



Wool Testing Bureau S.A. services

by Wihan Heath

Company Profile

WTB is a Company limited by guarantee and, having no Shareholders, is neutrally positioned and committed to serve the entire wool industry in South Africa. WTB was incorporated on 26th June 1990 and provides sampling and testing services to the South African wool and textile industries. The Company is involved in the testing and research for purposes of certification of wool according to the requirements laid down by the International Wool Textile Organisation (IWTO) and to other international specifications.

The Company is a non-profit organisation. The income and the property of the company is applied solely towards the promotion of its main object of researching and testing of wool on behalf of the wool industry.

WTB is accredited to ISO/IEC 17025 by the South African National Accreditation System (SANAS Lab No T020) to issue certificates in accordance with the Regulations and Test Methods of the International Wool Textile Organisation (IWTO).

The Company is also a member of the Independent Laboratories Round Trials Group (ILRT), together with the three Australian Wool Testing Authority Ltd (AWTA Ltd) Laboratories, New Zealand Wool Testing Authority Ltd (NZWTA Ltd) and Wool Testing Authority Europe Ltd (WTAE). The ILRT Group conducts two trials per week and the outcomes of the analysis are reported to each participating laboratory, as well as to IWTO meetings.

Raw Wool Testing Services

Participation in international round trials within the ILRT group and internal quality control procedures ensure that a high level of technical proficiency is maintained at all times. WTB samples, tests and certifies all wool sold at auction in South Africa. During the 2006/2007 season, a total of 310,547 bales were sampled under supervision of WTB sampling officers. As with all forms of testing, the correct sampling of the bales forms an essential part of ensuring the integrity of the test result.

A total of 76,196 pre-sale lots were certified. Of these lots, a total of 22,990 were tested for staple length and strength. The adoption rate (expressed as the number of lots tested for staple measurement as a percentage of lots tested for yield and diameter) increased from 25.4% in 2005/2006 to 30.2% in 2006/2007. The season under review is also the first where all fibre diameter results were certified using Laserscan equipment, introduced on the 1st of July 2006. This ensures that the South African wool clip is certified using the same technology as the other major wool producing countries.

Fleece Testing Services

WTB offers a range of fleece testing services to growers, stud breeders and research institutions. These include:

- Mean Fibre Diameter
- Washing Yield
- Length and Strength (10 staples)
- Manual crimp and length

Fibre diameter and yield tests are conducted on a 20-gram sample (roughly the size of a coffee mug), taken from the mid-rib of the sheep. The mid-side tends to be the site most related to the average fibre diameter over the whole fleece, so it is best suited to testing for clip preparation, selection and genetic improvement purposes. Smaller samples will decrease the precision of the result. The sample size must be increased to approximately 30 grams when length and strength measurements on Atlas are requested.

During the 2006/2007 season a total of 64,884 fleece tests were performed for various growers and research institutions. Testing fees for fibre diameter only tests ranges from R 2.10 to R 3.90 per sample depending on the number of samples submitted and the service time required. Other services can be requested and are charged separately. As a result of the strong focus on productivity improvements, Fleece Testing fees remained unchanged for the 2006/2007 season.

All fleece scouring and drying equipment have been consolidated in a dedicated area to improve workflow efficiency. Additional projects are underway to improve laboratory software systems and introduce direct data capture systems utilising barcodes. These projects will be completed in the first quarter of 2008 and are expected to provide further productivity improvements.

For further information, contact us at 041 503 6600 or wtb@wtbsa.co.za.



Laserscan equipment



Fleece scouring and drying equipment