WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE of AGRICULTURE
Morawa

Keeping an Eye on Innovation

The rollercoaster ride in the wool industry continues as prices rise and growers look forward to an increased demand for wool from China. Students at the WA College of Agriculture Morawa have commenced the year with shearing already in full swing, hoping to time this year's wool clip to meet strong market demand and good prices.

Technical Officer Mr Bruce McLean and shearing instructor Mr Ray Hughes assist the students with their shearing and wool handling skills. Some students have had experience in the shearing shed but for others it is a new learning curve. By the end of the two year course students become quite adept with a handpiece including the grinding of combs and cutters and are confident roustabouts.

The College endeavours to keep abreast of changes and new innovations in the sheep and wool industry. A bio-clip demonstration is planned later in the year. Bio-clip is a chemical method of removing the fleece by injecting the sheep with a natural protein which causes a break in the wool. At the time of inoculation a net is fitted over the fleece which is then removed 28 days later bringing the fleece with it. Sam Donehue from Mingenew expressed concerns about the process. "There is a lot of handling involved and the net is hard to separate from the wool." he said. If a 'wash-away' net can be made it will save a lot of time but there is still the problem of wool wastage when it falls out of the net while the sheep are still in the paddock".

Keely Duggan and Sam Donehue in the shearing shed

With surgical mulesing to be phased out in 2010 there are still few viable options being mooted. Students at the College keep close watch on industry legislation and are confident to discuss their ideas and concerns. Keely Duggan from Waggrakine has a very practical view on the issue. "Mulesing is an effective way to prevent fly strike and the alternative ideas that have been suggested still involve pain to the animal, she said. " If growers are forced to change practice then perhaps cross breeding with Samms for their broad wrinkle free rumps will be a solution. The less wet wool the better for reducing fly attraction".

The College has been able to demonstrate to students the best practice in carrying stock successfully through a drought. Feed lotting of lambs and supplementing flock animals with straw sprayed with molasses and urea has helped the College maintain its nucleus flock through a very severe drought, with no adverse impact to soil structure. 500 Merino and cross breed lambs have been grown out in the feedlot over the summer with good results, selling for an average of $71. The Lambs were fed wheat and lupins supplemented with bicarb soda, vitamins and minerals. Hay is provided only for the first two weeks while the animals adjust to the rations.

Wool growers with sheep available for student shearing are invited to contact the College. Please phone 99711158 to speak to the Farm Supervisor, Mr John Barrett.

Lorraine Madden ; School Officer

Department of Education