

SE wool
HD **Superior rams a fine investment**

WC 715 words

PD 15 April 2014

SN Stock Journal

SC FSTOCJ

LA English

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MERINOS have long been a money maker for the Burbidge family at Benefield at Ettrick, via Murray Bridge, South Australia.

Run in combination with a 1600-hectare cropping enterprise - half of the farm's 4000 ewes are run in a self-replacing Merino flock with the remaining 2000 mated to White Suffolk rams for prime lambs.

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Once a Merino stud, Benefield continues to invest in high-quality genetics as members of the Superior Wool Syndicate, paying up to \$40,000 for flock rams.

Bruce Burbidge said their partnership with the syndicate started five to six years ago after his son Chad finished school and decided to work on the farm.

"He had always been very interested in sheep," Bruce said.

"He wanted to do something a bit different, so I said to him to 'go and do it'.

"He wanted to concentrate on finer, softer wool so that's the path we took."

Some of the rams the Burbidges have invested in as part of the syndicate include Glenlea **Park** Olympic - a \$39,000 sire they bought from the Classings Classic **Sale** at Murray Bridge.

"It has really made a difference in the wool we're producing," Bruce said.

"In eight lines we **sold** recently, including pieces, the comfort factor was more than 99 per cent.

"It's good, white wool with good character, and at times we get 50 cents a kilogram more than the market valuation."

In February sales the top four lines made 20c/kg above the valuation - resulting in 794c/kg greasy.

Out of 130 bales **sold**, only four measured more than 20 microns.

The flock has an average micron of about 18M, with hoggets 16M.

"We aim to produce a soft wool with good character and good length," Bruce said.

Most wool is **sold** through Elders - with Elders Murray Bridge's Trevor Smith their local agent.

Bruce said they usually put a reserve price on their bales at auction to ensure they recieved a price close to valuation.

"Free growing, plain-bodied sheep with little wrinkle is what we aim to produce," he said.

Rams are bought about every second year, and different members of the **group** identify which to **buy**.

"Two years ago we **purchased** a \$38,000 ram at Leahcim - we ended up selling a few shares in him to others," Bruce said.

"Chad and I picked that ram out at Hamilton Sheepvention, Vic."

Semen is collected from rams at Brechin Ridge.

About 200 of the Burbidge's best ewes are AI-mated each year, with about 10-12 ram lambs bred from these matings then used in the **commercial** flock.

"We have used them at six months of age to speed up genetic gain," Bruce said.

"We use a ratio of 1:20 rams to ewes with the younger rams and get more than 100 per cent lambing so they've proved they can do the job."

Ewe hoggets are classed every year with the help of Bill Walker, Murray Bridge, with Bruce saying the wool has improved dramatically in this period to be "a whole lot" whiter and softer. "If everyone else is saying it, it must be true," he said. "I've never seen comfort factors like this."

Prior to becoming involved in the syndicate the family spent only \$1000 to \$2000 when buying a ram.

"If we can **buy** the best ram at a **sale**, then keep 10-12 rams we breed from him, that would otherwise cost us \$3000-\$4000 to **purchase**-in, it starts to make a lot of sense," Bruce said.

"We (the syndicate) all have similar aims, and are a mix of stud and **commercial** producers."

Bruce says the **property** is "glorified pastoral country - either sand or stone out here".

"Goyder's Line is only 20 kilometres away," he said.

"We probably have more sheep than most other properties around here, but I'm more interested in sheep than cropping."

Cropping remains an important part - with 1600ha cropped and 400ha sown for sheep feed.

Average rainfall is 350mm-375mm.

Details: Bruce and Val Burbidge travelled to **China** recently as part of the Elders **China** Wool Tour.

* Full report in Stock Journal, April 10, 2014 issue.

IN i0100124 : Sheep/Goat Farming | i0 : Agriculture | i01001 : Farming | ilsfarm : Livestock Farming
RE austr : Australia | saustr : South Australia | apacz : Asia Pacific | ausnz : Australia/Oceania
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AN Document FSTOCJ0020151217ea4f00010