



MEAT MERINO GENETICS WITH AUSTRALIAN WOOL TRADITION



John Armstrong, "Baltimore", Junee, with his SAMM/Merino ewe lambs.

Breeding the best mix

By **BRENDAN MANSBRIDGE**

AFTER LOOKING FOR A sire to reduce lambing difficulties in their maiden Merino ewes, the Armstrong family at "Baltimore", Junee, has been very pleased with the results from Prime SAMM rams.

The Armstrongs have only recently started using the breed, last year joining SAMM rams to their maiden ewes for the first time, but John Armstrong said he had been impressed with how easy lambing had been.

"We hardly had any problems at all," he said.

"The SAMMs seem to have a bit smaller head than the Dorsets, and they're a smaller lamb when born."

With the SAMMs the Armstrongs achieved a lambing rate of 100 per cent last year, with a number of twins.

Previously, the Armstrongs had joined their ewes to Poll Dorset rams, but decided to look at alternate breeds which were

known for easier lambing – as their maiden ewes were smaller than usual.

Mr Armstrong sought advice from the family's stock agent Des Makeham, Delta HLB, Wagga Wagga, and also from son Peter, who is in his final year of a veterinary science degree at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, before deciding on SAMMs.

They purchased rams from Cameron MacPherson's Rosemere SAMM stud, also at Junee.

While they haven't sold any of the SAMM-cross lambs yet, Mr Armstrong had been very happy with their performance, especially considering the SAMM-cross lambs were born in July a month later than the rest of their lambs.

"I reckon they look every bit as good as the Dorset lambs; they've got a bit of leg under them, and meat in the right places," he said.

"They still look very fresh, and I've also been pleased with their growth rates."

While this year the Armstrongs plan to sell the SAMM-cross ewe lambs, they may market them as replacement ewes to other breeders.

"We're only just starting off with the SAMMs, and don't really have enough numbers to keep any ewe lambs this year."

But in 2012, the Armstrongs planned to join 360 ewes to SAMMs, an increase on the 220 joined to them last year, and next year may look at keeping some of the ewe lambs as replacements for their own flock.

The destination for the wether lambs will be the Wagga Wagga saleyards, and Mr Armstrong said that he planned to sell them at the same weight as their Poll Dorset-cross lambs, between 26 and 28 kilograms carcass weight.

"The lambs were shorn in January, and we'll market the first lot of the SAMM lambs shortly," he said.

Mr Armstrong operates "Baltimore" together with his

wife Catherine, sons Peter, David and Patrick, and daughter Jane.

Peter is heavily involved with the livestock side of the operation, using the skills he has learnt in his veterinary science course, while David focusses more on the cropping and Patrick is currently studying agribusiness at Marcus Oldham College in Victoria.

They run 1300 Merino ewes on the 1400 hectare property, along with 400 Angus breeders and 600ha of cropping.

The family has 280ha of lucerne-based pastures, along with pastures comprising ryegrass and phalaris.

"Our country is undulating, so a lot of it lends itself more to livestock than cropping," Mr Armstrong said.

While they had previously run a self-replacing Merino flock and first-cross ewes, the family now buys in all their ewes.

"We've got a good source of ewes close by, so it's easy for us to buy them from there," Mr Armstrong said.