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Wool 2000

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The Wool 2000 Market Awareness Workshops have been a highly successful venture by Agriculture Western Australia and the International Wool Secretariat. In the past two years over 35 workshops have been held in about as many locations in the southern half of Western Australia, from Gascoyne Junction to Esperance. Steve Tunbridge reports on some outcomes from the workshops.

The Wool 2000 workshops have attracted over 1000 wool growers and wool industry personnel. These workshops are part of the Wool Strategy Group's initiatives to position the Western Australian Wool Industry as a recognised leader in the production of consistently high quality wool which meets the specifications of end-users.

The Wool 2000 Market Awareness Workshops were based on the extremely successful Muresk Marketing Skills Program and designed to support wool growers by providing accurate information on market requirements.

The workshops were a balanced mixture of practical hands-on sessions and presentations led by Dr John Stanton and Dr Sue Hatcher, with assistance from the district wool specialist officer. The workshop was divided into four sessions, taking participants on a journey through the wool pipeline, starting as a customer purchasing a woollen garment and tracing the steps back to the weaver and spinner, to the topmaker and relating their specifications to the raw wool produced on-farm.

World markets and consumer trends
The first session looked at the major markets for Australian wool and its competitors. It also gave an insight into the principles of marketing wool and what drives the demand for our wool. How product orders are placed by the garment manufacturers to the weavers and knitters, and in turn to the spinners, who then place an order to the topmaker, their buyers then purchase the appropriate wool types.

In addition customer trends and needs were examined. Wool has a positive image although it is perceived to be traditional. Consumers want casual, lightweight, comfortable, easy wear, soft and natural fabrics. All qualities that wool can provide.

In the practical part of the session, participants were given a range of fabrics and asked to rate them on the basis of comfort and appearance. And then identify what each fabric was made from.

The properties of wool fabrics and its major competitors
The most important wool quality for the fabric maker is fibre fineness. The fibre diameter of the raw wool has greatest influence here, affecting the weight, drape and feel of the fabric. Participants were introduced to terms such as yarn weight, neps, ply and twists per metre, found out what a 2/48's yarn is, and then shown how to calculate the yarn weight in a piece of fabric.

A yarn is described in terms of the number of yarns twisted together to form a multiple ply yarn, and its weight, which is measured in terms of number of metres per gram of yarn. The higher this number, the lighter is the yarn. A 2/48's yarn means it is a two-ply yarn, with each single yarn measuring 48 metres per gram of yarn.

Wool processing
There are two main processing systems - the worsted system and the woolen system. Participants were shown how greasy wool fibres are cleaned, carded, and combed into wool top, and then on to yarn. The whole process is all about removing contaminants, blending and re-aligning the wool fibres.

Worsted system uses fine, long stapled wools with low levels of vegetable matter contamination (burrs and seeds) to produce fine smooth finished products such as suitings and fashion fabrics.
Woolen system uses shorter, coarser stapled wools with higher levels of vegetable matter contamination, to produce heavier, hairier products such as upholstery, bulky knitwear, blankets, flannels and tweed.

Yarn specifications

The most important description of yarn is weight and it is expressed as the length of yarn from one gram of singles yarn. This session covered the interactions between fibres in cross section, fibre diameter, fibre length of the top (hauteur) and how they affect the weight of the yarn and efficiency of processing the yarn.

Top specifications

The final session of the day related top specifications to the raw wool produced on-farm. For the topmaker fibre, diameter and hauteur are the most important parameters in determining the quality of the top. Wool growers found this session to be the most interesting. In the practical session, wool growers used their own wool test results to calculate the predicted hauteur of a line of their wool. It highlighted the areas where management changes could lead to improvement in wool processing performance.

Hauter can be predicted from raw wool measurements. So factors affecting these parameters can have an effect on hauter; this is the reason topmakers blend wools to produce a top to a specified hauter.

The aims of the evaluation were to find out:
1. what wool growers thought of the workshop;
2. whether the workshop was worthwhile, in terms of having an impact on wool management on-farm; and
3. what information would they like next.

The questionnaire was prepared by Steve Tunbridge and Ian McFarland, in consultation with Don Burnside and Colin McDonald. The questionnaire was sent to 10 wool growers for their comments before being sent out to other wool growers. The questionnaire was sent to about half of the participants of the first two series of the workshops.

A total of 112 (49 per cent) responses were returned. This is a good response given that no follow up reminders were sent out.

What did participants think of the workshop?

The workshop format of talks with hands on practical sessions was very successful. Comments such as “like the workshop approach, working out things in a practical way” and “an outstanding ‘know your product, know your industry’ exercise. Well pitched and well put together” summed up the reactions of participants to the workshop.

Hauter = 0.52 x L + 0.47 x S + 0.95 x D - 0.45 x VM - 0.19 x M - 3.5

where

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L</th>
<th>staple length</th>
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<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>staple strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>diameter</td>
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<tr>
<td>VM</td>
<td>vegetable matter</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>position of break over 45 per cent</td>
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How do you view the effectiveness of the International Wool Secretariat?

On the question relating to the effectiveness of the International Wool Secretariat in marketing wool, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being extremely effective and 5 being not effective, the average was 3.16.

Nearly 80 per cent of respondents had talked to other wool growers about information from the workshop.

How do you view the effectiveness of the International Wool Secretariat?

On the question relating to the effectiveness of the International Wool Secretariat in marketing wool, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being extremely effective and 5 being not effective, the average was 3.16.
What further information would you like?
Virtually all respondents want more information on wool marketing and production.

When asked what were their three most important topics, and awarding 3 points for the 1st priority, 2 points for 2nd, and 1 point for 3rd priority, the top five topics were:
- Increasing wool cut per ha, $/ha,
- What the market wants,
- Managing the quality of your wool,
- How to choose the best strategy to sell your wool,
- How to price your wool, setting reserves on your wool.

How would you like this information presented and what is the best time to present it?
The workshop format was the most popular choice for delivery of the information, and the best times to present it were either early in the year (February to April) or later after seeding has been completed (July to August).

Summary.
The Wool 2000 Market Awareness Workshops have been a very successful venture. Participants found the workshop format, particularly the practical sessions, a very good means of gaining new information. As one participant commented “Hands on activities, calculating hauteur and feeling the other fabrics stick in our minds more than the talking.”

The workshops were not designed to provide wool growers with a set of recipes or take home messages. The program was developed to provide insights into market requirements, use of specification in processing and the importance of on-farm production. This evaluation has shown that participants have related what was discussed at the workshops to their own wool production. An example of this is the on-farm factors affecting hauteur and their implications to early stage processing. Wool growers recognised the importance of hauteur and are implementing management changes such as shearing time to improve wool characteristics that affect hauteur, for example, staple strength and percentage of mid-breaks.

Looking to the future, participants are wanting to improve productivity in terms of dollars per hectare. The WOOLPRO Project that has recently been launched, will assist wool growers to achieve this goal. Also the Wool Program’s ‘Breeding Better Merinos’ will identify the gains that can be achieved through breeding strategies.

The Kondinin Group has recently conducted via satellite to 15 telecentres from Carnarvon to Ravensthorpe an education and training program for wool growers and agribusiness advisers to improve their understanding and use of price risk management techniques such as futures trading and forward selling.

So issues raised during the workshops and highlighted in this evaluation are being addressed. To conclude, two comments from participants which typify the response to the Wool 2000 Market Awareness Workshop.

“Best wool day I have ever attended.”

“It is the first time I have been able to gain information on processing and the needs of mills.
Best advice the Department of Agriculture has ever supplied to wool growers.”

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