

WILTIPOLL BREEDERS MOVING WITH THE TIMES



Many people still talk about the Wiltipoll sheep as if it were a new breed despite it now having a more than thirty year history. This is a very positive factor for the breed as it indicates clearly how many meat sheep breeders are still discovering the breed in their search for an easy care high quality meat sheep to be used either as the basis of their flock or as a key component of a cross-breeding composite program. Wiltshire Horn sheep which are the base breed for the Wiltipoll have returned to prominence at both The Australian Sheep and Wool Show in Bendigo and the Melbourne Royal Show this year. Some sheep breeders prefer a polled breed, while still desiring the genetic diversity gained from backcrossing to the well established Wiltshire Horn breed. These breeders have made Wiltipolls their breed of choice.



The Australian Sheep and Wool Show

Thanks to the hard work and careful breeding of the pioneers of the Wiltipoll breed, notably the Gee Tee, Kars, Munna, Jonola and Wonoka flocks, plus the early work of improving the Wiltshire Horn flock in Australia by Bara Simbil, Gee Tee and Clifton Hills flocks, the current Wiltipoll sheep presents as a first choice for those who want an easy care meat sheep that can handle a wide range of climatic and feed conditions and consistently return high joining percentages. Good feet, complete annual fleece shedding, excellent mothering of twins and triplets, respect for fences and carcasses that meet both export and local market requirements are now the benchmark for the Wiltipoll breed.

The Wiltipoll breed has also found great favour with the increasing number of hobby farmers who are keen to put their own lamb on the table as well as having a hobby that still allows them time to enjoy their lifestyle. The quiet temperament of the current Wiltipoll breed and lack of horns ensures that younger children and older hobby farmers can handle these sheep with basic yards without the risk of injury. Because the Wiltipoll fully sheds its wool in spring there is no need for shearing, crutching or fly-strike treatment. Their black feet handle the very wet conditions encountered in parts of Gippsland without any sign of feet infections. Usually a once a year foot trim before lambing is all that is required even in the wettest of areas. With correct rotation of grazing paddocks worm infestation can be reduced and there are opportunities here for organic production methods both for hobby and commercial breeders.



The Australian Sheep and Wool Show

Reaching this stage of breed consistency has not been without its challenges. The back-crossing with Wiltshire Horn Sheep has had to take place with a constant eye to retaining wool shedding, good black feet and a complete absence of horns while ensuring good lamb growth rates. Breeders registered with ASSBA continue to work toward this outcome as stud breeders and deserve your support if you are looking to purchase stock for a new Wiltipoll Flock or improving your existing flock. This year brought the news that a vote recommending the cessation of AWA had been passed at the annual general meeting of the society. After compliance with NSW incorporation rules AWA will close its operations. AWA has worked tirelessly for many years to improve the status of the Wiltipoll breed and deserves thanks from all breeders for its work. Fortunately the Wiltipoll Sheep Breeders Association which has been building membership and interest now for some years is in a position to offer membership to AWA members who can also join ASSBA if they are keen to have continued flock registration and stud pedigree recording in a flock book. The future looks bright for the breed and continued improvement of this truly Australian easy care meat sheep appears to be well set for the future. There is no doubt that the future will bring challenges as we all cope with climate change, more extreme weather events, a move away from red meat consumption and increased production costs. The Wiltipoll sheep is clearly a breed well placed to meet these challenges and there is no better time than now to make this breed a significant part of your sheep breeding operation.