

President's Message in Focus 2023

“To be a farmer is to be a student forever, for each day brings something new”

John Connell.

What an apt description of farming. We have to overcome and persevere many different challenges on our path.

Looking back over 2023, we again realise that every season is different. Climatic conditions, especially in the more arid areas, have been superb. The very frequent falls were ideal for veld restoration. This remarkable recovery after several years of continual drought has been something to witness. The grain areas also had well above normal rainfall in most areas.

The general state of the world economy has played its part on our product prices. These negative sentiments have put immense pressure on both meat and wool prices. The positive here is that good quality, well classed, Merino wool still has a market while most Crossbred fibres have lost all demand. The sharply rising input costs is putting major strain on farm gate welfare of all our enterprises.

This year's Merino calendar was filled with Auctions, Shows, Flock competitions, a Merino Advisors' course and many exhibitions. Our stall area at Nampo was successfully upgraded to be the most eye catching of the Smallstock stalls. This stays one of the premier farming events on the calendar. It attracts thousands of feet and we should get good mileage from our investment. The Merino Week held in August with the National sale, AGM and function were well organised and enjoyed by all who attended. At Nampo Kaap, the Weskaap Merino show was held in September on the back of our highly successful Classic of 2022. Planning for the 2024 Merino Classic in Bloemfontein is already underway.

The genuine interest and enthusiasm of young commercial farmers in the Merino is one of the most exciting developments currently. We must all put effort into continuing this growth. The initiative of a breeder and agents to help farmers with sale catalogue interpretation and ram selection is an example of valuable practical support being given. The Ewe clubs are also a wonderful platform in this regard.

We continue to build on our Genomic database with the latest bleed of nearly 2000 animals nearing completion. The Condition scoring data which is now included in the BLUP evaluation is another first for Merinos in the small stock industry.

Currently it is a time of “Vasbyt” for sheep farmers. While we live in testing times, I truly believe there is much to be optimistic about for the future of the Merino industry.

A special word of thanks to Merino SA office personnel, Melanie Erlank and Willie van Heerden for their dedication and pleasant manner of running the organisation. To all of you reading this publication, enjoy the read and thank you for your endeavours in making the Merino the **“Benchmark Breed”**.

Season's Greetings

Adrian McNaughton