

95/S03



Producer Research Support

Border Leicester breeders set up young sire breeding program

Border Leicester Breeders Group



The project

A small number of Border Leicester stud breeders started a young sires breeding program and established a group breeding/marketing program called '\$uperBorder\$' as a result of this Producer Research Support project.

Objectives

1. Supply Border Leicester sheep breeders with research information relating to health and fertility of Border Leicesters; and
2. Form local breeding groups to identify and improve the quality of genetics in their flocks.

What was done

The project began with four workshops for Border Leicester breeders held across eastern Australia. Fifty-five breeders attended. The information from these workshops was distributed to the breed's broader membership.

In 1998 the breeders who attended the previous workshops were surveyed to assess the impact of these workshops.

The survey indicated most breeders had attempted to improve their lambing percentage but these attempts were reportedly largely unsuccessful.

The survey led up to a workshop at Echuca in October 1998, called to assist breeders gain further information to raise the productivity of Border Leicester sheep. These discussions led to the establishment of the Border Leicester Young Sire Scheme.

Four studs participated in the 1999 mating and eight for the 2000 mating.

The workshop also resulted in the formation of \$uperBorder\$, a breeding scheme designed to speed genetic gain through the increased use of the Australian sheep industry's genetic improvement program LAMBPLAN.

The breeders were told they have a "huge opportunity" to influence profitability of commercial prime lamb enterprises by making genetic gain in economically important traits.

These traits, including growth rate, carcase value, fertility and disease resistance could all be quantified by LAMBPLAN, from measurements collected by the breeder or LAMBPLAN contractor.

While few Border Leicester breeders measured all their sheep, the opportunity was there to do so.

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Key points

- The Border Leicester Young Sires Breeding Program was established.
- A group breeding/marketing program called \$uperBorder\$ was established.

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What happened?

Alex Ball of LAMBPLAN told the Echuca meeting the most important trait to measure and record was weaning weight. He said to maximise the accuracy of information coming out of LAMBPLAN it was important to have accurate information going into the system. This meant creating management groups and identifying different feed opportunities, such as in the management of show teams.

Ewe progeny needed to be in a management group different to ram progeny as each group would be laying down fat at different times, as well as being maintained in separate paddocks for obvious management reasons.

Mr Ball said while it was important to identify different groups it was also important to ensure too many groups were not created.

Ideally there would be several sheep in each group with the same sire. These could be linked to another group with the same sire.

He said LAMBPLAN was hoping to provide EBVs for structural traits in 2000. This would give an indication of structural correctness without seeing the sheep. He said when using LAMBPLAN it should not be the main aim to breed high index sheep with high index sheep only. To do so may mean some lower performing sheep would be bred with other lower performing sheep which would create a variation in genetics within the flock.

He said the aim should be to move all animals slightly forward and create an 'even' flock with a small variation in genetic merit.

Discussion

Thirteen breeders in 1999 marketed rams under the \$SuperBorder\$ name and this number was anticipated to grow. The \$SuperBorder\$ concept combined with the young sire scheme is building stronger genetic linkages between studs using LAMBPLAN.

The scheme was also opening the lines of communication between breeders, bringing them together to discuss the further development of Border Leicester sheep.

Within the young sire program, elite young rams were shared with other studs, with the rate of genetic improvement estimated at five index points each year or about 5%.

Genetic gain in a similar program within the Poll Dorset breed called Meat Elite was impressive, with some members making 12 index points of gain each year.

The extra pedigree linkages achieved via the young sire program improved the reliability of data in across-flock information gained from LAMBPLAN.