

Profit to be found in plain-bodied Merino

By CAITLYN WEST

ADJUSTING the way we regard and traditionally breed Merino sheep is the first step toward producing a Modern Merino.

Breeding a plain-bodied Merino can be a profitable enterprise according to five guest speakers, who presented at the Redesigning the Merino workshop, Morawa.

The event was organised by Challara Poll Merino stud principals Peter and Emma Wilkinson, and catered for by Morawa chef James Taylor.

A large crowd of more than 60 people attended the workshop to learn about the latest developments in the Merino industry.

Included in the 60 attendees was 20 students from the WA College of Agriculture, Morawa.

Mr Wilkinson said his aim was to show experienced farmers and the upcoming generation that there was still money to be made with Merinos.

"It came about because this time last year I was visiting a few clients and was very impressed with how their sheep were coming along," Mr Wilkinson said.

"But at that stage, there was a lot of negativity surrounding the sheep industry with exports, low prices and seasonal uncertainty.

"So I wanted it to be a commercial-grower based event to bring people together



More than 60 people attended the Challara Merino stud workshop in Morawa last week, which looked at re-designing the Merino.

and show them that things are improving and sheep can still be profitable.

"There is some very good research going on out there, so we gathered highly-respected guest speakers to let people know what's happening and inject some confidence back into the sheep industry."

He said the couple were always finding new ways to stretch the boundaries of what they traditionally thought a Merino could do, particularly with their stud flock.

The Wilkinsons were part of the SRS Merino group founded by sheep research scientist Jim Watts, who presented at the workshop and was the motivation behind the

Redesigning the Merino theme.

Dr Watts showed producers it was still possible to breed a plain-bodied sheep that was easy to manage and cut a lot of wool.

He said the Wilkinsons were one of three studs in WA belonging to the SRS Merino network who were all breeding plain-bodied sheep that were carefully selected for high fibre density and length.

"It's totally genetically-based breeding outcomes," Dr Watts said.

"Firstly, you breed a plain-bodied sheep which in turn gives you a more fertile ewe that has the ability to rear

more lambs that mature quicker.

"They are easier to shear, but one of the biggest benefits is its resistance to fly strike.

"Their plain breach means you don't have to mules them and there are no wrinkles to trap the urine droplets, saving you both time and money."

In the seven years since Dr Watts had presented in WA from his home town of Bowral, New South Wales, he said there has been a greater awareness and appreciation of breeding plain-bodied Merinos.

He spoke about another method to increase a sheep producer's bottom line and productivity, which involved shearing twice a year to boost

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