

## **Gaining the Genetic Edge**

Meat Elite Australia, a collaborative group of 21 Poll Dorset breeders spread across Australia, work tirelessly to give their clients a genetic edge with their sires when producing prime lamb for the sheep meat industry.

Working as a team, Meat Elite members strive for excellence through breeding programs based on accurate data and structural soundness. A commitment to gold data quality through highly accurate raw data input has seen the group achieve terminal sire pre-eminence. By sharing genetics from objectively measured superior animals, the group's sheep have consistently outperformed average terminal sire indexes.

The Meat Elite flock of approximately 8000 Lambplan tested females has proven to be a powerful genetic pool for the industry. Using leading edge technology, Meat Elite members like David and Colleen Gordon, Bruan Stud Condah, and Mary and David Currie, Lyndoch Park Casterton have utilized this genetic base to increase muscling and growth in their sheep.

As Mr. Dale Price of Majardah Stud Glencoe in South Australia explained, each year the MEA members identify 15 young sires for conformation, genetic performance and breeding diversity to test mate across a minimum of four flocks. The 2005 Young Sire Team had average Estimated Breeding Values of: . Rams identified as trait leaders are then reused in flocks like the Roeston Park Stud of Mr. Chris Rowe located at Kybolite to meet specific breeding objectives.

Members like the Clothier family of Woolumbool Stud at Lucindale, are now really pushing their breeding objectives to identify trait leaders for worm resistance. Phil Clothier claims that astute clients are very aware of the benefits worm resistance brings to their enterprises, and have been prepared to pay a premium for the Worm Resistant trait leaders. Mr. Steve Funke, Bundara Poll Dorsets at Western Flat, supported Mr. Clothier's statement saying, 'that many Meat Elite sheep have shown tremendous results, with many of the terminal trait leaders in the breed coming from member flocks.'

'Additional sires used within the flocks must meet stringent breeding objective targets based on accurate data and on farm performance for inclusion,' Mr. Gordon explained. 'Our commercial focus is our strength.'

Mary and David Currie along with other Meat Elite members are constantly challenging their practices so they can improve the quality of their sheep. At their recent Western Australian Conference Mr. Rob Davidson the Western Australian Meat Co-operative extension officer outlined the specifications needed to meet the co-operative's requirements for high yielding carcasses with good eating qualities. His presentation was based on WAMCo's experience processing 800,000 lambs per year using VIASCAN to measure meat yield. The Co-operative's 1200 suppliers' receive the feedback on their lambs, and are rewarded for meeting market specifications.

Progressive prime lamb producers have been rewarded when they have selected their ram requirements from either individual or group Meat Elite member flocks.