



■ Wiltidam breeder Ian Tubby, left, with Wiltipoll breeder Annie Hughes, check out the Wiltidams at the Adelaide conference.

Ram sold to \$2000



■ White Dorper breeder Hayden Whittlesea and buyer of the \$2000 ram Ray Newman, Victor Harbor, SA, at the Cleanskin Sheep Australia auction.

RAM demand is proving that Serviceton sheep breeders Hayden and Michelle Whittlesea are onto a good thing with their White Suffolk and White Dorper flocks.

The couple sold the top price ram at the Cleanskin Sheep Australia auction for \$2000 to Victoria Harbor, SA, breeder Ray Newman last Friday.

The breeder hoped the 11-month-old 78 kilogram ram with an eye muscle depth of 38 millimetres would put more muscle into his flock of 200 Wiltshire Horn and 100 Wiltipoll ewes. The ram was exhibiting fairly good shedding ability, he said.

Crossbreeding is also working for the Whittleseas Hayelle stud operation just across the SA border in western Victoria. Last September Hayelle sold 25 White Dorper-White Suffolk cross rams for an average of \$1000 to go over mainly Merino ewes, while pure White Suffolk rams averaged just over \$900.

The Whittleseas were also getting good results from artificially inseminating White Dorper ewes, with 96 dropping 160 per cent lambs in March last year that were then rejoined for another 150pc lambs in September. "So I got 300pc lambs in 12 months," Mr Whittlesea said.

— TERRY SIM

Shedding demand

SHEDDING sheep lamb skins and wool was in demand for farmers at the Cleanskin Sheep Australia conference in Adelaide last week.

Self-described 'Dorper' of the agency business, BR and C agent Malcolm Brady said skins for shedding sheep lamb skins, 20-25 kilograms dressed weight, were selling for up to \$15 for some first-crosses (with bare bellies) last week, but generally were worth \$6-\$10.

Mr Brady advised producers to get their agent to make sure a skin value would be paid before they send any lambs over the hook.

"The processors have all got specifications out there and they can tell you whether they are going to give a skin price or not."

Mr Brady said 12 months ago shedding sheep skin prices were valued at \$3-\$5 a skin, with some works paying nothing. "Now it is going up – I think it just supply and demand of sheep skins in the world."

Processors were now getting enough shedding sheep skins to put together container loads, possibly destined for a specialist market in China, he said. Saleyards were a great place to sell cleanskin sheep at the moment, but it did fluctuate he said. "So if you've got a niche market, please look after it."



■ BR and C agent Malcolm Brady had good advice for marketing cleanskin sheep and skins.

Wiltidams are yards apart

By TERRY SIM

AUSTRALIAN Wiltidam sheep breeder Ian Tubby intends to draw the line 'at the fence' in his selection criteria for the new wool-shedding breed.

"Any sheep that is showing a bad attitude to fences and yards in our breeding is sent off to the abattoir as soon as possible."

Mr Tubby said he knew of no other breed of sheep that was selected for its respect of the average farm fence and yard.

"This is important when you see the natural instinct of so many other breeds to drop their head and shoulders and crawl under very good fences," he said, while displaying the breed at the annual Cleanskin Sheep Australia conference in Adelaide last week.

The Australian Wiltidam is the latest wool-shedding breed to be registered with Cleanskin Sheep Australia – and some one-and-a-half year-old Wiltidam ewes and rams were displayed at the conference.

Mr Tubby said the Wiltidam rams on display were 50 per cent Van Rooy blood, and 25pc Wiltipoll and Damara genetics. The ewes were a Van Rooy-Damara cross.

Subject to the other people involved in the maternal breed, Wiltidam breeders would probably aim towards a one third mix of each of the three breeds, he said.

Breed development started in 2006 on his property Bundaleer at Morawa near Geraldton in Western Australia, where Wiltidams were first launched in 2007. There are seven breeders in Western Australia and the eastern states.

The reason for the poll breed was "sheer necessity" in rangeland and salt-affected country, Mr Tubby said.

"While there are currently numerous cleanskin sheep breeds in Australia, it was felt that there was a need for a very hardy, versatile productive ewe that could consistently produce maximise net returns per hectare throughout most of Australia."

He hoped the Wiltidam would be the maternal sheep bred of choice for a lot of sheep producers.

"The Wiltidam like all good cleanskin sheep requires very minimal inputs and produces large numbers of quality lambs per hectare that are very suitable for domestic or live export," Mr Tubby said.

"Our aims and objectives are to have a hardy, versatile and fertile maternal ewe that has good conformation, enough to be mated to any of the good prime lamb maternal sires."

Wiltidams would be selected for a large frame, heavy bone, with long legs and sound hooves, multi-births of medium-sized lambs, ease of lambing, mothering and milking ability. Tails did not need to be docked.

"A sheep like this can survive anywhere and not be clagged with maggots, dags, ticks or grass seeds," Mr Tubby said.

First DNA-proven Poll Wiltshire ram on show

WILTSHIRE Horn breeder Dennis Wilson, Crystal Brook, South Australia, nearly castrated the first genetically-poll ram dropped in his horned flock about five years ago.

Last week he and his wife Jill offered the first DNA-proven Poll Wiltshire ram bred from that first ram lamb at a public auction, after the Cleanskin Sheep Australia conference in Adelaide.

The ram was the first Poll Wiltshire tested with a double copy of the poll allele, using Pfizer Animal Genetics' HornPOLL test, to be offered for sale in the world.

Five years ago Mr Wilson thought the first poll Wiltshire ram to appear in his flock was a ewe when he tagged it as a lamb, because poll lambs were usually ewes. It was only the advice of his stock agent Peter Hill that stopped him from putting the animal on the truck to be sold for meat.

"He said you might want to hang onto this thing – so we kept it as a ram and we put it with a few horned ewes."

In 2007 the Wilsons enlisted the help of geneticist Scott Dolling, who helped develop the Wiltshire Horn and the Poll Dorset, and joined the poll ram to Wiltshire Horn ewes with smaller or no horns.

In 2008, Pfizer Animal Genetics started testing visually poll animals in the Byarlea flock.



■ Brian and Jill Wilson with the first Poll Wiltshire ram to be offered for sale. They are holding walking stocks made using Wiltshire Horn sheep horns.

"From then on it has been clear sailing – an expensive exercise, we spent a lot of money with the DNA testing, but now we know."

Mr Wilson said other poll breeds have been developed throughout the years without DNA testing such as Merinos and the Poll Dorsets.

"Basically the Poll Wiltshire is the first breed in the world that has been developed for any trait using DNA testing," he said.

"It took probably 30 years to develop the Poll Dorset, but with DNA testing you can go straight there, take a blood

sample and get the results back immediately," he said. "It's amazing what this technology can do."

The Wilsons now have seven adult double-allele Poll Wiltshire rams and expect to add to this figure when the results of testing last year's lambs come back. "There could be another 10 or 20 rams."

The Wilsons will continue to breed horned sheep "because they are good sheep", Mr Wilson said, but also to supply fresh blood for the poll flock.

The Poll Wiltshire ram failed to get a bid over the auctioneer's suggested starting price of \$5000 last Friday, but the Wilsons were negotiating to sell semen overseas. Only a single allele Poll Wiltshire ram has been sold to a Kangaroo Island, SA, breeder.

Pfizer Animal Genetics representative Steve Parker said the Wilsons' Byarlea Poll Wiltshire flock was the first cleanskin breed to be validated with the HornPOLL DNA test. Mr Wilson believed the development of sheep breeds or any animal would be greatly assisted by DNA testing.

Other breeds displayed at the conference included Dorpers, White Dorpers, Wiltipolls, Wiltshire Horns, Meatmasters, Persians, Minis and composites.

— TERRY SIM