

# Leading Sheep

– keep ahead with beneficial technology

One of Leading Sheep's objectives is to promote beneficial technology to sheep producers. So this edition of Flock talk also has a technology focus.

The first article proves that age is no barrier to technology as webinars become more user-friendly and improve the accessibility to information and experts. This producer encourages others to take the time to learn how simple it is to join these interactive, online sessions.

While the second article is a case study from a producer on the Queensland/New South Wales border who has introduced some sheep handling equipment to minimise the physicality of working with sheep.

Leading Sheep is also planning a number of sessions across the state in June focusing on remote monitoring of water and stock – so watch out for the details on [www.leadingsheep.com.au](http://www.leadingsheep.com.au). Alternatively join the Leading Sheep mailing list to make sure you are kept up to date with what is happening in your area, visit [www.leadingsheep.com.au](http://www.leadingsheep.com.au), click on the 'members' tab and enter your details.

*Nicole Sallur, Flock talk Editor  
Leading Sheep project manager &  
senior extension officer*



## Editorial committee

Nicole Sallur (DAF)

## Enquiries

Nicole Sallur

Phone: 07 4530 1270; Mobile: 0427 603 241

Email: [nicole.sallur@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:nicole.sallur@daf.qld.gov.au)

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# Age no barrier to sheep producers saving time with online learning

At 75 years of age, John Ford has mastered the technology of Leading Sheep webinars and is urging others to take the time to discover how simple it is to join in their interactive, online sessions.

Mr Ford regularly connects to the webinars from his property at Mungallala, west of Mitchell in South West Queensland, on topics ranging from ewe nutrition to sheep diseases.

"Technology is becoming increasingly user-friendly and webinars make information much more accessible than in the past when I would drive three or four hours to attend a seminar," he said.

"I'm able to engage with the experts that I would otherwise not have had the chance to meet, and I can join a session while I'm inside having my lunch."

Having an open mind and taking advantage of the resources available to you are two of the key aspects of moving forward with livestock production, according to Mr Ford.

"If we are going to stay in business we simply have to keep up with technology," he said.

"There are some incredible things available to us at just the click of a button and I would encourage anyone who is interested to connect to a webinar – you might be surprised what you could learn."

Mr Ford accesses webinars on his PC with a satellite Activ8 internet connection which is able to support watching the webinar, listening in to the commentary and joining question time by typing his questions, to which the speaker then responds to the whole group.

"I like to compare it to reading a magazine, where if you have a burning question about the content, you can't ask someone that knows the answer right then and there, whereas in the webinars, question time allows me to get the answer from an expert on the spot."

In previous webinars, Mr Ford has obtained valuable information to improve his operation, ranging from breeding programs to nutritional

needs during pregnancy and lambing.

"This kind of information is particularly useful for us in Queensland at this time, since we are suffering from this drought," Mr Ford said.

For more information on Leading Sheep webinars go to [www.leadingsheep.com.au](http://www.leadingsheep.com.au). If you have any questions or need assistance joining the next webinar, call Nicole Sallur on 07 4530 1270.

## What is a webinar and how does it work?

A webinar is a seminar in which you can participate without leaving home. You can hear from expert speakers from across Australia while sitting at your desk using your computer or mobile device such as an iphone or ipad. You can listen to the presentation either via your computer through VOIP or by dialling in on your phone. You can also ask questions during the webinar either by typing them into your computer or raising your virtual hand to ask a question verbally.

All Leading Sheep webinars are recorded and loaded onto [www.leadingsheep.com.au](http://www.leadingsheep.com.au) in case you can't make the live event, you can go back and listen at any time.

## How do I register to receive invites for webinars?

To receive email notifications about upcoming webinars, join the Leading Sheep mailing list at [www.leadingsheep.com.au](http://www.leadingsheep.com.au). Register for the webinar via the link in the invitation email. Keep your registration confirmation email as it has your link to join the webinar on day it is being broadcast.



John Ford regularly connects to webinars from his property and urges others to take the time to discover how simple it is to join in the interactive, online sessions.



# Embracing innovation to make sheep handling easier on-property

**Mungindi prime lamb producers Ranald and Noela Warby believe those in agriculture need to embrace innovation and technology, especially if it saves labour costs and reduces the physicality of on-property work.**

The couple run a Dohne prime lamb operation on their 4000ha property, Barrakee, on the Queensland/New South Wales border. They introduced Dohne rams from Roseville Park, Dubbo to their Merino flock 12 years ago, with the aim of turning off prime lambs and maintaining an average of 19-20 micron wool.

The flock has been pure Dohne for the past seven years and Mr Warby has now introduced rams from the Pye family's Calga stud at Coonamble.

In a good season they turn off prime lambs, but a run of dry years has forced them to shift focus and sell stores into local and interstate feedlots, including an operation at Murray Bridge in South Australia.

Like many family operations in regional Australia, the couple handled the bulk of the daily work on the property themselves, only bringing in contractors as necessary for jobs, like crutching.

But the couple are staunch advocates of innovation and new technology and Mr Warby credits Leading Sheep with helping producers, like him, keep up with advances in handling equipment and on-property practices that ultimately make his operation more efficient.

"Leading Sheep offers practical advice, knowledgeable speakers and good demonstrations, and it's good to get out and meet up with other producers and have time off the property while still gaining knowledge," he said.

Last year they put this commitment to embracing technology in action, purchasing an Arrow V-Express handler to reduce handling, save labour and offset some of the more physically taxing elements of sheep work.

The V-Express is a portable sheep handler that features hydraulic belts on either side that move the sheep along in single file, enabling



*Ranald Warby is a staunch advocate of innovation and credits Leading Sheep with helping producers, like him, keep up with advances like the sheep handling equipment pictured here.*

the producer or contractor to mouth, drench, vaccinate, tag and backline before tipping them on their backs to crutch, scan or trim their feet.

Today Mr Warby is a convert to the benefits of the machine saying it has allowed him to perform a number of tasks on his sheep in just one pass. Gone, too, are the days of fighting rams in a race when drenching and the usual tired back after a day of crutching lambs.

"In one afternoon I crutched, vaccinated and drenched 300 ewe weaners in the V-Express with one person helping, and it wasn't hard work at all. At the end of the day, I had three jobs accomplished," Mr Warby said.

"With the sheep up off the ground they're not fighting you, and you can also tip them onto their backs quite simply and easily and work on them at bench height."

Previously he would have crutched the sheep on the board as part of a job that would have included his entire 2000 head flock, with the contract help of two or three crutchers and a rouseabout.

Mr Warby bought his machine last year and set it to one side of an undercover drafting pen, ensuring that sheep flow smoothly through the drafting race and up a low 50cm ramp into

the V-Express, which measures approximately 90cm wide and 3m long.

It was his experience with a Harrington sheep handler many years ago that encouraged him to purchase the V-Express.

"A Harrington sales rep wanted a place to park his machine while he visited some clients so he left it here. I drenched 5000 ewes with it and found it to be very useful," Mr Warby said.

Over the past three years he has employed contractors with VE machines to pregnancy scan his ewes, because the contractor said he found it more efficient to have the ewes on their backs for scanning.

"The V-Express made that easy. As the ewes are coming along between the two belts, you place your hand on their chest and tip them over onto their backs without a struggle as the belts move them forward," Mr Warby said.

The V-Express is operated by a foot controller. The conveyor belts make a V shape that can be narrowed to contain shorn sheep or widened for woolly sheep, and the user has full control over the forwards and backwards motion.

"There are also hock restraints for crutching and when you're finished, you just reverse the



*Ranald Warby is a convert to the benefits of sheep handling equipment as it has allowed him to perform a number of tasks on his sheep in just one pass and has off-set some of the more physically taxing elements of sheep work.*

belts slightly so the restraints release and the sheep are free to go," Mr Warby explained.

The machine is driven by a quiet hydraulic motor available in both electric and petrol versions and on 6m hoses, so it can be placed well away from the working area.

While Mr Warby says it is difficult to quantify how much money or how many hours of work the V-Express has saved, he believes the machine's major benefit has been enabling him to perform a multitude of tasks on a sheep at one time with minimum physical effort.

He says it's not accurate to estimate the cost of the V-Express verses hiring in contractors, because with the latter he would run through his entire mob of 2000 head and cost/per head rates come back the more stock numbers handled. In contrast the V-Express allows producers to tackle jobs with smaller mobs.

"The benefit is in the reduced physical effort on the bloke doing the job and the reduced stress on the sheep from using the conveyor belt, which are hard to quantify in dollar figures."

He says one benefit of the V-Express is the ability to do several jobs at once but he needs another person to keep the sheep coming through to him.

"It definitely makes the work easier. For example, our rams weigh up to 130kg fully grown, but when they're in the belts they don't fight at all. Then they are at bench height and we can tag, crutch, drench and put a backline over their heads to prevent flystrike, all in one go."

- Ranald and Noela Warby run 2000 Dohne sheep on their 4000ha property, Barrakee, at Mungindi.
- They generally turn off prime lambs, but recent dry seasons have seen them sell stores into local and interstate feedlots.
- Last year they introduced a V-Express handler to reduce handling, labour requirements and the physicality of regular sheep handling jobs.

