

Case Study: Grant Borchardt from Tara, Queensland

Woolgrower Grant Borchardt from Tara, Queensland, is putting his shearing practices on the line to help other woolgrowers save money through 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 Grant Borchardt of 'The Deep' the difference to his profitability is \$900 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.

Grant runs a flock of 2,000 Dohne sheep on his property 'The Deep', as well as contract farming broad acre winter and summer crops. In 'Pick of the Draft', Grant talks about the importance of additional measurement, phasing out branding and how replacing his old 'thunderbox' long-drop toilet with a portaloos improved staff morale.

The AWEX model presented in the DVD emphasises the importance of additional measurement in maximising competition for the final product.

Lionel Plunkett, senior market analyst for AWEX says that woolgrowers can easily end up with a discount of between 30 and 50 cents per kilogram if they have not measured for length and strength.

'With test costs of around three cents per kilogram the message is clear,' he says. 'If you have combing length wool, you should measure it.'

Grant agrees, and his measurement program includes measuring chemical residues so he can provide European eco-label residue wool.

'We get normal measurement, plus I always additionally measure the main fleece line, the piece line and the weaners fleece line,' he says. 'We also do EU measurement for chemical residue. That way the buyers have all the information they need and they're not guessing what the clip is. They know it meets EU standard and so you get your premium.'

Branding is a key issue raised in the DVD, with sheep brands on wool attracting a discount of around 10 cents per kilogram, or \$1350 on the sample flock. Grant is avoiding a discount of around \$900 by using NLIS ear tags for sheep identification rather than brands.

The economic model shows that inadequate staffing can lead to faults such as stain and poorly skirted fleece, attracting discounts of up to 30 cents per kilogram.

‘Even after allowing for the costs of an additional shed hand, our 3,000 head flock would still be \$2,500 better off,’ says Lionel. ‘And I can show you examples of discounts of up to \$1 per kilogram.’

Grant makes a generous allowance for additional staff to make sure that everyone can do the best job possible.

‘I believe a woolclasser is capable of doing 600 fleeces a day,’ he says. ‘Anything over that is pushing it too much. If we run three shearers, they’re doing close to 200 in a day, and with them I run a wool presser, wool classer, wool roller and a picker-upper.’

‘Normal practice has been that you need the same number of staff as shearers, but I run one extra staff to the number of shearers. If you’ve got a spare bloke around it takes the pressure off everyone else and people have got time to do the job properly.’

Grant makes sure he shows his shed staff that they are valued.

‘We had a pretty good old thunderbox out the back,’ he says. ‘Even had a seat on it! But once we started getting women working in the shed, I knew I wouldn’t like my daughters or wife to have to use something like that. So I provided a portaloo. I bring it down here for shearing and crutching and afterwards I take it back and put it alongside the shed. I think the staff appreciate it!’

Grant also knows the value of providing hearty meals in a well appointed lunch and ‘smoko’ area.

‘We always ensure that our shearing team is well fed with a good variety of tucker served in comfortable surroundings. The old saying "the way to a man’s heart is through his belly" certainly applies to the shearing team,’ says Grant.

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

Image: Grant Borchardt, "The Deep", Tara QLD with DVD presenter, Scott McGregor