demand from returning purchasers.

Based near Molong, Allan and Kate Gadsby and their children Tom and Edwina, have been producing first-cross ewes for more than 20 years on their 2800-hectare property, Binnowee, developing strong relationships with several clients who they supply each year.

According to Mr Gadsby, these long-term buying relationships have been critical to their ongoing first-cross ewe breeding success.

"Our breeding objectives are governed by the producers that purchase our lambs, it's our job to put the lambs on the ground that the market wants," he said.

"Quite a few years ago, we sold some first-cross ewes on AuctionsPlus and the buyer was happy with them and rang us wanting a constant supply.

"We asked him what's the perfect sheep he wants us to breed to meet his requirements and we endeavour to supply what he wants.

"We get a premium for that and our client knows he is going to get a consistent supply of good sheep and he can be confident of their health status, it suits us both well."

The Gadsby family cur-



The Gadsby family, Binnowee, Molong, have been using Cadell Border Leicester rams joined to their Merinos for more than 20 years, producing quality, fast-growing first-cross ewes. Picture by Halcroft and Bennett

rently join between 5000 to 6000 ewes in their sheep enterprise, buying them in as one to 1.5 year-olds from Merino breeders in the state's west.

"We look for big, plain-bodied young Merino ewes that are between 57 to 63 kilograms live weight and ready to join," Mr Gadsby said.

"We generally buy about 1200 to 1300 replacements each year, depending on our requirements."

The Gadsby family are long-term clients of the Cadell Border Leicester stud near Ariah Park, selecting high-performing, fast growing rams which will complement their Merino ewes.

Initially Mr Gadsby will use Australian Sheep Breeding Values to guide his decisions, with emphasis on early growth, particularly post weaning weight and fat depth for lamb survival.

"We want quick maturing rams because that makes our lambs mature quicker and consequently their progeny mature quicker," he said.

"If you can get your progeny with a reasonable amount of fat cover on them, it gives them a bit more sustaining power in the first 48 hours after birth.

"I also prefer twin-born rams for fertility, that's also a key trait for our ewes, I would rather retain our older twin-bearing ewes and sell

a younger lot of single ewes if required.

"Visually, I look for plenty of length, softness, and a strong Border Leicester head with nice, thick ears."

Viewing it as an investment in the quality of his first-cross ewe progeny, Mr Gadsby is happy to pay more than the average price for his rams, and generally operates at the top end of the sale catalogue.

"The Cadell stud is one of the oldest Border Leicester studs in Australia and that depth of pedigree will give you consistent lambs," he said.

Ewes are joined in the first week of March to start lambing from early August

onwards. The young ewes are joined for eight weeks to maximise conception rates, while the mature ewes are mated for six weeks.

Mr Gadsby aims to have all the ewes condition score 2.5 to three at joining.

All the ewes are scanned to identify multiples with ewes separated into single and twin-bearing mobs so the ewes carrying twins can be managed accordingly.

Where possible, they lamb in better quality pasture paddocks and smaller mob sizes of about 200 head are maintained.

Lambing percentages average between 95 to 98 per cent in the single-bearing ewes, while 170 to 175pc

are recorded in the twin-bearing mobs.

The lambs are weaned in December, with the first-cross ewe portion shorn and moved to high quality pasture paddocks which have been set aside for them.

They will stay in their allocated paddocks until the following June, before being shorn again and run on grazing crops such as winter wheat, barley or canola.

This year, the family have sown about 240ha of canola at their Molong home block which the ewes are currently running on.

The first-cross ewes are sold in early October, following negotiations between the Gadsby's livestock agents, Halcroft and Bennett at Gulargambone, and the agents representing the buyers.

"We aim to have the ewes averaging 60kg at sale time," Mr Gadsby said.

"Last year they were 66kg, the year before that they averaged 64kg, and in the drought year in 2020 they were 57kg."

The wether lambs are generally sold direct to local feedlots after weaning at 40 to 45kg live weight.

"Last year they went to Fletchers feedlot and they wanted them shorn so we delivered them off the board, it's all about what the client wants," Mr Gadsby said.

"They make as much money as any other lambs in the market at that similar weight, and the entire draft goes at once."