

boost farm's profitability

hectare return over and above our existing prime lamb operation during the next three years or earlier as the genetics take influence," Mr Walter said.

With 75pc of implanted ewes scanning in-lamb, 90pc of those lambs survived to marking, with an average birth weight of 4.7 kilograms, marking weight of 12.5kg and an average growth rate of 325kg a day.

The August 2013-drop rams lambs will be sold as hoggets at the first offering of Australian-bred Highlanders in February next year, on-property at Murnong.

Currently averaging 36kg, the rams will be about 50kg by sale date.

The Highlander ewe lambs from the first ET program will be joined as hoggets in March, and will become the basis of the elite breeding flock.

The ideal 'efficient' prime lamb operation for Murnong will be a 19-23kg carcass in a self-replacing system, with targeted feed requirements.

"Our commercial flock will eventually be Highlander ewes with Primera rams breeding prime lambs," Mr Walter said.

"The elite flocks on both side is just an add-on to the sheep operation."

"The changed focus has us turning off lambs three weeks earlier, with 49pc yield - that is a big cost saver there - as well as getting more lambs on the ground."

Next year will see another 750 Highlander embryos and 500 Primera embryos implanted at

Murnong, allowing them to supply Australian-bred rams of the maternal and terminal breeds, with an aim of having flock rams for sale by 2015.

The profit driven commercial sheep producer will be the main clientele of the two NZ breeds, Mr Walter said.

"We can't change the market, but we can change input costs," he said.

"Good quality meat means more market options, but it rarely means a premium price.

"This program has allowed us to run more sheep for a greater number out the gate - up 10-20pc."

Describing them as a user-friendly sheep, Mr Walter said yield, temperament, fertility and lambing ease have improved with the use of Highlander and Primera breeds.

"Lambs at Murnong are sold either direct to works or through the saleyards, depending on where the price is best," he said.

"They have also been achieving good fat scores at 50kg, and produce a fair bit of wool, with enough to pay for shearing and animal health.

"Lambs have had tight skins, which is good for marketing."

Running alongside a 350 sow pigery and 1000ha of cropping, prime lamb production currently makes up 20pc of the Murnong farming business.

The operation is hoping to increase this to be an equal third of the business income wise, without increasing the number of sheep being run on the property.



■ Murnong Farming manager Josh Walter said strong genetics were missing from their prime lamb operation, leading to the introduction of Highlander and Primera lines.



■ Primera flock rams in use at Murnong Farming.

NZ rams in focus

BENCH-marked on a Profit Index which incorporates a 20,000 head lamb progeny test, Highlander and Primera rams have been gaining popularity, and not just in New Zealand.

The Profit Index model not only measures output but also input costs, and Focus Genetics has concentrated on this while establishing the two breeds, looking for kilograms of lamb weaned per ewe mated.

The maternal composite Highlander breed has been bred for the past 20 years, with 75pc retained for hybrid vigour, and a focus on hogget ewe performance.

Primera are the terminal composite breed, also bred for hogget joining, with a focus on high-yield and carcass

characteristics. They are the result of the world's largest progeny test.

Primera breeding objectives

- To lamb unassisted
- Fast growth and early maturity
- Efficient conversion of grass to carcass
- Selection for market required meat characteristics

Highlander breeding objectives

- Lamb as a hogget
- Rear two or three lambs as a 2-TH and onwards
- Longevity
- Efficiently wean their body weight plus
- Remain structurally sound
- Modest ewe weight and input requirements

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