

Best of two worlds at Nambung

By **COURTNEY WALSH**

NAMBUNG station, West Badgingarra, has had a few feathers added to its cap since Brian White and his wife Gloria took on the place 16 years ago.

Leaving their home property at Miling to the charge of their sons, moving towards the coast meant quite the change in operational style for Brian.

But despite the change in climate zone, soil type and plenty of other factors, it didn't mean a change in sheep breed, as Brian elected to hold onto the trusty old Merino flock as the best option for utilising the 2500 arable acres of the 5000 available at Nambung.

"We've always been Merino people," Brian said.

"But we also run 140 breeding cattle which are predominantly Angus and Murray Grey and together the sheep and cattle utilise the pastures on the property very well."

The Merino flock has been based on Challara bloodlines for the past 10 years, during which time Brian has noticed improvements in the fertility of his sheep.

"We've got a very fertile flock now and we're seeing a lot of twins each year which is good for our lambing percentages," he said.

"I like the Challara sheep because they're not only fertile, but also really good doers and they have a nice plain body on them.

"It's ironic because years ago we had plain-bodied sheep and then made a decision to try and get a bit more skin onto them and we suffered for it, so now we've come full circle back to a plain-bodied animal.

"They're relatively easy care, they can still cut a lot of wool and the shearers love them – so I think we've got the ideal sort of sheep."



☐ Rain poured down on Brian White and his sheep at Nambung station, West Badgingarra, last week but you won't find him complaining.

It's no wonder the shearers love them, because Brian's flock gets a clip twice a year.

"We were finding the Challara sheep were getting over 100 millimetres in length and we started to get discounted so going to preferably an eight-month shearing is what we want to do, but depending on what you can work in, six months is an option too," he said.

"Eight-month shearing is challenging from a management perspective, so we just have to juggle a bit to make sure we're getting over the 70mm length if we can.

"I've always looked for free-growing, broad crimping wool but if you're going to grow that broad crimping wool then it'll be too long in 12 months."

So the flock has been getting shorn twice a year for the past three to four years.

"By doing the double shearing we don't have to crutch and we're getting two wool clips," Brian said.

"The average micron across the flock would be about 19 which I think is a good mark to be at because it's a nice middle road between finer micron and heavier wool cut."

With the combined shearing Brian said the flock is cutting more than five kilograms.

"We don't have exact figures any more because we're not keeping that close an eye on it, but just going on bale numbers and the total annual wool clip, it's up on what it used to be," he said.

The White family's sheep flock must also be fairly familiar with the inside of a stock crate, just as it must be familiar with the shearing team.

With two properties in different rainfall zones and with different feed types available to the family, it was a no-brainer to look at ways to effectively utilise both and moving the sheep was the natural fit.

"The family set up at Miling is almost entirely

cropping now, so I am usually looking after 1000-1200 Merino breeding ewes here at Nambung during the winter months," Brian said.

"When they come out here depends on how the season is tracking and then we send them back over to Miling after harvest so they can utilise the stubbles there.

"We find that system works very well."

Lambing percentages, in particular, have benefitted from the White family's decision to send the ewes towards the coast before lambing gets under way.

"Even though here we have a wetter climate, we've got a lot of scrub and rushes down in the flats which is a warm environment for the lambs," Brian said.

"I've found in comparison to further inland, we have better results at lambing time because of that more forgiving climate.

"We've also put out lick feeders so we don't need to go

out into the paddock too much to disturb them and 100 per cent plus is normal for us now.

"We used to battle to do that with Merinos back in Miling but there they were dealing with frost and cold winds with less protection on the ground, so it seems to be a much better environment for lambing here."

Nambung struggles with mineral deficiencies but Brian said the sheep flock didn't need to worry about that.

"We need to be topping the cattle up with cobalt, selenium, copper and the whole works because these sands are deficient in those things, but the sheep aren't here 12 months of the year so we can get away with it," he said.

"Moving the sheep off the property regularly is also very good from a worm control perspective.

"By being able to shift them off the property, get a clean start there and visa versa when they come back, we've seen a big difference – we don't get scoury sheep any more."

Pastures are another challenge Brian has to work around at Nambung station, only 15 kilometres from the coast as the crow flies.

"Clovers don't proliferate that easily here but I think this year with a good start and no false break, it might be better," Brian said.

"One of the best things about this property is the sub-



These Challara blood Merino hoggets demonstrate the type of sheep Brian wants to continue to produce: easy care with plenty of free-growing wool.

tropical grass we're able to grow.

"We've got 150-200ha of those and we really should have more because it grows well on the poor sand.

"There's also a fair bit of couch through this country which is really good summer feed and with a bit of rain it keeps on growing, which is different to the Wheatbelt where if you've finished a paddock, it's finished until the next year.

"That said, it's good to be able to lower the stocking rate to just the cattle over the summer months."

Despite all the benefits of running the sheep operation across the two properties, Brian admitted it was difficult to aspire to great heights when it came to breeding objectives.

"It's a bit more difficult because they're full cropping

out at Miling so all I can do is continue to cull the lesser types out and continue to improve the flock that way," he said.

"I guess you've always got to try to improve by having sheep that do well and that's always been one of the things I've lived by.

"My dad used to say if you look after your sheep, they'll look after you and I've always agreed with that too.

"So with wool prices where they are, things are looking up and I'll keep on trying to improve my flock into the future."

Brian said he had the best of both worlds at Nambung station.

"My wife and I live in Cervantes and I come out here to the station to work," he said.

"It's an easy drive to Miling and an easy drive to Perth – I really enjoy it here.

"We also have the station stay business which has been going for three to four years and we enjoy having travellers come through."

Nambung station also hosts an annual music festival in October which attracted 1000 people last year.

"So it's a nice lifestyle out here and it's wonderful to be able to farm on this unique property," Brian said.

"The live export drama is definitely a concern at the moment because we've always sold into that market but having said that, I think the people who stick with it will be OK in the longer term."

As rain fell heavily last week greening up pastures on the property when *Farm Weekly* visited, things won't be looking too bad in the short-term either.

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