

# Sheepvention 2013 PREVIEW

## Texel offers multiple benefits

■ Chris Parker pictured with the 2012 Australian Sheep & Wool Show Tullamore Park young ram performance class winner which was commended for its carcass and lean meat yield.



■ Social media marketing and an increase in market demand has seen the Summit Park Texels sell more rams in the last two years than ever before in their long involvement with the breed.

By ANNABELLE BEALE

**W**ITH years in the breeding business and a passion for genetics, Hamilton producers Chris and Tania Parker forecast a Texel boom as the breed effortlessly hits domestic and export market criteria. Backing their statement is an increase in over-the-hook demand for Texel crosses, which Mr Parker said was due to substantially greater returns for Texel-sired lambs. This has seen Summit Park Texels sell more rams in the past two years than ever before in their long involvement with the breed, which has been assisted by marketing via social media.

This year marks the 20th year since the Western Europe bloodlines were introduced to Australia. The introduction sparked a distinctly different genetic pool and carcass type available for prime lamb production.

The large lean lamb produces value-added cuts without excessive waste fat and bone – a product Mr Parker said was sought after by supermarkets and butchers.

With more than 12 years experience measuring meat breed's performances as a contractor for Advance Livestock Services, Mr Parker

### At a glance

◆ Chris and Tania Parker, Summit Park Texels, Hamilton

◆ Texel stud run on 80ha

◆ Focus on high muscling, low birth-weights



said Texel-sired lambs out of crossbred and Merino ewes dressed on average 5-10 per cent higher than many other types of sheep.

"When I started scanning sheep 12 years ago, the market was export driven with an emphasis on over 30kg carcasses," he said.

"But the current way the market is, they don't want those super heavy carcasses; producers are finding it hard to finish those big animals because they are targeting traits to grow and have lost the emphasis on the muscling and conformation.

"But now the market has changed and demand is back to a domestic market of 18-22kg and up to 26kg for export."

With this change has come increased emphasis on muscling and conformation.

Mr Parker said this was where Texels stood out as a meat breed to target these requirements.

Summit Park flock consists of 130 pure Texel ewes, and also a line of Texel, Border Leicester-East Friesian ewes, which he said produced a placid temperament, sound structure and highly fertile ewes that had proven able to endure consecutively tough seasons and difficult conditions.

"I've always been involved with Texels and from all the work I've undertaken, I've never really found anything else that makes me think 'I should be breeding that'," he said.

"We always come back to the Texels."

"You scan a Texel in an ultrasound machine and you can just see muscle, good levels of fat, lean over the ribs."

He said that assessing a Texel lamb with an ultrasound on a live lamb, or as a carcass over the hook, it became obvious their lean meat yield made them an ideal butcher lamb.

"They don't visually appear as big as the other breeds yet they weigh really well and measure up because of the high muscling factor that makes them a real meat breed," he said.

The Parkers' commitment to the breed was commended at

## Sheepvention



## Texel premium on UK falling

THE British Texel Sheep Society is also celebrating a boost in demand, reporting premium prices for Texel sired lambs for commercial producers, despite a dramatic fall in prime lamb prices across the country, including a \$41 per kilogram week-on week-fall.

Texel Sheep Society chief executive John Yates said Texels' reputation for excellent carcasses and killing out levels was keeping them in the premium price range.

"No one wants to see lamb prices slipping as much as they have in the last few days, but it is pleasing to see there is still a strong demand for quality Texel lambs," he said.

"Texel lambs produce quality, evenly fleshed carcasses and the breed thrives in all manner of climates and conditions."

Texel lambs were adept at laying down flesh at all growth stages and their evenness of cover meant they were marketable at a wide range of weights, he said.

"This is true across the country and Texel crosses are in demand from local butchers, UK retailers and the export trade alike," he said.

"This is something no other breed can match in terms of volume of supply and consistent quality of product."

last year's Australian Sheep & Wool Show where they won the Tullamore Park ram performance class with a young ram, based on its carcass and lean meat yield.

The Parkers will be showing at this year's Sheepvention at Hamilton. Mr Parker said, despite tough conditions in western Victoria over the past two seasons, he predicted strong competition and uplifting camaraderie among stud and commercial breeders.

Being the go-to man at sheep shows and at numerous stud operations across Australia, Mr Parker's contract role with Advance Livestock Services scanning meat breeds has provided many profitable lessons, with the Parkers adapting their breeding to a more condensed lambing season for ease of management.

"You learn so much by talking to producers, seeing the good things and the not-so-good," he said.

"You learn to adapt practices to make them work in your own situation. It reiterates why you are breeding the sheep you are breeding."

Summit Park uses AI techniques to gain optimum use of sires and incorporates a range of genetics from their own rams as well as other bloodlines. When AI is combined with pen mating and paddock mating, lambing is synchronised for ease of management to lamb in a condensed time-frame.

Recording accurate data is a focus for Summit Park, with the flock measure for performance-based traits providing information to select for high muscling and low birth weights in their sheep, with all lambs weighed and tagged at birth.

Mrs Parker said rams were selected based on their LambPlan performance figures and matched according to type and structure.

"This is so we are not constantly using the same rams and the same progeny – we get a better crossover of genetics," she said.

Mr Parker said: "We are targeting the 24kg carcass weight lamb but still have the ability to turn them off at 18kg, or to take them that extra step – the Texel is well suited and can do multiple things including using them as both terminal and maternal sires."

The stud recently invested in using the Total Genetic Resource Management (TGRM) program which monitors EBVs and matches the best rams with ewes for genetic gain.

"It looks right through your pedigree to make sure you don't get too much in-breeding," Mr Parker said.

"By using these monitoring tools when you're breeding, it determines the best possible genetic matches to increase your EBVs and provides a solid foundation for breeding – you have an even group of progeny and less extreme differences. Performance and quality is the result."