



FLOCK TALK



Leading Sheep

– equipping progressive and thriving producers for the future

Have you thought about a career in the sheep and wool industry? This edition of Flock Talk focuses on a couple of different ways you too can get involved in the industry.

The first is a story about a young shearer from Barcaldine, who is now running his own shearing team. Andrew Ross gives his tips for becoming a shearer and why he loves it and reckons others should try shearing.

In the second story, Dave Owens talks about how he turned his dream of owning his own property into a reality. And in particular how he set up his own crutching team to finance the property and give him cash flow.

Hopefully these two stories will inspire you to get involved in the sheep and wool industry – who knows you may just love it!



Members of the regional Leading Sheep committee voting for future priorities of Leading Sheep

On another note members of the three regional Leading Sheep committees met in Charleville a couple of months ago to identify their priorities for Leading Sheep's future. This information was presented to the project advisory panel who used it (as well as other sources) to determine the vision, objectives and targets of a 'new' Leading Sheep project.

Thanks to all those who were involved in these meetings and to the many others across Queensland who provided their feedback via a phone or on-line survey. Your thoughts and ideas are appreciated and were used to shape the direction of Leading Sheep going forward. Watch this space for more details about the future priorities for Leading Sheep.

You can connect with Leading Sheep on Facebook and join our mailing list at www.leadingsheep.com.au.

Nicole Sallur, editor, Leading Sheep project manager and senior extension officer
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Barcaldine tradie swaps wood for wool

Barcaldine's Andrew Ross is candid when asked why he became a shearer. It was about money, and he jokingly adds, proving to his mum he could endure the heat and hard work.

The young tradie from western Queensland was a qualified cabinet maker before he opted to follow in his father's footsteps and become a shearer. He hasn't looked back since.

He is one of a growing number of young people joining the wool industry as sheep make a comeback across the state.

"I took a break from cabinet making to work in the sheds for my parents' contracting business," he said.

"Then, a couple of New Zealand shearers who were working in the team started to teach me to shear and I really enjoyed it.

"So I asked Dad if I could work in the shed as a shearer and he happily offered me a shearing job in his team. Mum wasn't quite as keen on the idea, she didn't think I would handle working in the heat."

But in the two years since he stepped on the board he hasn't seriously thought about returning to his first trade.



Andrew Ross from Barcaldine loves being a shearer and encourages anyone who is interested to give it a go.

"When sheep numbers started falling a decade or so ago so did the jobs in the industry, but now as sheep numbers increase so are the opportunities for employment, particularly because there aren't that many shearers around now," Mr Ross said.

"The drought had a big impact on sheep numbers, but good winter rain and the construction of exclusion fencing to protect sheep from wild dogs, has resulted in more sheep coming back into the region.

"More shearers are needed here right now. In the past we have had to split into two teams to meet the demand from industry and it is looking like it will reach that stage again."

Shearing is not just another job for the young western Queenslander, who says the 'social' environment of the shed makes it more than a workplace.

"I really enjoy it as a job. You are meeting new people all the time and there is a great sense of satisfaction when you complete one shed and head on to the next.

"I also like the travel: you are shearing in a new environment, a new place, every week.

"People come from all over Australia and even across the world to work in the sheds so you make new connections from anywhere."

Then there is the issue of economics: the former tradie says working as a shearer pays 'significantly' better than cabinet making.

"You just can't beat the money and because shearers are low in numbers in the industry at the moment they are in demand, so the job security is great."

It is one of the reasons he has become a quietly spoken advocate of the industry.

"If you have a good work ethic and want to give it a go and get involved there are a lot of job opportunities. Just in our team alone, we are always looking for rouseabouts or wool pressers to fill in.

Why try shearing?

- Increasing job opportunities as sheep numbers rise.
- Shearing can pay more than conventional trades, like cabinet making.
- Shearers are in demand so job security is high.

"They can be long, hot days, but doing a job well and being paid well can be very rewarding."

He has now taken over his parents' team and is committed to encouraging others to get involved in the industry.

"I am loving it. It is a great industry to be a part of and if anyone out there is interested I would really recommend giving it a go."

Watch this short video (2mins 40secs) to hear more from Andrew Ross about why he recommends anyone giving shearing a go: <http://bit.ly/2fZeuyH>



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FLOCK TALK



Right starter business can help you buy your own rural property

Like a lot of young people working in rural industry, Longreach's Dave Owens dreamed of buying his own property. Today his dream is a reality thanks to some strategic business ventures.

The western Queensland sheep and wool producer advises others with the same life goals to be prepared to start in businesses with a quick monetary turn-over, like shearing, sheep trading and selling wool.

Today he owns Somerset, a 10,000ha grazing property, 70kms south of Longreach, running up to 8000 Merino ewes. For the past nine years he has also operated his own contract crutching team travelling and working throughout western Queensland.

He admits managing two businesses at once could be challenging, but he credits an ability to juggle a hectic schedule with helping him achieve his goal of buying his own property.

"There are so many opportunities to get ahead in the wool industry. Before I bought my own place, I was trading sheep because they were affordable and were a more reliable option than cattle – there has always been money in them," Mr Owens said.

"If you start off creating quick turn-overs through sheep trading, shearing and selling wool it can help you get ahead and it was these businesses that helped me make enough money to buy Somerset.

"When I first bought Somerset it was a low input property with nearly every paddock having



Longreach's Dave Owens turned his dream of buying his own property into a reality by starting out in a business with a quick monetary turn-over.

access to an open water source. So this meant I was able to keep travelling away with my contracting business, because I could be gone for five to six days and know the sheep had access to water.

"It also meant I had a profitable off-farm business. The income I was receiving from contract crutching gave me a quick cash flow and having that second income meant the bank took me seriously. It also allowed me to develop and make improvements on Somerset, which meant I could grow that side of my business financially."

When it came to property ownership, Mr Owens said a focus on improving sheep production rates proved a key driver to increasing profitability. He is also a staunch advocate of

effective record keeping, both on-property and in the office.

"From the start it is important to keep an eye on costs: you need to crunch hard numbers. It's also a good idea to speak to someone else in the business who has had some experience and tips for keeping on top of expenses," he said.

"For example, when I first started out, I spent a lot of time with stock on agistment before I realised the finances weren't working out for my business. If you're going to get into the agricultural game, work out your numbers and finances first. It can make a major difference to success or failure, especially when you are first starting out."

At a personal level he said operating multiple businesses has also allowed him to spread risk to a certain extent and there was an upside to juggling the roles of sole producer and running a contracting team.

Looking forward, Mr Owen has plans to continue to improve his Merino flock and expand his property portfolio. And his advice for those weighing up a future in agriculture?

"To get ahead you really have to love the industry. It's a tough environment but can pay off if you work smart."

Watch this short video (4mins 28 secs) to learn more from Dave Owens about owning his own property and running a contract crutching business: <http://bit.ly/2guJPK2>



Three tips for buying your own property

- Start in a business with a quick, monetary turn-over, eg shearing, sheep trading
- Be prepared to continue to work off-farm
- Be an effective record keeper, and develop your financial knowledge.

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