

The Western Australian Lamb Trial

1 INTRODUCTION

The Western Australian Lamb Trial has been developed to benchmark the state's genetics against some of Australia's most recognised and profitable Merino bloodlines and flocks. The trial will provide independent data on each team's performance relative to the links and the other teams entered in the trial.

The trial will be directly linked to the highly successful Australian Merino Production Trial which is run in New South Wales.

The aim is to benchmark a minimum of 600 wether lambs from a minimum of 30 Teams of 20 wethers born from April 2026 to August 2026.

The West Australian Lamb Trial (WALT) is designed to replicate the production system of many profit focused Merino sheep breeding enterprises. The genetic variation that will be measured through this trial will assist growers in determining the relative capacity of their flock's genetics to make money.

The WALT will promote and provide information to achieve genetic gain by providing an analysis of weight gain in a commercial feedlot, fleece value and carcass value and therefore total lamb values under conditions that can be replicated on a commercial farm.

Inspection days will occur at both the assessment shearing and carcass processing events. Experience has highlighted the value to entrants for them to network with their peers and learn from some of Australia's most progressive businesses.

The WALT will be managed and coordinated by Redgum River Pastoral Company and is supported by Fletcher International Exports, Meat and Livestock Australia, WA Stud Merino Breeders and Sheep Producers Australia.

Western Australian based sheep service providers and extension officers will be encouraged to be involved.

2 TRIAL STRUCTURE

The WALT will measure key production traits and report animal performance on a dollar per head basis.

Each team of 20 wether lambs will be drafted then selected, tagged and delivered to a central location then trucked to Beaufort River and shorn in the third week of November 2026 (even up shearing) when the trial will commence.

The lambs will then run together on stubbles or pasture until they are inducted into the Feedlot in the second week of January 2027. The wethers will be penned across 5 pens based on their weights at induction and randomised across pens.

The lambs will then be weighed every three weeks leading up to a side sample being taken 2 weeks prior to the inspection Field Day and shearing of the wethers in the second week of May 2027. At this time all the wool traits will be measured. Total fleece values with 6 months wool growth will then be calculated and reported.

Lambs will then be processed at Fletcher International Exports at Albany in Late May 2027 to determine total carcass value including meat quality traits.

Total sheep values will be calculated and reported.

The average age of each team of lambs will be used to provide an adjusted data analysis.

Over the duration of the trial all lambs will be fed a production-based diet to maximise wool and body weight gain. Lambs will initially be inducted onto a commercial starter Feedlot pellet blended with hay and fed in a bunker.

The lambs will then be fed a commercial feedlot ration, it is expected that the lambs will be on feed for 12 weeks in total including the induction phase.

This benchmarking data is vital to those breeders wanting to turn their wether lambs off prior to 12 months of age and retaining the premiums of lamb rather than hoggets.

The trial will include 'link' teams to ensure across-site comparison to trials been run for over 20 years in Eastern Australia. It is planned to have 3 teams of 30 wether lambs come across to NSW.

3 TRAITS TO BE MEASURED

Each entrant will receive a comprehensive analysis of each flock's performance for all the traits listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Trait measured

Liveweight and growth traits • Age (mouthed – lamb/hogget) – prior to slaughter and at slaughter • Condition Score • Growth Rate • Final body weight (kg) • Total Growth rate (grams/head/day) • Liveweights	Wool • AWEX Identification – style (MF4; MF5) • Bin Line (AAAM; AAEE; AAAC) • Clean fleece weight (kg) • Coefficient of Variation of Fibre Diameter • Colour – Nil, H1, H2, H3 • Comfort factor (% < 30.5 micron) • Fibre Diameter (um) • Greasy fleece weight (kg) • Schlumberger Yield (%) • Standard Deviation (FD) • Staple length (mm) • Washing Yield (%)
Carcase traits • Carcase weight (kg) • Dressing percentage – derived from final body and carcase weight • Fat depth at GR (12th rib) (mm) • Intramuscular Fat	
Skin • Length (cm) • Body wrinkle (external – 1 to 5)	

Flock profiling

Included in the WALT is **MLA Flock Profile** (often called **Flock Profiling**) this is a genetic benchmarking tool developed through **Sheep Genetics**, a Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) initiative. It allows commercial **Merino** producers to measure the genetic merit of their flock and compare it directly with the national MERINOSELECT population using Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs).

Wool focus

1. Prior to shearing, a sample of fleece will be taken from the mid-side of each sheep and tested for fibre diameter, coefficient of variation fibre diameter, staple length and washing yield.

2. Prior to shearing wethers will also be body weighed and scored for condition, fleece rot (if present) and wool colour.
3. Post shearing the wethers will be scored for body wrinkle.
4. At shearing, all wool from each sheep will be weighed and commercial values will be calculated using long term 5 year average prices.
5. Commercial wool values will take into account each fleece's tested fibre diameter, staple length, yield and wool type (AWEX ID) as determined by independent AWEX-ID accredited wool valuer(s).
6. Using the fleece values determined, team average results will be calculated by dividing the sum of the individual wool values, by the number of wethers present in the team at shearing. The total number of sheep in each team, plus the proportional oddment values will determine the team total value of wool production.

Animal performance

1. At the start of the trial all wether lambs will be body weighed. Body weights will be then be collected every three to four weeks until lambs are processed.
2. Prior to processing, lambs will be given a curfew of 12 hours and body weighed prior to trucking to the abattoir. The wethers will be mouthed prior to processing.
3. At processing, the lambs will be measured and assessed for the following traits - hot carcass weight, fat depth, skin score, body length, intramuscular fat and allocated an individual price per head.
4. Calculations will be made in terms of net profit per head, using standard industry modelling.

4 RULES AND GUIDELINES

1. Teams need to be a commercial self-replacing wool strain of sheep including, Horn, Poll, SRS, Bond, MPM, Mega Merino, Dohne and South African Meat Merino (SAMM).
2. The entrant must have bred all sheep nominated, with the wethers carrying the entrants NLIS PIC tag. The entrant can enter a team of wethers bred from rams purchased from the nominated stud (bloodline source) or those bred to their own rams.
3. The trial will commence in mid-November 2026 and conclude in May 2027.
4. The trial aims to accommodate a minimum of 30 teams.
5. At the commencement of the trial, all teams will be shorn to standardise wool length (even up shearing). All trial wethers will run together for the duration of the trial.
6. Each nominated team must be selected according to the following process:
 - 6.1. The Entrant will yard a minimum 90% of his/her 2026 wether drop lambs (born after 1 April 2026). A minimum of 300 wether lambs must be yarded.

- 6.2. The entrant will then organise an independent person such as a stock agent to randomly draft thirty six (36) wethers from the above group. At the conclusion of the tagging the entrant will ask the drafter to sign off on the protocol and this sheet will come with the lambs to the trial site.
- 6.3. The Entrant and/or their advisor to then select his/her team of twenty (20) from the random group of 36 wethers. The selection of the 20 wethers will be in line with the entrants breeding objectives and will occur without the use of objective data.
- 6.4. Under the supervision of the trial representative, the team of twenty (20) wethers will then be ear-tagged, with two permanent tags.
- 6.5. The Entrant to liaise with the trial coordinator in their region for the delivery of his/her team of to a central location for trucking to the trial site. All teams must be on-site at Fletcher International Exports Feedlot at Beaufort River prior to the even up shearing anticipated to be in the third week of November 2026 and accompanied with a National Sheep Health Statement and National Vendor Declaration (Sheep). If any form of footrot is present in a flock (or suspected), the flock is ineligible to participate in the trial.
- 6.6. Wether lambs are expected to arrive unshorn, at entry to the trial (arrival at location for even-up shearing).
- 6.7. Upon arrival, a full animal health induction program will be implemented. Should any individual team fail the initial feet inspection or any other animal health issues deemed unacceptable by the trial induction manager, the team will be removed from the trial and entrants asked to pick up their sheep.
- 6.8. On arrival to the trial site the wether lamb ownership and management transfers to Redgum River Pastoral Company. All trial expenses are the responsibility of Redgum River Pastoral Company.
- 6.9. Trial reporting will occur across the length of the trial. Entrants will be encouraged to engage in the various activities that will occur across the trial. The interactions between entrants and also the facilitation of learning have been tremendous outcomes of similar trials run in Eastern Australia.

5. TRAIT MEASUREMENT

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All information becomes the property of Redgum River Pastoral Co.

6 FOR MORE INFORMATION AND NOMINATIONS

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

1. Express your interest in the Western Australian Lamb Trial. **Expressions of Interest close 15 September, 2026.** A minimum of 30 teams is required for the WALT.
2. **Enter Your Team by 30 September, 2026.**

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