



# 'Meat machines' a Wasleys bonus

BY MIRANDA KENNY

**A**SHMORE White Suffolks has grown from a childhood interest to an impressive stud boasting a ewe flock with every ewe at or above the average White Suffolk index value of 150.

"This is the cut-off point," Ashmore principal Brian Fischer said. "Most are a lot higher, which is what we are selecting for in replacement ewes."

Brian – who manages the Wasleys stud with the help of his wife Rhonda and son Troy – says the index values are going up about seven points a year in their breeding flock.

"We are improving genetic gain faster than the rest of the White Suffolk breed, particularly for growth and muscling which is important because growth and red meat yield are important profit drivers in the prime lamb business," he said.

The family's attraction to the breed started in 1989 after Troy persuaded his father to drive him to an Allendale White Suffolk stud sale at Bordertown.

Troy bought seven to eight ewes with his own money and as time went on, Brian saw how serious his son's interest in the breed had become. So they bought 100 pure Suffolk ewes when Minlaton Suffolk stud Minlacowie, on Yorke Peninsula, dispersed, which they mated to White Suffolks rams for several generations.

The Fischers still use a lot of outside genetics in their breeding program.

"That's where a lot of our genetic gain has come from," Brian said.

"The lambs we produce are little meat machines, growing at 600-700 grams per day up to weaning."

Troy has been president of the SuperWhites young sire and genetic improvement group for

the past three years, and the stud has been a member of the group for the past 11 years.

This group is where the stud sources a lot of its genetics.

"SuperWhites is a group of breeders from around Australia focused on breeding high performance sheep," Brian said.

"They source the best genetics in Australia available and use them in their flocks. "And if you come up with an outstanding ram you are obligated to offer the rest of the group semen from that ram for use in their flocks."

Brian says that in the early 1990s his family was trying to get the sheep leaner, but now they are not placing as much emphasis on that one trait.

"We have a strong emphasis on improving growth and muscling while holding birthweights and leanness constant," he said. "In the future we will be increasingly looking at worm egg counts as an indicator of parasite resistance as well as seeing what DNA markers can offer our business."

The 300 stud ewes are joined at three separate times throughout the year for ease of management and because of the artificial insemination program. Back up rams are put out after AI.

Brian says it would be too much work if the ewes all lambed at once, because all the lambs have to be tagged and weighed at birth, and during following months in order to work out Lambplan figures. Most ewes usually lamb in paddocks near the house.

"AI allows you access to the best genetics without having the rams here," Brian said.

"The conception rate for AI is usually 70 per cent and over 90pc after backup, and from these we probably get 120-130pc lambing on average."

Brian says sheep are culled if they have structural soundness

problems.

"If they have mouth or feet problems they are culled, because if they can't eat or walk they are no good," he said.

In the past five years the stud has doubled the number of rams it sells at its annual ram sale.

This year they will offer about 120 rams, with every ram being above the breed average and many being in the top 10pc of the breed for traits like growth and muscling.

Brian says the majority of his commercial clients use his rams over Merino ewes.

"They (the rams) are sought-after in areas where it is not as lush," he said. "We sell a lot of rams into the pastoral areas as well as Kangaroo Island, the Mid North, Barossa, Yorke Peninsula and the Eyre Peninsula to a lesser degree."

Stud stock have been sold all over Australia.

The stud has fed hay as a supplement, but Brian says they "didn't do too badly" last year in regards to their feed situation, and he has recently sold 400 rolls to Victoria.

Brian says many commercial clients say it is easy to make \$250 a hectare GM with prime lambs but not so easy to make the same amount with crops in recent seasons.

The Fischers run sheep and crops on a 50:50 ratio on their 400-hectare property but Brian says it is becoming increasingly more difficult to make a profit with cropping, so he is running more and more sheep on his place.

The sheep are often run on stubble and also on predominately clover-based pastures, with ryegrass and natural grass.

Cereals such as triticale and oats are also sown for grazing.



“These varieties are very palatable and the sheep will go through and pick out the triticale,” Brian said.

Brian also started planting small patches of lucerne last year, which did well, despite the drought.

Rotational grazing keeps feed fresh and growing well.

• Details: Ashmore White Suffolk stud, 08 8525 4068 or visit [www.ashmorewhitesuffolks.com](http://www.ashmorewhitesuffolks.com)

## Pointers to profit



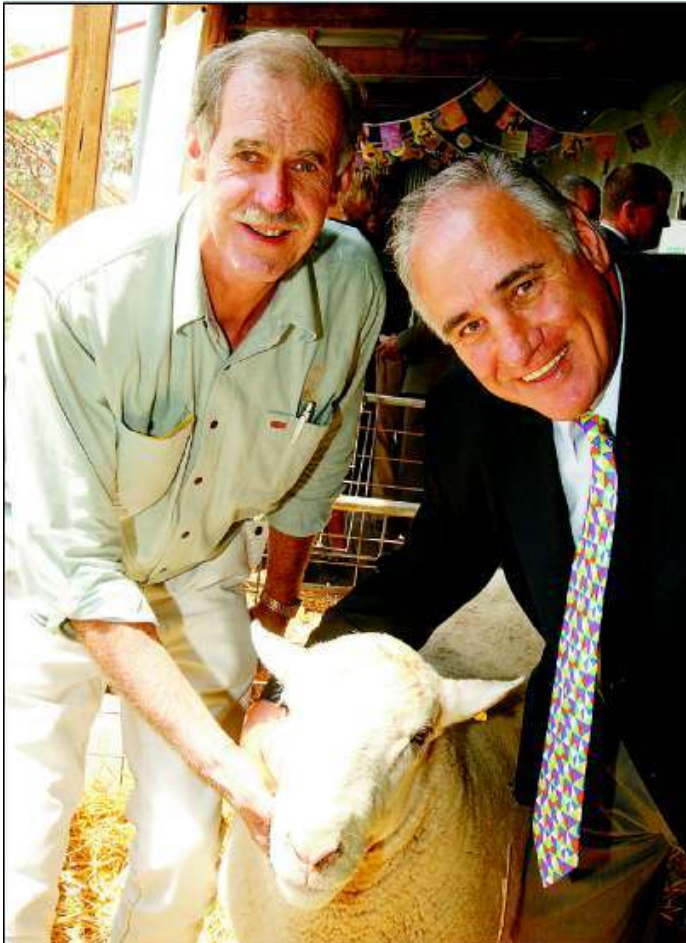
- EWES selected for high index values
- SUPERWHITES group allows access to highest performing genetics
- EMPHASIS on growth and muscling

## CRC sets up national progeny test

Cooperative Research Centre information nucleus is set up as a national progeny test to help:

- Improve accuracy of breeding values in Sheep Genetics Australia through collection of additional data across five sites
- Provide new information on new and novel traits that can go into SGA like red meat yield and nutritional attributes (omega 3 fatty acids, zinc content of meat), and eating quality
- Help validate DNA markers with the molecular information flowing into SGA for existing and new traits

The CRC will help speed the delivery of DNA-based technology to industry through validation and integration of information into SGA.



## Ashmore ram is the chosen one

Brian Fischer shows off his White Suffolk sire Ashmore 050131 to Sam Kekovich at last year's Meat & Livestock Australia annual general meeting in Adelaide. “He is one of the trait leaders for muscling and he was chosen for his good combination of growth and muscling,” Brian said. The ram is being used in the world's largest sheep genetic trial, conducted by the Sheep Cooperative Research Centre, and progeny will be generated in five sites across Australia – including the South Australian Research & Development Institute's Turretfield site. The trial aims to identify gene markers that impact on animal performance for traits like red meat yield, nutritional value and parasite resistance.