



CONNEWARRAN

MERINO STUD

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Greetings from the team at Connewarran. We hope that all our clients have enjoyed the great seasons and prices that we have over the last 12 months. It's exciting to be so well rewarded for our efforts. In this newsletter we discuss some of the things we're doing to try and make our business, and that of our clients, even more rewarding.

Richard, Jenny, Hamish and Eli Weatherly



THE TEAM EXPANDS!

It's official, the Connewarran team has expanded by one to include Eli Weatherly! Eli (nee Velez), a vet born in Colombia who has immigrated to Australia, was married with Hamish last December. Among her many wonderful attributes are a great love of merino sheep, chocolate brownies, and coffee. It's a magnificent mix in our opinion, and one that makes Eli well worth a visit in our tent at Sheepvention, which we encourage you all to do!

MULESING

Like it or not, mulesing is an issue of such contention that we feel the need to give it considerable thought. We believe that a non-mulesing environment is a possibility we must consider, and plan for, if we are to adequately manage our business risk and offer our clients a product that allows them to do the same. The first step in doing this is to understand where we are now. As such, in 2016 we conducted a small trial of non-mulesing in both our stud ewe lambs and the flock wethers to try to understand the implications of ceasing mulesing, should we be required to do so. The main learnings from trial were that:

- Connewarran non-mulesed sheep demonstrated slightly lower weaning weights and slightly higher rates of breech strike than their mulesed counterparts
- However, these effects were not extreme and were manageable
- Connewarran will continue to mule, with pain relief
- However, should market forces or legislation provide the incentive to do so, Connewarran blood sheep could very quickly adapt to a non-mules environment with relatively limited business consequence or disruption

We would be happy to discuss the trial and its results in more detail with any clients who are interested.

CONNEWARRAN 0040 PROGENY IN ARGENTINA

This year we had the pleasure of selling semen from Connewarran 0040, who led the MP+ index in the 2013 Elders Balmoral Sire Evaluation trial, into Argentina. 0040 was one of three sheep selected from an Australia-wide search by the client, and was chosen on the basis of his very strong credentials in clean fleece weight and weaning weight.

In May Hamish and Eli visited the client to get a better understanding of their operation and see how things are done in Patagonia. They were most impressed. The business ran many tens of thousands of sheep, harvested the wool, and then produced tops for sale through their own factory. They had a direct link to the local government research station through which they ran their embryo transfer program, and also conducted experiments regarding productive traits such as feed conversion. Sheep ran at about 1 head to 5 hectares, did not require mulesing due to the absence of the blowfly, on country that received no chemical or fertiliser treatments. The result is a vertically integrated business producing an ethical (non-mules) and organic (no chemicals or fertilisers) product, with a strong commitment to research and genetic improvement. The trip was a great motivator and learning experience for Hamish and Eli, and has provided a number of insights which they believe they can apply for the continued improvement of the Connewarran Merino Stud.

WECS ADDED TO OBJECTIVELY MEASURED TRAITS

This year we intend to add a worm egg count measurement to the list of objective measurements we take of our ram lambs and provide to clients. The full list of objectively measured traits will now include: fleece weight, body weight, micron, SD, CV, scrotal circumference, eye muscle depth, fat, and worm egg count. We currently have the hiccup that we can't get the average WEC high enough to take the measurements, but we're confident this is an issue that we'll manage to overcome before sale date!

FEED CONVERSION

It has long been on our minds that we measure the output of our sheep, but not what they consume. Small past experiments have suggested

a very significant difference between animals. With our sheep in a controlled, shedded environment leading up to Sheepvention, we think an opportunity to measure individual intake exists. This year we have created some individual pens and are housing a selection of rams retained for stud use individually, in order to measure their feed intake. It's all quite experimental, and naturally we'll continue to observe how our rams compete and perform in the paddock environment. But we hope that shed intake may correlate with paddock intake, and that there may be some patterns evidenced across sire/ewe lines which could indicate heritability. Eventually we hope to build a system of data collection that over subsequent years can be included in our breeding program and add value for our clients.

SIRE EVALUATION TRIALS

Our commitment to testing our genetics against the very best in Australia continues. This year marks our 10th consecutive year of trial entry with nine different sires represented. Thus far each has finished a trial ranked in the top three of at least one of the trial indexes.

Currently we have three sires entered at various stages of trials:

- Connewarran 60297 for the 2015 drop in the NorthEast, where we understand data collection is complete but final results have not yet been produced
- Connewarran 1002 for the 2016 drop in the Northeast, where the first shearing has been conducted, but again, results have not yet been circulated
- Connewarran 15024 for the 2017 drop at the Elders Balmoral site, where first results should be available late next year


We will be sure to share results as soon as they are forthcoming.



CONNEWARRAN IN TALKS FOR EXCLUSIVE ETHICAL FASHION SUPPLY AGREEMENT

In October 2016 Hamish, Eli, and Richard welcomed Zsuzsanna Cseber and Constantin Eis to Connewarran. Zsuzsanna, a former buyer for a major German fashion house, is in the process of starting her own line of ethical fashion and hoped to form an exclusive wool supply agreement with Connewarran. In addition to the potential supply agreement, the Connewarran team saw this as an opportunity to spend 5 days with a young couple who represented the fashion ideals and expectations of European youth, and learn about their thought processes. We think this insight is important to manage our own business and continue to provide the genetics our clients need to manage theirs.

The couple spent five days on Connewarran observing operations, developing a greater understanding of sheep husbandary, wool harvesting, handling, sales and marketing, and briefing us on their requirements. These included: non-mules, non-tail dock, a micro-chip rather than ear tag, natural deaths for animals and no slaughter, no shearing cuts, videotaping of all shearing, permanent on property web cams, and traceability of fleece to animal.



Both Zsuzsanna and Constantine impressed us with their genuine commitment to the welfare of sheep, openness, quick grasp of operational issues, and willingness to question their own assumptions. Their approach was solution focused rather than prescriptive, and left us feeling that, whilst our industry has a way to go to meet welfare expectations, there are people out there who want to work to find a solution rather than simply beat our industry over the head. In the end the two parties were unable to reach a binding supply agreement, but we thank Zsuzsanna and Constantin for their passion for, and commitment to, our wonderful product and industry, and wish them all the best in their journey to bring their product to market. It was a privilege to host them and we stay in touch with interest.

The Connewarran team extends a special thanks to Damien Meagher and Rob Ellis of WISS for the time and commitment they shared educating our guests on the wool selling system, and to the Edwards family, who taught shearing, classing, and the all-important throwing of a fleece!

SALES

Last year we held our first on-property ram sale and were grateful once again for the support of our clients. We offered 44 rams, sold 41 during the sale at an average of \$1,186, and a further 21 after. This year we intend to expand the number of rams offered in the sale to better reflect recent overall sales.

We would also like to note that, in 2016, three sheep sold at Sheepvention for their \$1,000 reserve, and the other two for very competitive prices. We encourage clients who are attending Sheepvention, or have an agent attending, to inspect and consider our Sheepvention offering, as great value may again be available.

**WHERE YOU CAN SEE
CONNEWARRAN RAMS IN 2017**

30th and 31st July

Ballarat Ram Sale

7th and 8th August

Hamilton Sheepvention Ram Sale and Site 367

11 am, 18th October

Annual on-property ram sale

Any time

By appointment to inspect on property

CONNEWARRAN
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