

Consumer focused White Suffolks dominate Sydney

In terms of breeding evolution, the White Suffolk sheep breed is still very young, yet it continues to achieve major industry recognition on a regular basis. Officially founded in only 1985, White Suffolks have risen to be one of the top terminal breeds in the country based on any form of assessment.

This was further highlighted at last week's Sydney Royal Easter Show when the White Suffolks dominated by winning all three major interbreed awards. Ian and Donna Gilmore and family, Tattykeel White Suffolks, Oberon, NSW had a day to remember when they initially dominated the breed judging, winning all four broad ribbons, but then went on to greater success. They won Supreme Prime Lamb Ewe, Supreme Prime Lamb Ram with their White Suffolk breed champions and then won the Supreme Group (1 ram and 2 ewes) of the show. Their winning group was made up of all milk tooth sheep, none of which were their broad ribbon winners, demonstrating that White Suffolks do have early growth and muscling and can compete with other breeds that are dropped earlier. Adrian Veitch, one of the panel of judges who made these decisions said when announcing the interbreed group winners, "This is very easy; it comes down to muscling and the White Suffolks win hands down". Because of this age difference, it is rare that milk tooth White Suffolks gain interbreed success this early in the year, which makes the achievement of winning the maximum possible interbreed result even more meritorious.

However it is not one Royal Show success that highlights the breed's overall success. White Suffolks have already accumulated a whole swag of these awards at Royal and other major shows right around the country. The major reason for the breed's incredible growth and commercial acceptance has been its collective decision to focus on commercial relevance through the use of objective measurement to identify and more widely use superior breeding animals. The fact that major show success has also followed dispels the myth that today's show ring has no relevance to the commercial industry.

The White Suffolk breed's official stance has always been that showing presents an ideal opportunity to present its product before prospective breeders as a commercially relevant option. The flow on commercial demand is now so strong that until spring ram sale offerings come on line, it is currently quite difficult to source quality White Suffolk rams from almost anywhere Australia wide.

The White Suffolk breed instigated the display of objective information on all show sheep at major shows; something now followed by some other breeds. It also introduced non trimming, a skill that could mask the true make-up of the animal. Due to the positive commercial reaction, this also has now been adopted by other breeds as they have moved to retain commercial relevance.

The progressive attitude of the White Suffolk breed was highlighted at its recent national conference at Ballarat. At this conference a top group of selected speakers presented the latest breeding and management options to achieve greater productivity and profitability, challenging current methods and opening doors to even more rapid progression. The overwhelming endorsement of these options, which are focused on producing more live lambs that grow quickly, have higher yields and most importantly produce an enjoyable eating experience for the consumer, was an indication of how the breed has achieved its success to date and that it is likely to continue to gain further growth and market share.

With the advancements in Genomics it is envisaged that future selections will be able to be made by DNA sampling; identifying top animals while also allowing identification and removal of negative outliers; sheep that are exceptional in some areas but also have correlated negative outcomes to consumer satisfaction.

The breed management committee, which coincidentally saw Ian Gilmore elected to that board at Ballarat, also sees the breed being a major contributor to the prime lamb maternal flock in the future. Many traditional maternal breed options have been very slow to accept objective measurement as a way to progress and as this sector equates to 50% of the prime lamb equation, the breed now has a gene pool large enough to select specific sire lines that are strong for either terminal and/or maternal traits.

For more information contact – Secretary, Australian White Suffolk Association, Adelaide Showground on (08) 8210 5231.



Pictured is Tattykeel's Supreme Champion Group from the 2010 Sydney Royal Easter Show. Holding the ewe on the right is Principal Ian Gilmore, while his son Braydon holds the other ewe. Martin Gilmore holds the ram. All these sheep were milk tooth only. Tattykeel also won the Supreme Prime Lamb Sire and Dam awards with other White Suffolks, making it a clean sweep of all major interbreed awards.

