NEWS AND EVENTS

News releases

- NSW DPI news feed
- Agriculture
- Fishing and aquaculture
- Forests
- Minerals and petroleum
- General
- Ministerial

Events

Newsletters

Minfo

Bush Telegraph Magazine

Agriculture Today

Media contacts

Breeding secret to better chops

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Good news for consumers who savour tender, juicy lamb has been revealed in the latest research results from Industry & Investment (I&I) NSW - sheep genetics can help produce more lamb which better satisfies market demand.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Sheep Industry Innovation (Sheep CRC) Information Nucleus (IN) project aims to develop genetic tools which producers can use in their breeding programs to increase production and profitability.

I&I NSW research scientist, Sue Mortimer, said meat samples from the Sheep CRC IN flock's 2007 and 2008 drops indicated that some desirable meat traits were genetically inherited.

"The key objectives are to improve the lean meat yield, meat quality traits, consumer acceptability, eating quality and nutritional value of lamb," Dr Mortimer said.

"Initial analysis of lean meat yield and tenderness indicates that these meat traits could be used in sheep genetic improvement programs.

"We aim to refine the genetic parameters based on further analysis of IN flock drops to establish Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ABSVs) which can be used to boost production and target meat quality traits."

Annually up to 2000 animals are sampled across Australia including IN flock drops from the Cowra Agricultural Research and Advisory Station and Trangie Agricultural Research Centre (TARC), with collection and analysis continuing for lambs born up to 2011.

In conjunction with the Sheep CRC Next Generation Meat Quality program, meat samples are tested at Cowra, while staff at Trangie conduct genetic analysis of liveweight gain, meat production and meat quality.

Dr Mortimer said the Sheep CRC IN project aims to expand on genetic improvements which have delivered substantial increases in productivity and profitability for the sheepmeat industry during the past decade.

"In future sheep genetic indexes used in LAMBPLAN to select terminal and maternal sire will be monitored for responses to the newer consumer-relevant traits," she said.

"It may be necessary to develop breeding objectives and selection techniques which combine meat production, carcase and meat quality traits for use in individual flocks."

Producers can contact Dr Mortimer at TARC (02) 6880 8008 to find our more about the Sheep CRC IN project which is supported by Australian Wool Innovation Ltd and Meat & Livestock Australia.

Digital photographs available bernadette.york@industry.nsw.gov.au

Media contact: Bernadette York 02 6391 3936, 0427 773 785