

# Charollais In Australia an Update

Ian McDougal reports on  
the progress on the breed in  
Australia and NZ



It is now 5 years since the first Charollais embryos were implanted in Australia. While initial progress was slow – mostly due to the droughts of 2006 and 2007, since joining forces with Colin and Heather Hilsdon and son Anthony (some of you may remember Anthony who had a Charollais flock at Middleton Stony, near Bicester) ewe numbers have swelled to 250 and the quality of the stock on offer has improved enormously.

The flock now resides at “Danengate”, 4 miles north of Hamilton, in the western districts of Victoria. With a mediterranean climate and an annual average rainfall of 24 inches it is ideal Charollais sheep country and the western districts are one of Australia’s key prime lamb producing regions.

Over the past two years we have flushed over 100 ewes resulting in a significant improvement in the quality of lambs produced. All stock are “Lambplan recorded” (very similar to Signet recording). Raw data sees our top rams scanning 40 - 43 mm eye muscle, 4-5.5mm fat, 60 – 78kg live weight. No concentrates of any form are fed, ie all lambs are reared at grass.

Lambs drop outside in June and July – early to mid winter (we try to avoid August which can be very cold with sleet at times). Mortality at lambing is weather dependent, but if weather is not atrocious we lose less than 10%. A big selling point for Charollais in Australia (and now New Zealand) is their easy lambing versus breeds such as the Poll Dorset, White Suffolk and Texel.

*More >>>*

During 2009 we exported small quantities of genetics to both New Zealand and Brazil and hope to expand both of these markets. It is interesting how much the demands of each market differ. New Zealand farmers are paid on meat content so look to maximize carcass yield whilst not compromising growth rate, lamb mortality and other management traits whereas Australian farmers look for easy lambing and fast growth rates but no payment is based on conformation or meat yield – frustrating.

Overtime we see that profitability will relate directly to lean meat yield per hectare combined with important traits such as easy lambing, clean on points, resistance to both internal parasites and fly strike. With 2 - 3000 ewes per labour unit (additional contract labour for key tasks) sheep must be easy to manage. We think that the Charollais go a long way towards ticking these boxes.

Today with any reasonable slaughter lamb bringing AUD\$5.00/kg dead weight (£3.00 / kg) and skins AUD\$10.00 each there are no real pressures on Australian farmers to strive for premium quality. But agriculture being cyclical, before we know it only quality lamb will command top prices and Charollais will have to be delivering the goods. Over the next 2-3 years we hope to begin utilising the CT scanner and DEXA technology to further advance the genetic progress of Charollais in Australia and New Zealand.

Ultimately the proof of the quality of lamb is in the eating. Colin and Heather Hilsdon along with son and talented chef Michael run the gourmet café restaurant “Catalpa”, based at Tarrington 4 miles from Hamilton. Charollais lamb is currently on the menu and is keenly and repeatedly sought after. The ultimate advertisement for any breed.

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