



□ Mal Hufton is impressed with the soft handle, style and character of Grass Merino's wool as well as their physical soundness, 'do-ability' and lamb rearing ability of the ewes.

Grass Merinos step in right direction for Harden farmers

When it comes to cutting-edge management to maximise profits Mal and Louise Hufton of 'Naranghi' Harden are ahead of most.

Mal has availed himself of technological upgrades whenever possible and attended courses on Grazing for Profit, Holistic Management and Prograze. Consequently he has no difficulty walking through a paddock and estimating its dry matter content and available fodder.

Mal also keeps complete records of which paddock the sheep are in on any one day and, as his flock of 2300 merino ewes moves as one mob, he can tell exactly where they were on a given date, plans where they will be in a month's time and reasonably accurately determines how much feed is available for stock in coming months.

His breeding objectives are straightforward - a heavy cutting 18- to 19-micron fleece, 100 per cent lambing and wether lambs that will meet market specifications for the meat trade within 12 months.

The Gilgandra Grass Merino Stud manager Graham Peart is

now using Grass Merino sires.

"Graham is passionate about his sheep and this is reflected in the meticulous and comprehensive records he keeps, all of which I have access to," Mr Hufton said.

"That's pretty special. Very few ram breeders offer that sort of service."

The Huftons first started using Grass Merino sires five years ago - during the drought - and Mal admits that they took a bit of a beating during the harsh seasons.

"They certainly have had a fair trial. However, the fertility of Grass Merinos has excelled for me," he said.

"Lambing in July/August we marked 106 per cent lambs even though the ewes were joined in extremely tough autumn/winter conditions."

Mr Hufton agrees that his management plays a significant role in achieving such a high lambing percentage. However, so too does the sire's genes.

"We always have our ewes in good condition at joining - they are between 45 and 60 kilos.

"The country is very protected, ideal for lambing, and

since 1994 we have rotationally grazed 40 paddocks on the 600-hectare block here with considerable advantages - wool cuts have gone up and micron count has gone down.

"However, that reflects Graham Peart's quest for the 'golden fleece'.

"A progress summary over the last 20 years shows that for Grass Merinos clean fleece weight is up 0.6 kilograms, micron count is down 2.0 and body weight up 4.0 kilograms - altogether Grass Merinos are 30-40 per cent more productive than average and that's reflected in my records as well."

Normally the Huftons would micron test in the shed but as they are not getting premiums for microns at the moment Mal is visually classing his ewes.

He has added another 800 breeders to the flock this year and any that are not up to scratch are joined to terminal sires.

Like Graham Peart, Mal Hufton is also passionate about his sheep but then as he comments:

"If you are not passionate about what you do, why do it!"