



# AUSTRALIAN SUPERFINE WOOL GROWERS' ASSOCIATION INC

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## ASWGA New England Region Report

### July 2009

Superfine woolgrowers across the New England have experienced a variable season with generally favourable conditions up to January, after an average spring. The latter half of the season has seen spectacular falls of rain in the eastern half of the tablelands, following the three big floods on the north coast. Unfortunately the western half of the region has not been so lucky with growers in this area once again forced to start handfeeding.

As is well known, the superfine wool market started well until the effects of the world recession became apparent. Growers selling from October have had to readjust their expenditure pattern to cope with the downturn. Some better prices were seen in the ultra-fine area and of note, the magnificent bale of 12.5 micron produced by the Munsie family of "Kelvin Vale" in association with the Fittler family which attracted 48000 c/kg.

It is fortunate that sheep prices have remained at stronger levels to alleviate the financial losses in the wool market. In June we are hearing of heavier superfine sheep commanding values of \$70 to \$90 per head in the wool. While one cannot resist selling at these levels, it is of concern for wool buyers when so much quality superfine wool will not be available for the trade in the latter half of this year.

The level of the superfine wool market has offered little encouragement to growers to pursue a business solely in wool production. Many producers continue to take advantage of more attractive alternative enterprises such as prime lamb and beef production.

The New England region has enjoyed an active role in industry matters as well as local meetings and social occasions. A most

successful Christmas Dinner Meeting was held at the New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale with 30 members in attendance to hear reports from the ASWGA Council Meeting held in Melbourne in November.

The local membership appreciates the time and efforts given by our two local council members, Mark Waters and Stephen Harvey. The councillors attend meetings throughout the year in Melbourne to represent the opinions of the New England members and report back the latest matters from time to time.

In March the New England Region prepared a detailed submission to the 'Options for Future Selling Centres Review survey'. The industry survey report expressed a desire to reduce the number of selling centres in Australia which threatened the future of the Newcastle centre as the New England's and Australia's premium auction centre for superfine wool auctions.

The regional identity issues along with the most important industry liaison with brokers and superfine wool buyers/exporters were all documented along with other facts and figures. The small savings of 1 or 2c per kilogram was not deemed significant to the superfine growers, if and when the sales were to be centralised to Sydney or Melbourne. It was expressed that any benefit would have to be substantial and be passed on to growers.

Mark Waters and Tony Gall represented the region at the industry meeting in Sydney in June on this issue and their efforts assisted in the outcome, where the status quo would prevail in the medium term, thus ensuring sales would continue in Newcastle.

The New England Wool Expo saw the involvement of ASWGA members, who chaired the woolgrower forums. An interesting program was arranged, covering issues including carbon trading, the sheep CRC work on wools for next to the skin comfort and areas covering improved breeding techniques for sheep and wool production. Unfortunately only a small but very interested number of growers were present on the day.

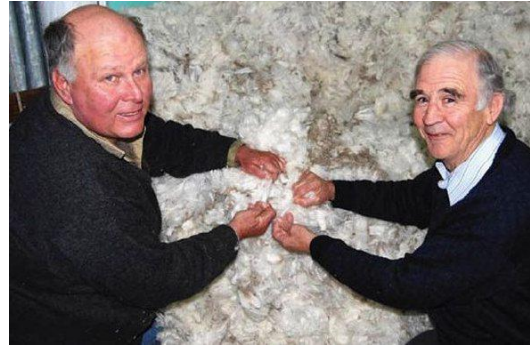
Members were disappointed that the 2009 Zegna competition was not conducted, as changes take place due to the call for improved ethical standards in relation to the cessation of mulesing by the end of 2010. A reduced number of fleeces would be expected in the next competition due to lack of unmulesed sheep in this region. Woolgrowers need support to make their job easier with reduced costs. Alternatives to mulesing do not appear to be satisfactory as yet and with time running out, this is a major concern to growers in this region due to the higher summer rainfall and subsequent fly challenges in the summer months.

It could be stated that wool from mulesed sheep would be a better product due to less fly stress on the animal and the less risk of stained wool.

The 2009 New England Wool 'Ultimate Clip Competition' was again widely supported by our members. The members are very appreciative of the encouragement provided by Andrew Blanch of New England Wool and his Italian processor connections, REDA and Vitale Barberis Canonico, in constantly striving to improve the standard of superfine clip preparation.

At the awards presentation dinner held in Newcastle at the end of June, New England members managed an equal fourth placing shared between Geoff and Jan Wood (JW/Uralla) and Tony and Janet Gall

(Gall/Wilsons Creek). The competition attracted 280 entries from across Australia. The Stephen family from "Warrane" were also mentioned in the highly commended clips.



The Federal President Kevin Dunn will be attending regional meetings in July to report the Association's activities and outcomes from his overseas mill visits. A special luncheon meeting has been organised for the members in the Tenterfield area. At the Annual General Meeting held in Armidale, Professor John Thompson from the School of Environmental Science (UNE) will share his experiences with meat labelling and marketing, highlighting the similarities and differences with our wool marketing.

The region lost one of its very prominent members with the passing of Gordon Leahy in late 2008. The 'North Springvale' woolclip from the traprock region was always well recognised in the New England and Gordon's passion for the industry and support were always very much appreciated.

As Chairman of the New England Region we thank members for their support in such difficult times and particularly the secretary Janet Gall for continually organising the meetings and enjoyable social functions throughout the year. The reducing numbers of members across the association needs to be addressed in order to continue the valuable work that the association conducts for our industry.