



NEWSLETTER WINTER 2022

GRASS Merinos Dominate MERINOSELECT

At GRASS we have always been keen to compare ourselves to the wider Merino industry. In the recent changes at Sheep Genetics the GRASS Merinos flock performed very well. For over forty years GRASS has been working on the two main profit drivers in any Merino enterprise, Clean Fleece Weight and Reproduction. The new data coming out of Sheep Genetics shows based on the Dual Purpose Plus index **11 of the top 20 rams in Australia in the 2020 drop are from GRASS and 15 of the top 20 rams in Australia in the 2021 drop are from GRASS.** The Average of the GRASS flock to be in the top 1% of the industry for Weaning Rate (the New reproduction ASBV) as well as in the top 5% of the industry for Clean Fleece weight.

The Average of the GRASS Merino flock is in the top 1% of the industry for the Dual Purpose Plus index.

Looking at the 2021 sale rams the flock category of rams had an average DP+ index that was in the top 5% of the whole industry. That means when you purchase any GRASS Merinos ram you are buying the top of Industry Genetics. These are incredible numbers so please don't take our word for it. Check out the new Sheep Genetics search site at <https://search.sheepgenetics.org.au/search/dashboard>

Manager's Report

The past six months at GRASS Merinos have been incredible. After another highly successful ram sale we set about preparing the 2022 sale team. The unprecedented rain throughout this time has brought another cracking season and sheep commodity prices continue to be strong. The GRASS Merino flock continues to amaze us both with their physical results and with the ASBVs being achieved.



Running the stud on a commercial basis at a high stocking rate really allows us see the pressures placed on our clients' flocks. The 2021 spring and 2022 summer were certainly interesting. High fly and worm burden was a real management challenge for all sheep producers. The GRASS breeding ewes still managed to wean 111% of lambs to ewes joined. They cut 7.6kgs of wool that tested at an average of 19.4 micron. They then backed up to pregnancy scan at 148%. At our recent lambmarking we again marked 106% lambs to ewes joined, with 161% of lambs out of our twin bearing mobs.

The GRASS Flock has also performed very well in the recent Sheep Genetics analysis enhancements. The enhancement included a full database redevelopment, improved accuracy and a new reproduction ASBV known as Weaning Rate (WR). It must have been a very busy time at Sheep Genetics.

A Deep Dive into Weaning Rate

As we have discussed above Sheep Genetics (SG) have released the new Reproduction ASBV called Weaning Rate (WR). SG has been at work for quite a while now on breaking down reproduction into its components allowing breeders to make more targeted genetic gain in the three or four different drivers of reproduction. The component trait ASBVs being Conception (CON) Litter size (LS) and Ewe rearing ability (ERA). SG has also done work to allow for the incorporation of genomic information to help the traits. SG also consider that having a single reproduction trait was important to assist commercial producers in making selection decisions, for inclusion in selection indexes. Therefore, the combined trait called Weaning Rate was developed and is available to the MERINOSELECT evaluations as a replacement for NLW.

SG define Weaning rate as the number of lambs weaned per ewe joined, and is expressed in the units of 'lambs', similar to the component traits. WR is calculated using the improved reproduction traits and is derived by placing an economic value on each component at different average litter sizes. The complicating factor is that, as litter size goes up its economic value declines but the economic value of ewe rearing ability continues to increase. Teasing out this information and being able to use it has given us a very powerful tool to drive reproduction and in particular the ewe's ability to rear a lamb.

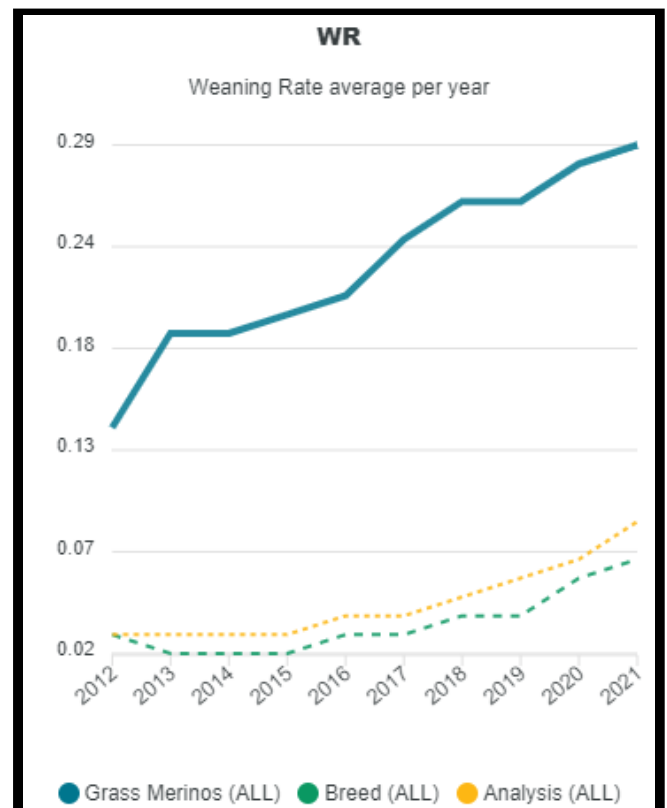
These new Breeding Values will allow GRASS and the industry as a whole to look at each stage of the breeding cycle. It will allow GRASS and other breeders to really focus on the area which they want to improve.

The results of the new Weaning Rate ASBV and its inclusion into the current industry indexes was something that we were excited about. We did not know how our sheep would perform on the new ASBV but we were confident our long term work on reproduction would hold us in good stead.

GRASS ewes will wean 22% more lambs than the industry average

As you can see from the graph the GRASS flock currently has a **Weaning Rate average of 29%** whereas the industry Weaning Rate average is 7%. This means that the **GRASS ewes will wean 22% more lambs than the industry average** year on year.

This also means that the ewe progeny of GRASS Merinos rams will wean 22% more lambs than ewe progeny of the industry average rams. This data is particularly exciting given how lowly heritable reproduction is.



More Wool

More Lambs

More Profit

PRODUCTIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

GRASS Merinos have been focused on increasing productivity per ha for the past 45 years. Although production per hectare should be the main focus of any seed stock producer, we have also been conscious of sustainability and farm resilience.

GRASS has been working on farm sustainability and resilience in many different facets. From planting trees and ensuring ground cover to installing solar power. From improving soil health by constantly cultivating legumes to focusing on animal welfare traits like wrinkle and wool quality.

In 1987 the GRASS Directors spent much time investigating farm sustainability. They travelled to Victoria to see the 'Potter plan' demonstration farms. These farms were designed and managed in harmony with the ecology of the land in order to improve production and redress land degradation. The GRASS Directors planted their first tree lines shortly afterwards. Those early adopters now have thirty year old tress lines with many different native species. These tree lines are now providing perfect shade and shelter for livestock and well as significant wind reduction.



*Former GRASS Director Greg O'Brien
with a treeline he planted on Sunnyside
in 1989*

Tree lines planted as wind breaks reduced wind erosion as they help slow down the wind and minimise the damage caused by wind moving across the surface of the soil. *"We know that just one millimetre of topsoil lost in a wind event equates to around 12 tonnes per hectare of soil."* *"With this, you are losing valuable organic matter and nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus and you are potentially left with changed production zones within a paddock determined from normalised difference vegetation index NDVI yield maps and soil tests."* **GRDC soil erosion podcast May 2021.**

Tree lines help to create cooler microenvironments by reducing temperature extremes at a paddock and farm level. In reducing wind flow, tree lines can lead to a reduce heat stress benefiting crops, pastures, and livestock. Tree lines reduce wind speed and the severity of wind damage to your crops and pastures.

Integrated Pest Management programs use good insects to control bad insects in crops and pastures. A well planned tree line creates biodiversity in farm environments which may lead to a reduction in pesticides as Integrated Pest Management works on a holistic level.

At GRASS Merinos we are aiming to combine productivity and sustainability. We are using genetics and ASBVs to advance our flock's production. We are also attempting to improve welfare traits and manage our farms ecology to increase our sustainability.



More Wool

Less Wrinkle



2022 GRASS MERINO Ram Sale

The 2022 GRASS Ram sale will once again be done by appointment. We have been receiving quite a lot of enquiries already so make sure you book in early for 2022.

The days for you to come to Select and Collect your rams are:


Thursday 6 & Friday 7 October

Premium Selection

GRASS Merinos offers a premium selection service. Once a buyer has selected the grade from which they wish to purchase, GRASS will select a number of rams within that grade based on the buyer's breeding objective. The buyer can then choose from within that selected group. This ensures that the buyer gets to view and choose from rams that meet their particular breeding objective.

There will be a 20% premium for this service.

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