

Making more money as a result of your ram and ewe selections must be the primary objective for a commercial sheep producer. This is a summary of how I recommend a commercial flock producer achieves this outcome.

It's your flock, it's your income. You must take control.

Two basic elements

- A. Select to your breeding objective.
- B. Select traits accurately and combine them efficiently.

1. **Breeding Objective:** Establish traits that increase income or save costs. Balance the emphasis (not importance) on each so they maximise return. Write down the emphasis on each. Out of 100% for ASBV traits. And out of 100 for the additional traits. Selection must be a balance across all these traits. Separate breeding objectives from management objectives.
2. **Ram selection** (at auction) for a group of flock rams. Use RamSelect if possible, it's a huge help.
 - Know how and when ram purchase takes place – talk to your breeder not just look at the “web”.
 - *Benchmark to rams in other relevant flock's catalogues and use a current percentile band table.*
 - Step 1. Benchmark. When you get your catalogue compare their standard to the rams you have on hand.
 - Relative to the standard of rams you have on hand set yourself reference performance standards for the index that matches your breeding objective and each relevant trait.
 - Step 2. Grade the rams on performance in the ram sale catalogue as soon as it is available.
 - Use an index if there is one that matches your objective. Only use an index if you are sure.
 - Grade the whole catalogue 1 to 4 or at least 1 to 3 – 1 being best. **X** rams that are unsuitable.
 - The index may be a primary way of dividing the rams into groups.
 - But also look closely at each rams performance for the traits in your objective to ensure they have the right standard and balance. Remember each ram will have strength and weaknesses.
 - If the standard or balance is only slightly weak for the grade they can be dropped one or more grades or if less suitable **X** the ram.
 - Outcome – 4 or 3 grades – hopefully 50 to 70% of the catalogue is graded – about equal number per grade but normally more in lower grades as marginal sheep get pushed to lower grades.
 - Step 3. Your visual trait evaluation – usually sale day. First have a look at the overall standard.
 - Set a reference standard. Take account of the season – nourishment, dust, fleece rot, etc
 - Work through the catalogue - combine your measured grade with visual trait performance.
 - Adjust your measured grade down if visual trait standard is not suitable. **X** if unsuitable.
 - Set a price limit for each grade and stick to it. Bid up quickly to the grade limit.
3. **Ewe selection** for a classed Merino/Dohne flock – for a flock with 10 to 40% classed down.
 - Fine tune Breeding Objective. Establish % being aimed for in grades, e.g., Merino, X bred, cull.
 - Establish general standard of the group being classed – in the yard and down the race. Take account of the season and management – nourishment, dust, fleece rot, etc.
 - Establish the standard you will grade to. This is difficult because you are balancing several traits. There is no one standard for each trait. A ewe with a very high standard for a high emphasis trait may be tolerated with a little lower standard for another trait. Each race won't have the correct %.
 - Select as directly as possible for a trait, e.g. for fleece weight, use fleece wool not bonnet.
 - Accuracy improved by measurement. High emphasis, if possible, if cost effective. Body weight.
 - Accuracy improved by good and fair inspection – see all traits, consistent fleece, stand correctly.

Allan Casey, Advanced Breeding Services - 0408 279 719 – 20 March 2017