

The Coopworth Advantage

The Coopworth advantage has been the marketing theme that CGA has used over recent years. It encapsulates the benefits of the Coopworth breed and introduces the concept of the Coopworth system.

The Coopworth breed is the only truly maternal breed that can reproduce itself in a self replacing flock. All seed stock breeders adopt a performance recording programme that strives to objectively measure the important production traits, link the data through full pedigrees and produce an index which expresses the economic value of the genetic merit of each animal. In Australia we use the Lambplan system which produces ASBV's. All Coopworth flocks are well linked genetically (each year we use common AI Sires). This enables across flock comparison of every Coopworth sheep and their traits and index value can be identified on the percentile band produced by Lambplan each year.

The result of the dedication by Coopworth breeders to performance recording is evident in the publication by Lambplan of the Top 150 Maternal Sires. This summarises the superiority of sires from all the major maternal breeds. The Coopworth breed contributes 58% of the genetics of the sheep in the report. More significantly within the top 10% of Maternal Sires, Coopworths and Coopworth based composites represent 88% of the number- the Cream of the Crop.

The Coopworth sheep is at its best out in the paddock run under progressive commercial conditions. Coopworth ewes are run in large numbers at good stocking rates of around 10 ewes/ha. The high fertility enables the weaning in excess of 140% lambs. Many breeders join a good proportion of their ewes to Terminal Sires. Self replacing flocks with high fertility can join as low as 40% of their ewes to maternal sires. This really drives the meat production. Other breeders chose to join their entire flock to Coopworth rams- focusing on selling large numbers of ewe lamb and young ewes. This illustrates the flexibility of the Coopworth breed to suit a range of different environments and production systems.

There is equal flexibility in the ability to optimise the meat production. An early terminal lamb can meet the sucker market at good trade weights. Alternatively the fertility of the breed can be enhanced by producing later lambs for either a light kill job or as feeder lambs for further weight gain. Growth and muscle traits are an important component of the Coopworth index so in its own right the Coopworth wether lamb produces an excellent carcass.

The high performance potential of the Coopworth sheep really makes it a breed for the progressive producer. It is important to adopt many of the industry's best practises. Scanning ewes for multiples and managing them properly enhances weaning percentages and lamb weight. Providing high quality pasture drives the weight gain. Adopting good agronomic tools such as pasture manipulation through spaying and grazing, strategic use of additional fertiliser and deferred grazing maximise pasture growth.

The Coopworth System is all about running sheep with high genetic merit which produce large numbers of fast growing lambs maximising feed conversion and kg lamb/ha.

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Tim Johnston

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