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**Dates for the Diary**

**3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2015**

South West Slopes Merino Breeder Field Day  
Galong, NSW

**November 2015** (date to be confirmed)

MerinoLink Sire Evaluation Field day - Jugiong

**3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016**

MerinoLink Annual Conference – Wagga Wagga

**4-6<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

IWTO Congress – Sydney  
(*International Wool Textile Organisation*)

**10-12<sup>th</sup> August, 2016**

Lambex - Albury

*Sally Martin*

Chief Executive Officer

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Welcome to the third edition of *MerinoLink Limited Newsletter*.

In this edition you will find the eID Tag Trial report. A stand-alone copy of the report is available on request.

The MerinoLink Limited board met recently and has started planning the next MerinoLink conference to be held on the first Wednesday of March 2016 in conjunction with the Peter Westblade Memorial Merino Challenge shearing in Wagga Wagga.

The second MerinoLink Sire Evaluation is underway way, evaluating 17 sires from across Australia.

MerinoLink is working with the Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association (AMSEA) and AWI to investigate the opportunities to host one of the four Life Time Productivity Project sites. This project will run over 9 years and focus on measuring reproduction and adult traits of 120 sire progeny.

MerinoLink is currently supporting the development of the 2016 LambEx conference which will be held in Albury next August.

*Sally Martin*





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GENETIC BENCHMARKING

YOUNG SIRE PROGRAM



**MerinoLink Limited is a not for profit organisation that aims to facilitate sheep grower's and service providers link with information, knowledge and research.**

MerinoLink's founding members are from a wide range of sheep businesses with varying production systems. The Members have been brought together by a common enthusiasm for profitable Merino sheep and a desire to continue to build their businesses, client businesses and the sheep industries profitability as a whole.

MerinoLink is committed to assisting our members make better use of past and current research. In addition, MerinoLink aims to build networks and add value to existing and future research and development.

MerinoLink recognise the opportunities to work together to develop research projects for the future improvement of the Australian Sheep industry.

We aim to provide all members with access to industry organisations and facilitate a two way dissemination of information.

MerinoLink consist of producers and service providers moving our industry and members forward as fast and effectively as possible. This is made possible by MerinoLink's engagement with members and industry, education of members, exploration of research ideas and exchange of the results.

## MerinoLink CONTACTS

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# RamSelect .com.au

The Sheep CRC have developed an interactive website, **RamSelect.com.au** that will enable **ram buyers** to more easily rank rams according to their breeding objective.

The new tool was launched in Sydney on **Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July** in preparation for the 2015 spring ram selling season.

The tool (website) uses information from Sale Catalogues listed on the Sheep Genetics Website.

Ram breeders need to upload their sale catalogue details (SGID and Lot number) onto the Sheep Genetics website. Ram Breeders can upload both auction and private treaty rams on the Sheep Genetic website to take full advantage of this tool. The RamSelect website updates the ram sale data from Sheep Genetics every night, so allow 24 hours to be accessible.

The aim of the website based tool is to allow ram **buyers** the ability to better match ram purchases to their breeding objective.

There are options within the tool to be able to modify and fine tune the Ram Buyers breeding objective to find rams better suited to the commercial outcomes desired.

The tool is available for the Merino, Maternal and Terminal breeds.

The tool is made up of Primary Categories and Secondary Categories. The ram buyer can change the emphasis on the traits or categories to suit their breeding objective. This aspect can substantially change the ranking of rams.

Future developments will allow ram buyers to save ram purchases (inventory) to allow a future benchmark to guide your ram purchases in the future.

Other developments in the future include:-

- Including semen sales
- Reminders about sales
- Refinement of the star rating system
- Ram value calculations
- Impact of selection on your flock in the future
- Live interaction at sale

## Trait categories for Merino, Maternal and Terminal breeds

MERINO and Dohne	TERMINAL	MATERNAL
Wool quality		
Fleece weight		
Growth	Growth	Growth
Carcase	Carcase	Carcase
Weaning percentage	Weaning Percentage	Weaning Percentage
Parasite resistance	Parasite resistance	Parasite resistance
	Eating Quality	Eating Quality
		Wool (maternal)

The screenshot shows the RamSelect website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'MERINO MAMS', 'SUPERIOR', 'ALL STUDIOS', 'PRIVATE TREATY', '50 BM', and '2500'. Below the tabs is a table of rams. The table has columns for 'Rank', 'Lot #', 'Breed', 'Name', 'ID', and 'Rating'. The rams listed are:

Rank	Lot #	Breed	Name	ID	Rating
1	4	ALFORKTON	PRIVATE TREATY	6013332013130061	★★★★
2	41	ALFORKTON		5042942013130050	★★★★
3	54	ALFORKTON		5042942013130066	★★★★
4	7	ALFORKTON POLL		6013332013130523	★★★★
5	51	ALFORKTON		5042942013130122	★★★★
6	15	ALFORKTON		5042942013130951	★★★★
7	18	ALFORKTON		5042942013130820	★★★★
8	5	ALFORKTON POLL		6013332013130442	★★★★
9	11	ALFORKTON		5042942013130198	★★★★
10	53	ALFORKTON		5042942013130187	★★★★
11	25	ALFORKTON		5042942013130073	★★★★
12	2	ALFORKTON		5042942013130158	★★★★
13	34	ALFORKTON POLL		6013332013130156	★★★★
14	33	ALFORKTON POLL		6013332013130725	★★★★
15	19	ALFORKTON		5042942013130161	★★★★

# eID Trial Report

Sally Martin, Sally Martin Consulting

“Which electronic tag is the best?” This is a question many sheep producers ask when considering using electronic tags for the first time. MerinoLink with the assistance of Moses & Son has set up a trial to evaluate five (5) different tag options currently on the market. We would like to thank and acknowledge the support from Allflex, Leader Products and Shearwell Australia for both supporting our trial and providing tags.

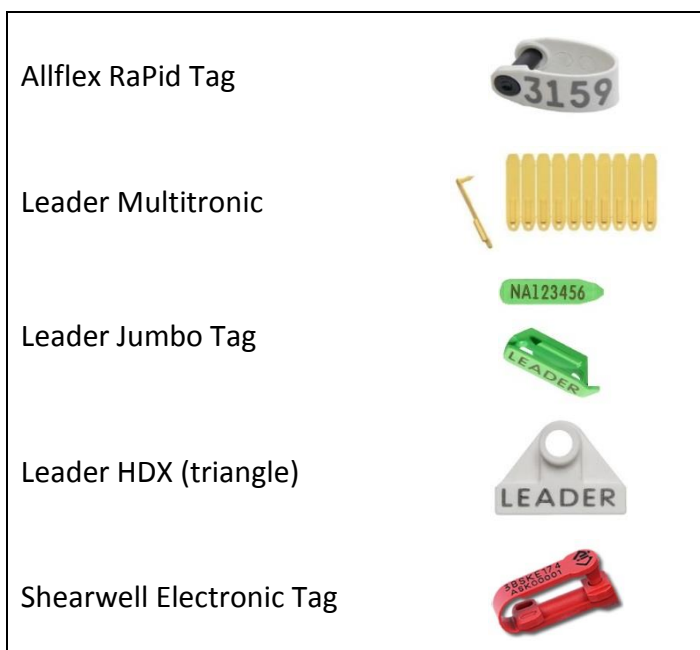
Thank you to Marty Moses (Bluechip Livestock, Temora NSW) and David Davidson (Yarran, Milvale NSW) for providing the sheep to conduct the tag trial and Simon Coddington and Adele Offley (Moses & Son) for your assistance in setting up the trial, applying the tags and data collection.



Feedback from MerinoLink members indicates that tag application in young and older sheep can sometimes be problematic. The eID Trial of the five tag products has been carried out on young lambs at marking and older classed in ewes. The two scenarios are typical of commercial and ram breeder operations.

100 of each tag were applied to both lambs (at marking) and adult sheep (18 months +). The same person applied the tags to both the lambs and the ewes (for consistency). The tag manufacturer’s application recommendations were followed during the application process. The tags were scored for the following attributes:-

1. Time it takes to apply the tags
2. Ease of application – to the ear
3. Ease of putting tag in the applicator
4. Ease of applicator use
5. Number of tags unable to be applied (various reasons)
6. Versatility of the applicator
7. Description of how the tags are presented to the breeder (eg individual; lots of 25)



The five electronic tags evaluated included the new Allflex RaPID; Leader Multitronic; Leader Jumbo EID Tag; Leader HDX (triangle) re-usable using plastic and brass tip male button and Shearwell Electronic tag.

Tag application at both sites was carried out during normal commercial husbandry or management activities. The tags applied to the lambs were at lamb marking time and the hoggets were applied whilst collecting an 18 month body weight.

The results presented in this report are based on the tagging experience at the two sites only.



## Tag Application Recommendations

### Allflex Rapid Tag



RapIDMatic Applicator – semi auto gun like action; ideal for larger flock operations; slide cutter/loader back and forward to load next tag.

RaIDTagger Applicator – single tag application (shown in photo)

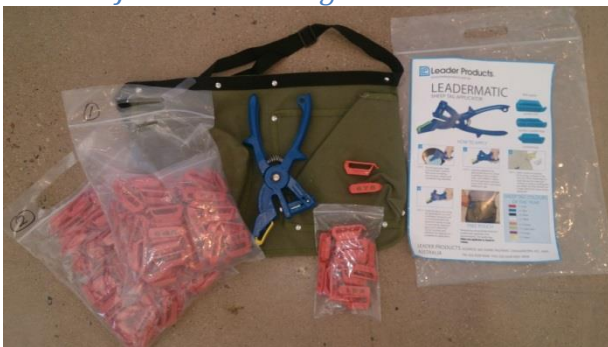
Instructions – wash applicator regularly in water, do not lubricate applicator, keep top d

### Leader Multitronic Tag



Multitronic Tag Applicator – single tag application

### Leader Jumbo eID Tag



LeaderMatic sheep Tag Applicator – single tag application.

Instructions – dip applicator head in an antiseptic solution (assists with healing)

### Leader HDX (triangle)



Standard Deluxe Applicator – single tag application

Male button – brass tip or plastic tip



Instructions – dip applicator head in an antiseptic solution (assists with healing)

### Shearwell Electronic Tag



Shearwell Tag Applicator – single tag application

Instructions – place the tag in the applicator and dip the applicator into antiseptic or disinfectant solution (do not immerse the whole strip of tags)

## Tag Specifications

TAG PRODUCT	COST \$		SPECIFICATION					NLIS Accredited	FEATURES					FURTHER INFORMATION
	RRP Price	Price with MerinoLink Discount \$	Size	Weight Grams	Colours	Packaging	Transponders		Read distance	Recycle or Reuseable	Applicator	Application	Applicator Cost	
<b>Allflex</b>														
RaPID EID	\$1.65	\$1.55	14mm x 35mm	2.5g	10 Colours	Strips of 20	HDX ISO Compliant	Yes	1 metre	No	RaPID Tagger/ RaPID Matic Applicator	Automatic and Manual	\$49.95 / \$189	www.allflex.com.au
<b>Leader Products</b>														
Multitronic	\$1.65	\$1.20	13mm x 81mm	2.6g	9 Colours	Strips of 10	HDX ISO Compliant 134.2 kHz	Yes	1-1.1 metre	No	Multitronic	Manual (single application)	\$45	www.leaderproducts.com.au
HDX Re-usable	\$1.45	\$1.10	27mm x 37mm	7.0g	9 Colours	Individual	HDX ISO Compliant 134.2 kHz	No	1-1.2 metre	Yes	Standard/fasttagger + similar	Manual (single application)	\$49	www.leaderproducts.com.au
Jumbo EID	\$1.45	\$0.70	13mm x 48mm	4.5g	9 Colours	Individual	HDX ISO Compliant 134.2 kHz	No	1-1.2 metre	Yes	Leadermatic	Manual (single application)	\$64.40	www.leaderproducts.com.au
<b>Shearwell Australia</b>														
EID	\$1.50	\$1.43			11 Colours	Strips of 10	ISO 11785/6 Compliant HDX Transponder	Yes	1 metre	No	Shearwell Applicator	Manual (single application)	\$12	www.shearwell.com.au

- Note: Leader HDX (triangle) comes as a tamperproof tag that is NLIS accredited. The Tamperproof tag has the same ratings as the Leader HDX Re-usable tag.



## Tag Application Ratings and Comments

100 of each tag were applied to the lambs and the hoggets. The time to apply the tags was recorded at each 10 tag interval, the average and total times are presented in the Table 1. If tags fell out applicator, stem bent over and had to be manually applied or extra time was taken sorting tags this has been included in both the average time and overall time to apply tags.

Ease to apply = how easy was it to place the tag/applicator in the correct position to apply the tag - 1 = very easy; 5 = difficult

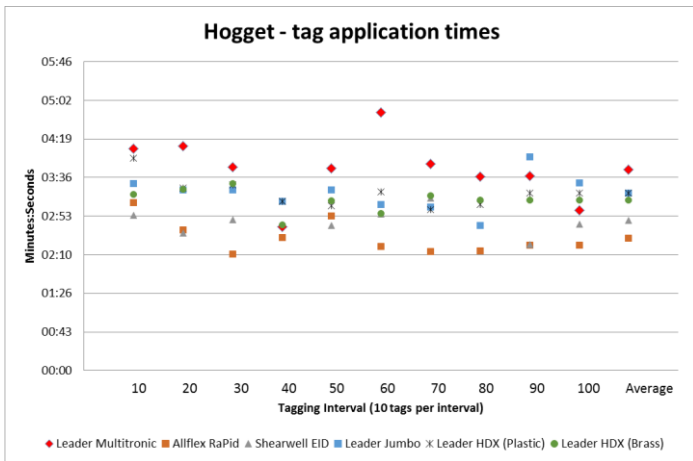
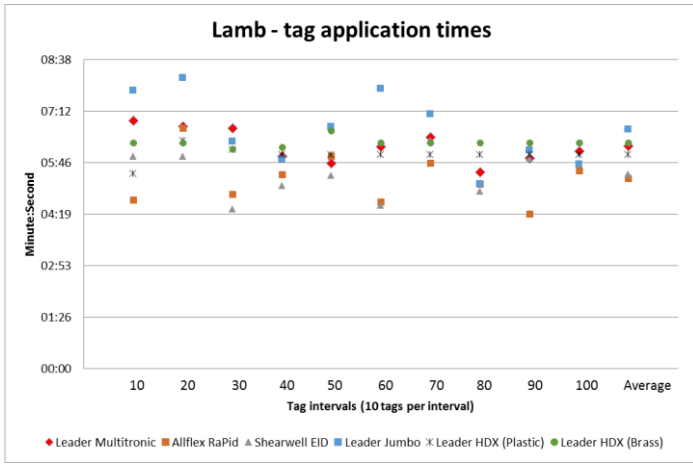
Application use score = how easy was it to apply the tag to the ear - 1 = very easy to apply, little effort required; 5 = very difficult, a lot of effort required

*Table 1 – Tag Application Rating and Application Times*

Tag Name	Tag	Average Time to apply - Lambs (per 10 tags)	Average Time to apply - Hoggets (per 10 tags)	Total time to apply 100 tags Lambs	Total time to apply 100 tags Hoggets	Application Use Score (1-5) Lambs	Application Use Score (1-5) Hoggets	Effort to apply tag (1-5)	Ease to Apply Score (1-5) Lambs	Ease to Apply Score (1-5) Hoggets	Overall Score
Allflex Rapid EID		5 min 19 sec	2 min 28 sec	53 min 7 sec	24 mins 43 sec	2	2	2	2	3	2.2
Leader Multitronic		6 mins 14 sec	3 min 45 sec	1 hour 2 mins	37 mins 28 sec	2	1	1	2	4	2.0
Leader HDX Tamperpro of EID	  Plastic Tip Male Button	6 mins 0 sec	3 min 19 sec	59 mins 57 sec	33 mins 6 sec	5	5	5	3	3	4.2
Leader HDX Tamperpro of EID	  Brass Tip Male Button	6 min 19 sec	3 min 11 sec	1 hour 3 mins	31 mins 46 sec	4	5	4	3	3	3.8
Leader Jumbo EID		6 mins 42 sec	3 min 40 sec	1 hour 7 mins	33 min 4 sec	3	2	3	4	3	3.0
Shearwell EID		5 min 27 sec	2 min 48 sec	54 min 25 sec	28 min 3 sec	1	1	2	1	2	1.4



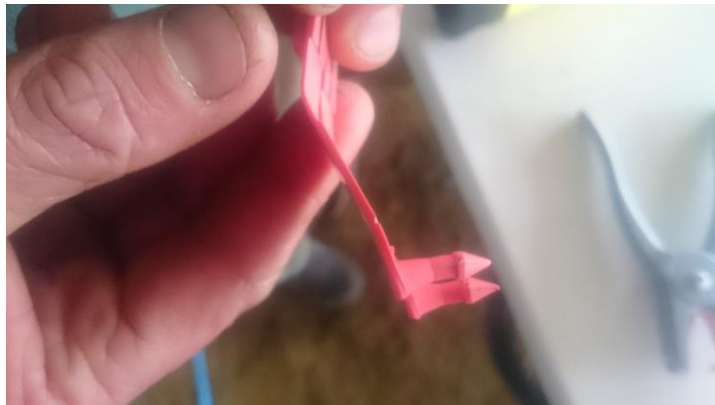




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*Example of ear tag stem that has been bent making it difficult to apply*



*Example of ear infection from the ear tag*

Tag Name	General Comments - Lambs	General Comments - Hoggets	Applicator Comments
Allflex Rapid EID	The tags were easier to rip off tag strip than the other self-piercing tags; big visual numbers seen as a positive; considered the same rating to apply as the Shearwell tags; most comfortable applicator to use.	When applying the self-piercing pin tended to slide either side of the hole, needed finger to guide into the hold. Applicator too thin in the handle, tended to roll in your hand when putting pressure to apply tag.	277grams - Comfortable applicator to use; Blue nob on applicator helped to align tag
Leader Multitronic	Tags were easy to read; electronic tags were easier to apply than the visual Leader tags; one tag had to be reapplied to applicator; Multitronic tag was felt to be the easiest to apply to lambs because of its thin stem. No issues with the stem bending over.	When applying tag, tag tended to bend over (12 out of 100); had to manually apply 2 out of 100 tags due to stem bending. 4 out of 100 tags rejected and could not be used; overall the tag was not easy to apply because of the stem bending; once the stem was bent it took double the amount of time to apply; the thicker or older the ear the more trouble applying tag.	199 grams - Applicator light, comfortable; only one tag bent around during application process on the lambs.
Leader HDX Tamperproof EID	Hardest tags to apply - a lot of force required to push male button into tag - plastic male button considered more difficult than the brass tip male button; if plastic tip not completely pushed into applicator pin the button would fall off.	Very hard to push male button through ear and into tag, needed two hands; if sheep moved head the release mechanism would need to be reset; applicator jammed shut after applying tag; when applying the tag needed to move hand back along the applicator to get leverage, the handle is hollow and when pushed shut pinches fingers.	343 grams - applicator was slightly heavier than the others tags, issue with male button falling off if not pushed on completely (onto applicator pin).
Leader HDX Tamperproof EID	Second hardest tags to apply - a lot of force required to push male button into tag - plastic male button considered more difficult than the brass tip male button; similar issues to plastic tip pin, slightly easier to apply	Very hard to push male button through ear and into tag, needed two hands; if sheep moved head the release mechanism would need to be reset; applicator jammed shut after applying tag.	as above
Leader Jumbo EID	The size of the ear affected the ease to apply tag - the bigger the ear the easier it was to apply; small ears harder to position applicator to punch hole for tag, would end up either jamming applicator or losing tag off the end. On larger ears it was good; tags come in a bag and have to be sorted into number order if applying with a matching visual tag with number - more time consuming and more chance of mismatching tag numbers.	Comfortable easy to use applicator; needed to make sure the ear was flat for the applicator to put tag in efficiently.	308 grams - Applicator was more complicated to use; where applicator was ground to apply eID tag it was catching and gripping when applying tag, this became easier as the applicator was used.
Shearwell EID	Applicator not ideal (ergonomics more suited to certain hand sizes; lug pushes into palm); tags hard to rip off tag strip; narrow tag difficult to see visual tag number; considered the same rating to apply as the Allflex RaPID tag; putting tag into applicator was slightly more awkward compared to Allflex RaPID and Leader Multitronic tags.	When tag does not sit flush against the back of the applicator it is difficult to apply tag; if ear doubles over tag can pop out of applicator; handle lug too large and high on edges, pushes into palm; 2 tags had to be put in manually after pin bent.	195 grams - Applicator was quite uncomfortable to use, the extra grip pushed in the thumb and after doing a number of applications hand became quite sore.

## The Wool Market – Where to from here?

---

*Marty Moses, Mose & Son Woolbrokers*

What started as a lack luster wool market in January 2015 is developing into one of our most volatile market periods in my time in the wool industry. I offer this brief summary to recap the journey so far!

In 2013-2014 the progressive withdrawal of the big speculative cheque books from the wool market had us to believe that when Olam (Queensland Cotton) closed their trading books that that was the last of the cashed up trading desks and market makers. What was left were the “dyed in the wool” export and processing companies, the mums and dads, family based - long term buyers and exporters who are financially and emotionally attached and a-tuned to the idiosyncrasies of our wool pipeline. We were led to believe that this may deliver a less volatile, and an increasingly slower moving market environment. Could this be “the market we have wished for?”

How wrong could we have been with the wool market performance to date resembling the flailing arms on air fueled vinyl man outside Bunning’s. From April to June there seemed no stopping the markets upward trajectory, with the EMI adding substantial amounts week on week. Progressively wool producers got excited, and cleaned out all the fresh stocks they could find then found every old wool bale stored in their sheds and more-so that they had stored with their broker. As the volumes of “held” wool were run down the question of quantity then became the focus of our customer. The Chinese, Indians and Italians became fierce competitors for the diminishing weekly offerings of greasy wool trying every strategy to secure wool at best cost. It was as if the world was panicking about the end of raw wool production for the year ahead.

Then came the three week recess in July, just in time to stop the market tipping too much of the hard fought price rise back. This coincided with AWI conducting their Wool Selling Systems Review - review and the industry flocked to Melbourne to get a glimpse of what all the fuss and expense was about? Most left with possibly more questions than answers but never the less it was a good catch up with our fellow industry participants.

Meanwhile the rest of the industry was contemplating how our market would open? Could it maintain? Will Chinese interests still be interested in August and September?

The market opening in early August answered these questions loud and clear, with two weeks of frenetic purchasing from a range of companies. How high could the EMI go? Should I hedge? What if prices are going higher? Why didn’t I shear earlier? The pressure is unbearable, it’s killing me....

Then the inevitable, the Chinese stock market crashed. The Chinese Government re valued their currency, and the stock market crashed even more. The key driver seemed to be that the world got what they have been wishing for, the Chinese economy now mimicking the US and European fiscal failings. Wool sales contracted “the shakes” in Week 8 and by week 9 (at the point of writing this) the market has a case of the death wobbles and had lost all composure falling 50c per day. What a ride!

One could get disheartened with the volatile nature of our industry, however with volatility comes opportunity. The opportunity to learn how to make a sustainable price, “hedge” if you will. Whist I imagine the groan and visualise the eye rolling, please don’t shut out the option of integrating price risk management into your marketing strategy. It is a simple process of analysis, planning and execution. The market has endured a few years of just one “Over the Counter” hedging service we now have two options to choose from.

The take home message is that it is impossible to control markets, however wool producers (with some help) can make sound decisions that will heavily influence the price we bank by hedging some of their clip.

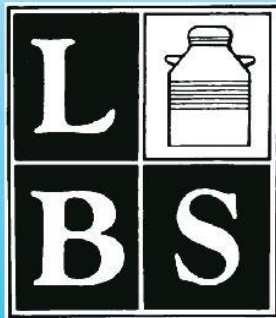
Moses & Son specialise in hedging our client’s clips and will be happy to facilitate a presentation of how to go about starting the process.



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*Annual MerinoLink Conference  
Save the Date – Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016*

# Sheep Supplement Trial - Update

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*Sally Martin (SMC), Lexi Cesnik (SMC) and Luzia Rast (CSU)*

A joint project “Production and Financial Impacts of Vitamin and Mineral Supplementation in sheep in NSW” between MerinoLink Limited and Charles Sturt University has successfully been funded by the NSW Sheep Industry Fund.

This project is researching the use of mineral and vitamin supplements by NSW sheep producers as well as trialing commonly used supplements in field trials to determine the production and financial impact of supplement use in different sheep enterprises.

The project received ministerial approval on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2014, which led to the administrative set up of research project including animal ethics and human ethics approvals. The project timeline involve 5 sites in 2015 and 5 sites in 2016, concluding in November 2016.

Results of an initial pilot survey amongst MerinoLink members in October 2014 showed that 82% of respondents (n=40) provide their sheep with a vitamin or mineral supplement.

A more in depth producer survey was designed and implemented between April 2015 and June 2015 and confirmed results of the pilot survey that many producers use a range of mineral and vitamin supplements for various reasons. Results of both surveys were used to finalise the field trial protocols and select the trial products.

The products that will be trialed include: a ruminant stimulating oral drench, an oral mineral drench and injectable vitamin supplements. All the products that have been selected can be administered to the animal directly (weaners and adult ewes) either by oral drench or vaccination. This was important to ensure the randomly allocated animals had the correct dose of the product.

## Product Groups

- Vitamin B12
- Vitamin ADE
- Mineral Supplement
  - Cobalt, copper, zinc, manganese, selenium, magnesium, iodine, potassium, sulphur
- Rumen prebiotic digestion enhancer
- Sea weed extract

There were many suggestions to look at loose lick supplements and lick blocks. The trial design and set up for these products is outside the scope of the current project, however it is being considered as a future option.

Recruitment of trial properties was limited to MerinoLink members and is split between Autumn/Winter and Spring lambing systems. The properties are located near Molong, Young, Temora, Jugiong and Orange. There are opportunities to identify additional locations in 2016.



# Financial Implications of Cheesy Gland

*Lexi Cesnik, Sally Martin Consulting / Moses & Son*

Cheesy Gland is a commonly found disease, and mainly seen in carcasses at meat processing plants. The information in this report has been sourced from presentations given by Jock Munro, Zoetis and the Manildra Meat Processing Company.

For producers selling their sheep "Over the Hooks" Cheesy Gland can have a reasonable impact on returns as well as wool production losses.

Cheesy Gland is a bacterial disease which causes puss filled abscesses that form in the lymph glands of sheep. This disease is spread primarily at shearing from small knicks and shearing gear which has not been disinfected. This disease requires a host animal to survive and will not survive for a substantial period of time in the environment.

## Financial Implication:

Cost of 6 in 1 Vaccination = \$0.04/Head

### Impact on Meat Production

Average Trim on Carcase due to cheesy gland = 500g

Price (\$) for 1 kilogram of carcase = \$5.50

Amount (\$) Lost in Yield = 0.5 kg x \$5.50

Amount (\$) Lost in Yield = \$2.75

Sheep vaccinated/ Loss in Yield = 68. This means that for \$2.75 (\$ loss in yield) you could vaccinate a total of 68 Sheep

Difference in vaccination cost and losses = \$2.75 – \$0.04 = \$2.71.

This means that for spending \$0.04 and vaccinating your sheep you have saved \$2.71/Head.

### Impact on Wool Production

Average Loss/ Head = 5% of Clean Fleece weight

5Kg fleece weight at 5% Loss = 5.0 kg x 0.05 = 0.25kg Clean Fleece Weight Lost/ Head

EMI = \$12.31/Kg

\$/Head loss of Wool Production in infected sheep = \$12.31 x 0.25kg = \$3.08 /Head

Number of head vaccinated / loss of yield = 76Hd. This shows that for the amount of Income Lost (\$3.08/head) the farm could have vaccinated 76 Head to prevent the loss.

Difference in vaccination cost and losses = \$ 3.08 – 0.04 = \$3.04. This shows that the farm would be saving \$3.04/ Head by vaccinating against Cheesy Gland.

Clinical signs of the disease in a flock can be the appearance of a swelling in the throat or jowls, and the animal coughing.

Subclinical signs of this disease are often not identified until they are being processed through a meat processing facility, when puss formations can be found on internal lymph glands.

If more than 5 of these formations are found then the carcase is condemned. If less than 5 formations are found then the carcase is trimmed. An average trim weight is estimated at 0.5 kg.

Cheesy Gland is an immune compromising disease and will reduce growth rates in Lambs and fibre production. Prevention is the simplest way to deal this this disease and can easily be done by vaccinating the sheep with a 6 in 1 Vaccine.







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