

FAQs

Q. Why do the ewes in the videos have patches of wool removed from their right-hand-side?

Each sheep has had a midside wool sample removed to test fibre diameter, yield, staple length and staple strength. A minimum 50g wool sample is necessary to do all the tests required. Wool samples from all of the MLP sheep are tested by AWTA on Laserscan and ATLAS equipment.

Q. Why do the ewes have so much urine stain?

At the time of filming for the field day the ewes were 10 days away from shearing. They were crutched once during the year, in mid-February. Some of the ewes are quite wrinkly which increases the amount of stain (68% have a BRWR score = 3 and 11% have a BRWR score ≥ 4). Further, a lot of the ewes have long staple length which also contributes to the degree of stain.

Urine stain is an important trait that's routinely scored in the MLP project due to its relationship to flystrike. In order to score the trait effectively, we need to allow the sheep to fully express their range in performance.

Q. Why do some ewes have yellow pegs on them?

Yellow pegs were placed on ewes that had representative wool for the sire group - and were used for the open fleece photos.

Q. Why do some of the ewes have blue brands on their wool?

The ewes are side-branded with SIRO-Mark to facilitate birth records at lambing. Remnants of the brand are still visible 10 months later. The shed staff are aware, and all brands are removed from fleece wool during the wool preparation at shearing.

Q. Why do presenters sometimes talk about 28 sires and others talk about 30 sires evaluated at the site?

There are 15 sires evaluated in each of the two drops at the New England site, with two of those sires evaluated in both drops. The repeat use of two rams provides linkage between the years, and will allow the data to be combined across years to create a larger dataset.

Q. Are there any wool samples from the New England sire groups available?

Unfortunately, a wool sample from each of the sire groups was not retained prior to shearing. If future field days are held online, we will consider whether it's possible to retain a wool sample from each sire group.

Q. Why is there a 100 point range on some indexes?

The New England site was established to not only explore lifetime productivity under a summer rainfall conditions, but to also facilitate the evaluation of ultra and superfine wool types in the MLP project.

The 28 sires evaluated at the New England range from ultrafine to medium wool types which has resulted in a large range in fleece and growth performance. This range in performance translates into a very large range

in performance in the reported indexes. For many ultrafine breeders with Saxon origins, their selection emphasis includes wool quality traits that are not accommodated in the current standard indexes, and this should be considered when comparing sires on index performance.

Q. Why do we measure WEC when the sires with poor (high) WEC appear to be as productive as others for fleece weight and body weight?

All sheep within a drop are managed as one mob, and the average of the mob must meet LTEM condition score targets. In managing to the average of the mob, the susceptible sheep are accommodated (i.e. well looked after) and they are able to remain productive.

Q. Why are there less sheep in some sire progeny groups? For eg. Moorundie Poll, NE73.

The MLP F1 progeny are born as a result of an Artificial Insemination (AI) program. Even though an equal number of ewes (90) were joined to each sire, differences in semen quality and other non-genetic factors contribute to a variable number of lambs conceived and ultimately weaned. Furthermore, in 2017 most of the sire groups had a sex ratio in favour of females (i.e. more females than males). The Moorundie Poll group was the reverse, with considerably more male lambs born than females. The core MLP project focusses on the female progeny, this is what you see in the videos and report, with the male portion often involved in related research.

Q. If breech strike has been an issue, why don't you mules or do additional preventative treatments?

CSIRO made a deliberate decision a long while ago to 'practice what we preach' and to operate to industry best practice for our environment where possible. Hence, the decision to stop mulesing in 2009. Our non mulesed commercial sheep are not particularly problematic, but the divergent genetics involved in our genetic research flocks can be more complex to manage.

Additional chemical treatments on top of our regular program brings its own issues, such as the development of chemical resistance. When effective protection from chemical treatments and crutching start to reduce, we check and treat the ewes very frequently. Affected animals are recorded, and impact on production is negligible.

While repeated checking and treating flystrikes over a long fly season does increase our workload, there are also positives in this. The MLP flock is an excellent genetic resource and the flystrike data we collect is valuable for industry and can be used for many purposes. A research facility such as the Chiswick property is a preferred location for collecting such data as we operate under strict Animal Ethics and Welfare protocols.

Q. Why do the 2018 drop ewes seem to have shorter staple length than the 2017 drop ewes?

At the 2020 shearing the 2017 drop ewes had two months more wool growth than the 2018 drop ewes. This is because the yearlings are first shorn at 10-11 months of age and are then brought into line with the adult sheep the following year.

Q. What were the New England pregnancy scanning rates for this year, and are they publicly available?

Joining took place in April and preg scanning in late June showed 95% conception in the 17 drop (41% twins, 136% foetuses), and 93% conception in the 18 drop (14% twins, 105% foetuses).

Preg scanning results at the sire level will be made available to sire entrants and will be publicly reported once the reproduction cycle for 2020 is complete.

Q. Why have the sheep been filmed in different ways and in different pens?

The sheep filming took place over two full days at about the shortest day of the year so daylight was in short supply. We had never done this before and it took a while to work out the best system for filming the sheep – best places, movements, angles etc. We did change the process part way through and that produced a better result. Consequently, there are unavoidable differences in the sheep videos. The extended filming time and changing daylight also affected the colour and clarity of the fleece images.

Q. Why are some of the fleece images clearer than others or different colours.

While there are differences in colour and crimp definition between sheep, differences in fleece images are also associated with changing daylight which had an effect on colour and clarity of the images. The sheep were filmed over two days with different weather on those days. Time of day also had an effect on the quality of the images. Unfortunately, this is one of the disadvantages of being online.

Q. When will all the data have been collected on the New England ewes?

At the New England site, the last shearing is in June 2024. At that time the 17 drop ewes will have been shorn seven times and weaned five drops of lambs. The 18 drop ewes will have been shorn six times and weaned four drops of lambs.

Q. Will all future field days be available online?

The online nature of the New England field day is to manage the current social isolation measures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although there is strong interest in having both physical and online field days, there is a limited field day budget and we are unlikely to be able to fund both formats. Depending on the COVID-19 situation, the MerinoLink and Pingelly field days planned for October might need to consider having some aspects of their field day online. More will be known closer to the date.

Q. Why aren't the F2 progeny measured through life?

The F2 progeny are the progeny of the F1 MLP ewes. Their main purpose is to provide a reproduction record for the dam (the F1 ewes), and a weaning weight to help calculate maternal weaning weight.

The 5,700 MLP ewes recorded through life will provide a robust dataset and although measuring 25,000 progeny may add some value, the cost would not outweigh the benefit.

Q. What information do the classers have when they are classing?

The AMSEA Grade and Professional Grade are undertaken without access to measured or recorded data, and the sheep are classed as a whole drop (randomly presented) to the sites breeding objective.

Q. What outputs and outcomes can we expect from the MLP project?

A copy of the MLP analysis plan is available on www.wool.com/MLP and outlines the key objectives of the project

CSIRO Add on Work

Q. How do the “add on” projects at CSIRO work with the core MLP project?

The additional work undertaken by CSIRO in no way impacts on the performance of the F1 ewes - or the collection of data from the core MLP project. Work on the F1 ewes is non-invasive, meets animal ethics requirements, and where possible is combined with other project activities. The data collected will add considerable value to the core MLP database.

Q. Why are the sires not identified in the CSIRO talks?

The additional work undertaken by CSIRO is not part of the Central Test Sire Evaluation or the core MLP Project. For this work we are only interested in variation in the Merino population for these traits, not the performance of individual sires. When the sire entrants nominated their rams for inclusion in the MLP Project, they were not agreeing to have them progeny tested for all of these additional traits.