

The National Merino flock: A true success story 20 years of performance recording and BLUP breeding

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Breeding improvement based on performance recording and BLUP breeding values steered the South African Merino into the frontiers of performance excellence and economic competence.

Since 1985 economic factors favour the selection of fine woolled sheep. The challenge for sheep breeders was then to decrease fibre diameter while at least maintaining, if not increasing, meat (body weight) and wool (clean fleece weight) production.

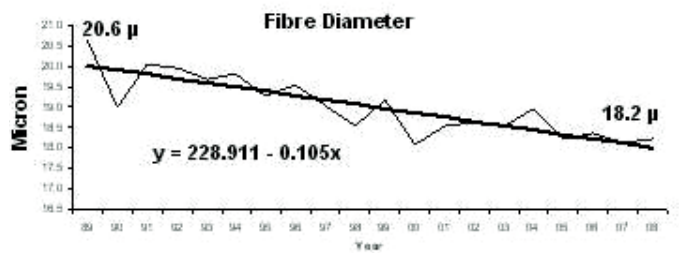
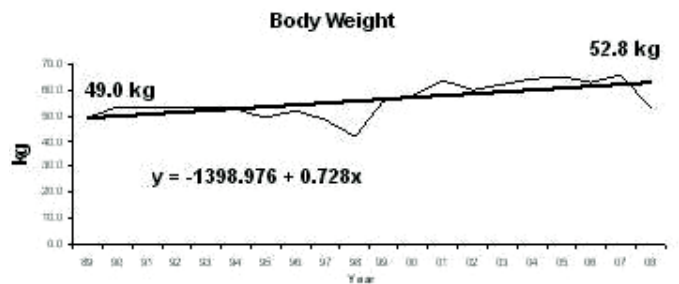
Production changes in the South African Merino industry from 1989 to 2009 indicate a success story in terms of breeding improvement towards market trend.

The average fibre diameter for the National Merino flock as illustrated by the data submitted to the SA Fleece Testing Center, declined systematically from 20.6 micron to 18.2 micron over the past two decades. This breeding success for finer wool may even be more pronounced when considering that the average body weight increased from 49.0 to 52.8 kg. Together herewith clean fleece weight remained constant at approximately 3.1 kg.

In a recent paper delivered at the World Conference on Animal Production, Schoeman and co-workers stated that genetic improvement in the Merino breed resulted in a R5.27 return per small stock unit over the past 7 years.

Attributable to the accumulated effect of genetic improvement, performance recording is the best investment for sustained profitable production of wool and meat to deliver products highly desired by clients and customers.

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Production changes in the South African Merino Breed from 1989 to 2008

