

DPI Primefact

The importance of benchmarking your sheep/flock

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Benchmarking: insight into the current performance of your sheep/flock

Why is benchmarking important when making genetic decisions?

- Benchmarking is a valuable tool when getting started with genetics within your flock. To benchmark allows you to get a deeper understanding of the genetic performance of an individual animal or flock against other sires or ram sources in the industry. This provides valuable information on how your animal or flock is currently performing, allowing both gains in desired traits and shortcomings to be identified.
- This information will allow you to select appropriate breeding objectives, monitor changes in traits and make informed decisions about your breeding program and identify superior rams, as well as ones that don't align with your objectives.
- It can be very difficult to make sire selection decisions without an understanding of current flock performance.
- Some options for benchmarking your flock include:
 - Recording performance data
 - For ram breeders, submit data on traits relevant to your breeding objective to MERINOSELECT or LAMBPLAN (depending on your production system) to obtain estimated breeding values (Australian Sheep Breeding Values) and an index
 - For commercial producers, record traits to monitor changes in flock performance over time.
 - Do a Flock Profile test provided by a genomics company to measure genetic gains
 - Sire evaluation



Figure 1. Sheep standing in pen at Trangie, NSW.

- Ram breeders entering a sire into a site where base ewes have a similar breeding objective
 - Commercial producers searching sire evaluation reports and viewing sire progeny groups on display at field days
 - Entering a team into a wether/ewe trial
 - Entering a flock into a local flock ewe competition
 - Using percentile tables available from Sheep Genetics
- Ideally, you should be recording as many traits as possible, particularly those relevant to the flock's breeding objective, for the best understanding of your current flock's performance. This will also increase the accuracy of traits. The most important part of recording performance data is ensuring that it is quality data.
 - It is useful to continue to benchmark your flock over time, to understand what direction the genetic progress is going in.
 - Are you on track and seeing genetic improvement in the next generations? Is not much change happening at all? What is working? What doesn't work? Can anything be improved? Do you need to put more selection intensity on the traits of interest? Are other traits changing undesirably?
 - Genetic gain has occurred when the average genetic merit of progeny on the ground, is higher than that of the generation of the parents.
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