

# Mt Ronan launches producers group

By **TAMARA HOOPER**

THE pinnacle of any farming enterprise is efficiency across all facets of the business, it is how each individual is able to achieve their goals that sets them apart.

For Mount Ronan Maternals principal Guy Bowen the enterprise focus is firmly on their livestock production system and how they can pass on their years of intensive research and benefits to their clients and fellow breeders.

With this in mind Mr Bowen launched the Mount Ronan Prime Lamb Producer Group on Monday, on-farm in York.

It is believed to be the first producer group of its kind in WA, and all attendees were producers who purchased and bred the Mount Ronan Maternal bloodline.

"The Mount Ronan Prime Lamb Producer Group will be proactive and interactive in nature and will provide opportunities for members to access the latest research and development initiatives in the specialist prime lamb industry," Mr Bowen said.

He said the group also offered the potential for Mount Ronan feeder/breeder lamb sales with the added benefits of having a branded product.

"Lambs could be offered on AuctionsPlus, and can be sold anywhere in Australia without leaving the vendor's property until after sale and would be described by a certified assessor for AuctionsPlus," he said.

It also offered the opportunity for specialisation by lamb producers, growers and finishers, and a closer link with processors with scope for better feedback.

Mr Bowen said the precedent had been set by Lambpro, NSW, and it was working very well.

"Ultimately we see involvement with the group providing producers with a wider range of marketing

options," he said.

"Product branding will definitely result in the achievement of market premiums, especially when vehicles such as AuctionsPlus are utilised."

The day offered a range of information from the Mount Ronan research program, which is focused on identification of individual ewe efficiency and profitability.

The ensuing forum involved discussion from delegates including Beth Paganoni, the Department of Agriculture and Food, and Andrew Thompson, Murdoch University, relating to the issues of sheep enterprise profitability.

Ms Paganoni discussed the idea of maternal and feed efficiencies, with maternal referring to the ewe rather than the breed.

With the idea of measuring maternal efficiency still very much in the research stage Ms Paganoni was able to draw on data collected over the past five years from their Merino research flock at Pingelly, which they referred to as their Maternal Efficiency Flock (MEF).

"We are looking at the efficiency rating in a commercial sense, where there is the potential of eventually having a scale system, much like that on fridges and washing machines for energy and water efficiency, at sale," she said.

"The ways to improve maternal efficiency are definitely through genetics and management.

"Our research is correlated on kilogram weight of the lamb weaned to per kilogram weight of the ewe at joining."

She said a main factor was the input cost of feed, hence their focus on feed efficiency.

Mr Bowen said the Maternal Index was not an accurate representation of their breeding objectives.

"Tom Bull, Lambpro, is refining a more appropriate



□ Ken Atherton (left), Williams, Andrew Daw, Ravensthorpe, David Millstead, Wongan Hills, Sam Lubcke, Manypeaks, and Mount Ronan's Guy Bowen in the yards post the forum and presentations, looking over some of the Mount Ronan Maternal lambs.

index which we will use for our spring ram sale catalogue," he said.

"This index will place a negative selection pressure on adult weight and positive selection pressure on weaning weight, fat, muscle, fertility and milking ability."

The forum also opened up the floor for the attendees to discuss their individual experiences and what they wanted more information and feedback on.

Mark Smith, Merredin, said he had been able to hear from and talk to other producers from different areas and with different production systems.

Murdoch graduate and Mount Ronan client Sam Lubcke, Manypeaks, was fully behind the producer group idea.

"I like the idea of starting from the grass roots, instead of being dictated to from big business," she said.

"It also offers us the opportunity to get feedback, which is notoriously hard to do as individual producers."

As a producer buying the Mount Ronan rams, Ken Atherton, Williams, wanted to gain insight into where the Bowens were placing emphasis within their genetics.

"Today's presentation and forum showed me a lot of this," he said.

Andrew Daw, Ravensthorpe, believes the producer group has fantastic potential.

"The producer group is a great idea and gives us the ability to be able to buy and sell lambs amongst like-minded breeders," he said.

"Occasionally you might want to sell some lambs before they reach market weights or buy some in, this group offers us a guaranteed network."

About 25 people attended the day from as far afield as Gingin and Merredin through to Ravensthorpe and Manypeaks.

Mr Bowen said more breeders wanted to be involved in the group but were unable to attend the first forum.

"I was very satisfied with the event and it was wonderful to see producers interacting and sharing ideas," he said.

"The key objective of the producer group will be the maximisation of lamb enterprise profitability for its members.

"I am very excited about the development of this initiative.

"I firmly believe it will grow legs of its own and very quickly.

"Some producers travelled long distances to attend and we acknowledge their commitment with gratitude."