

One of the most highly-regarded international figures in the global wool industry

Barry Walker



Barry's first foray into the superfine wool market place came early in his life. As a small child, he'd spend his school holidays gathering tufts from round the sheep yards at the woolshed on the family property Ledgerton, near Yass, in south-east NSW.

These bags he would duly cart to Yass and sell whenever he could hitch a ride to town. This spirit of enterprise and reluctance to let an opportunity slide has stayed with him throughout his distinguished career—and the superfine, wool growers of Australia are the better for it.

For much of his adult life, Barry has been (and remains) a superfine wool grower at the top of his game, garnering with his brother Gavin a swag of national and international acclaims for a consistently outstanding product.

But his endeavour and success have not stopped at Ledgerton's gate. Barry joined the Australian Superfine Wool Growers' Association early in his career, quickly proving his worth in difficult negotiations, and ultimately serving on the Association's council and executive for 20 years. Early in his involvement with the ASWGA, Barry played a strong role in convincing the Australian Wool Corporation and Australian Wool Testing Authority that measurement for micron must be improved. As a result, the AWC's early poor support for superfine wool did an about-face; the AWTA now goes to great lengths to continuously improve the objective measurement of superfine wool. During the 1980s, when the Reserve Price Scheme was implemented, Barry was involved in the annual negotiations with AWC in obtaining a reasonable position for superfine wool types, despite the AWC's initial dismissal of superfine wool as a mere 4 per cent of the national clip. When the Reserve Price Scheme later collapsed, Barry played a leading role in refocusing ASWGA to meet the new challenges, with the development of a commercial arm Australian Extrafine Merino.

He further improved the marketability of Australian superfine wool by pushing for the introduction of nylon woolpacks, solving the serious problem of woolpack contamination of the clip. His passion for furthering the industry to new successes in Australia and abroad fuelled Barry's dynamic three-year presidency (1993-1995) during one of the industry's most challenging periods. Barry seized the opportunity to build close, strong and lasting ties with international customer members and to greatly improve the understanding producers' and processors' understanding of each others' pressures and needs. He was particularly successful in persuading key Italian and Japanese superfine customers to increase the price they were prepared to pay for superfine wool. His international role has continued throughout Barry's post-presidency career. As a result, Barry has become one of the most highly-regarded international figures in the global wool industry. The interests of his fellow superfine wool growers are— as ever—foremost in his mind as he undertakes new negotiations with international customers in his other wool industry roles.

While pouring his energy into the ASWGA and, of course, the family business, Barry has achieved much else for the industry through a broad and distinguished range of representations. He's been on the boards of the NSW Farmers Association, Australian Wool Research and Promotion Organisation, and Chairman of Australian Wool Services. Barry was a co-founder and remains a director of AWN. Last year he established the Graziers Investment Company to succeed AWS; he remains Chairman of this company, and of Andar—an agriculturally focused manufacturing company fully owned by Australian wool growers. He served as a Director of the Australian Wool Testing Authority and the Wool Council of Australia. Barry's also taken a very personal approach to improving relationships and understanding between superfine wool growers and international processors with Walker Tours, taking producers to the processors' factories and shopfronts for a first-hand look at what happens to superfine wool once it leaves Australia's shores. The Australian Government recently recognised his outstanding service to the industry by awarding him an OAM in the Queen's birthday honours list.

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