

## Case study: Bob McFarland from Hay, NSW

Woolgrower Bob McFarland near Hay in New South Wales is putting his shearing practices on the line to help other woolgrowers save money by making small on-farm changes. He is one of five woolgrowers featured in a new DVD 'Pick of the Draft' produced by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and Australian Wool Exchange (AWEX). The DVD puts hard dollar values on poor sheep management and shearing practices and estimates the money that can be saved through simple improvements.



The program isn't just another training program, according to DVD presenter Scott McGregor. 'It will be great entertainment as well as showing growers how simple steps can make a big difference in profitability,' he says. For Bob McFarland of 'Oxley Station' the difference to his profitability is \$2750 gained by changing brands for ear tags.

The DVD presents a computer-based financial model developed by AWEX to show woolgrowers how much cutting corners with their wool clip is really costing them. The model is based on an average woolgrower running a flock of 3,000 Merino sheep, cutting 4.5 kilograms of 19 micron greasy wool. The total clip is 13,500 kilograms.

Bob McFarland runs 5,000 Merino sheep on his property 'Oxley Station' near Hay NSW. In 'Pick of the Draft', Bob talks about the importance of providing good facilities for his woolclasser, shearing contractor, staff and importantly, for his sheep whilst in the shed and yards.

'Our contractor and classer are a very professional team,' Bob says. 'They train their staff to a high standard so they can deliver a good quality product to the buyers.'

'I like to treat people the way I'd want to be treated myself. I want them ringing up wanting to come and shear my sheep. If I give them good facilities, they will give me good results.'

Bob had the opportunity to upgrade his facilities when a wild storm destroyed his vintage shearing shed a few years ago. Within days he contacted his shearing contractor to help him redesign an old crutching shed into a new Multi Purpose shed that can be used year round for other sheep jobs such as AI, classing, horn cutting, loading trucks, displaying sheep for open days and storage when no shearing is taking place.

'An asset of this size and expense has to have more than one role and purpose in this day and age,' Bob says.

Bob made sure that the new Multi Purpose shed included a good quality toilet block and proposed (yet to be built) 'smoko' facilities so that staff had somewhere to put their personal belongings and take breaks away from the work areas. He has even provided a special stand that can be converted for left handed shearers.

The Oxley Station team takes OHS seriously as the new shed has special sloping catching pens and a higher than normal raised board. These are just two examples of good, simple and practical innovations that make shearing and wool handling that much easier.

Several of the other tips recommended in the DVD have paid off for Bob, including additional measurement, pre-shearing crutching and using ear tags instead of brands.

Lionel Plunkett, senior market analyst for AWEX says that woolgrowers can easily end up with discounts of between 30 and 50 cents per kilogram if they have not measured for length and strength. Based on the AWEX model, Bob could be saving up to \$5,500 by carrying out additional measurement.

‘We’re doing additional measurement because we believe the trade demands it,’ says Bob. ‘It gives you an objective measurement. If you don’t do it, I think your wool gets bypassed.’

Lionel recommends additional measurement of wool for staple length and strength. ‘If you have combing length wool, you should measure it,’ he says. ‘It will help to increase the competition for your wool.’

Branding is a key issue raised in the DVD, with sheep brands on wool attracting a discount of around 10 cents per kilogram, or \$1,350 on the sample flock. Bob is avoiding discounts of around \$2,750 by using National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) ear tags for sheep identification rather than brands.

‘With the NLIS we all have to ear tag our sheep anyway,’ says Bob. ‘I use micron disks that fit over the top of the NLIS tag, with different colours representing the different reasons for tagging. There’s no contamination of the wool.’

‘Pick of the Draft’ shows how pre-shearing crutching should pay for itself. ‘You only need to avoid discounts of 15 cents per kilogram to cover the costs,’ says Lionel.

Bob says he does pre-shearing crutching whenever possible. ‘The main reason we crutch is to keep any sort of contamination, whether it be stain or dag, out of our fleece line,’ he says. ‘We do a ‘bung hole’ crutch to take away the stain from the crutch of the animal, especially the ewes. We do it in crutching trailers out in the paddock so sometimes weather conditions or other factors prevent us, but 90% of the time we achieve it.’

The generous tips, insight and advice given by Bob and the other woolgrowers in the ‘Pick of the Draft’ DVD demonstrate the simple ways woolgrowers can keep costs down and maximise profits.

*Image: Bob McFarland, 'Oxley Station', Hay, NSW, with shearing contractor David Kemp*