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Electronic ID improves flock record keeping

- Electronic identification tags have improved stud flock record keeping of weight, micron, breeding history and classing records.
- Enabled selection for performance and genetic gain.
- Resulted in production gains from 5kg/head of broader wool to 4.5kg/head of quality 17-18 micron wool.

Name: Bim Goodrich

Property: Waroo, Inglewood

Enterprise: Wool, cattle, commercial fruit

Size: 3240 hectares

Sheep: 450 stud ewes, 3550 commercial ewes



Bim Goodrich has started using electronic identification (EID) tags in his stud sheep flock which has improved productivity and record keeping.

Accuracy and speed of record keeping were the key reasons for Traprock grazier Bim Goodrich to start using electronic identification (EID) tags in his sheep flock, and he is happy with the results.

The producer from south east Queensland said EID tags have allowed him to improve the control of his stud flock information and as a result bolstered returns.

For the past decade, the Goodrichs have fitted 450 Merino ewes from their Waroo Stud with EID ear tags enabling them to measure wool performance and genetic gain.

“The accuracy of information from EID tags combined with the expertise of our sheep classer have improved our wool from cutting five kilos of a broader, ropey style wool to 4.5kg of good quality, 17-18 micron fleece,” he said.

The Goodrich Family Trust runs a stud operation of 450 ewes, along with 3550 commercial ewes on 3240 hectares between Inglewood and Stanthorpe, along with a Red Angus cattle herd and a commercial fruit orchard.



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Mr Goodrich first saw electronic recording in April 2007, when he attended a Precision Sheep Management master class run by the Sheep Co-operative Research Centre in Orange, New South Wales.

The event was one of the first to showcase the potential of EID ear tags for quick and accurate recording in sheep amongst other new wool industry technology.

“They also had innovative self-drafting systems, user-friendly computer software and readers, and delivered advice on keeping individual sheep records, mothering up lambs etc,” Mr Goodrich said.

“I came home with big plans and tagged all 4000 ewes with radio frequency identifier (RFID) ear tags, but the system wasn’t as easy to use as it looked.”

He said given the size of his family’s commercial operation applying the technology on a commercial scale was difficult to justify.

“We just didn’t have the staff or time to get the benefits from it, to wool test all the sheep or collect the RFID bar codes and records to follow it through,” Mr Goodrich said.

In the following years, average wool prices combined with dry seasonal conditions made it difficult to consider reintroducing the EID tags in their commercial flock, but the Goodrichs persevered with the technology in their stud ewes.

“We’ve found the individual EID tags allowed us to speed up the information recall and accuracy of data input for each ewe, for things like weight, micron, breeding history and classing records,” Mr Goodrich said.

The family have also invested in an automated three-way drafter that Mr Goodrich says has further improved the efficiency of record keeping.

“We paid \$20,000 for a Thompson Longhorn Sheep Handler made locally in Warwick and it has proved an excellent investment,” he said.

“We enter the drafting code for the different lines of sheep into the reader and when it automatically reads a sheep’s EID tag as it moves through the race, you know it’s accurate.”

On Warroo the stud sheep are tagged with EID tags at lambmarking, when they are around three months old.

“They’re good, solid tags and are easy to read, easy to reach and cost around 25 cents per sheep,” Mr Goodrich said.

“Some of our stud ewes are up to 10 years old and still have the same tag they had as lambs. Overall we probably get around 2 per cent (EID) tag loss each year as a result of the tags pulling out.”



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For the past three years the Goodrichs have been trialling Allflex foldover RFID tags on 3000 wethers and have previously hosted trials for retention and readability tags in their cattle herd as well.

As for the future of electronic identification tags, the Queensland producer believes it is a case for individual producers to decide the best fit for their enterprise when it comes to selecting EID tags, readers and drafting systems.

He said his personal experience with stud ewes was EID tags could improve the speed, ease and accuracy of flock record keeping.

He advised other producers to consult with groups like Leading Sheep, to source reliable information on the latest technology and regulations in the sheep and wool industry.