

Tackling human health issues on farm

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Sustainable Farm Families, an award winning initiative of Western District Health Service, based in Hamilton is delivered statewide in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries. Developed to bring better health, wellbeing and safety to people on the land, Sustainable Farm Families (SFF) is a program of practical, straightforward information and advice that has proved life-changing for many participants.

Working long hours, often far from town, farming men and women and their families can be neglected in terms of preventative health care. Making the time for health and wellbeing is often the last thing on a busy farm agenda. The SFF program covers a range of areas including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, women and men's health, stress, depression, farm safety, anxiety, nutrition and physical activity. All participants receive health assessments as an important part of the workshops.

Farmers who have completed the program have reported an enhancement in overall health from better food choices to improved farm safety. Some also found that they were able to make better business decisions because they had a new perspective on how important their health and families are in their lives.

To take part in one of the SFF programs across Victoria call (03) 5551 8508 or visit the website: www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au

Improving lamb survival

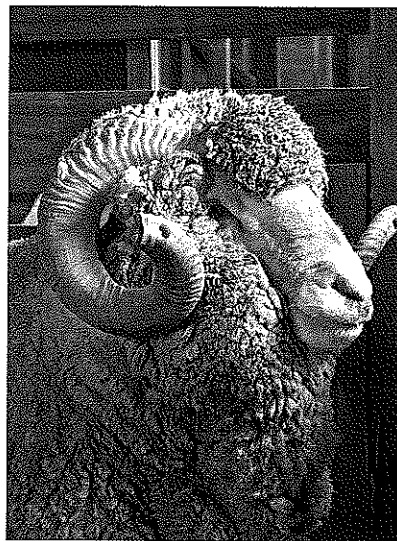
Gervaise Gaunt, Sheep Industry Development Officer, DPI Rutherglen

A Sheep Co-operative Research Centre project conducted by staff at DPI Rutherglen, now has two years of lambing data and other information from over 9,700 progeny from 184 wool, dual purpose or terminal sires. The data has been collected from flocks located at eight research sites around Australia.

Lamb birth weight, vigour, body temperature, time to stand, bleat and follow, leg bone and body lengths, chest circumference and dam maternal score were recorded from the 2007 lambing.



Influence of sire on lamb survival



Lamb survival is influenced by the environment and management. Genetic heritability of lamb survival is low but since there is reasonable amount of variation, (for example, all progeny of one sire survived until weaning while only 44 per cent of the progeny of another sire survived until weaning), there

is potential to improve through breeding, even though progress will be slow.

Influence of lamb weight on survival

Analysis of lamb birth weights and survival showed a birth weight of 4.3 to 5.2 kg improves the chances of survival during the first week of life. Light lambs are more likely to succumb to harsh environmental conditions and have less vigour for feeding and following the dam. Heavy lambs are more likely to have a prolonged and more difficult birth and can have more deaths within the first 24 hours or lower vigour and consequently diminished capacity to drink and follow the dam.

After the first week of life, heavier birth weight lambs (~5.7 kg) do have better survival to weaning however since they are more likely to die within the first 24 hours a weight compromise is required for survival to weaning. The graph below shows data from progeny of about 100 sires from both wool and meat breeds. The graph shows that 85 per cent of single lambs with an optimum weight of 4.6 kg and 73 per cent of twins with an optimum weight of 4.1 kg survived to weaning. It is often possible to select rams that have breeding values for birth weight.

