

ADOPTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN THE WOOLBELT OF WESTERNAUSTRALIA

S.J. SHAW^A and I.J. McFARLAND^B

^A Agriculture WA, Gillamii Community Agriculture Centre, Cranbrook, WA 6321

^B Agriculture WA, 10 Doney Street, Narrogin, WA 6312

With an increasing emphasis on quality assurance for products and services, wool growers are beginning to recognise the importance of providing the market with a product that is all it claims to be. Broker initiated wool quality assurance schemes have been actively promoted in Western Australia for about five years. There is now a growing interest from grower groups in the development of their own quality assurance systems with the focus on marketing directly with processors. The aim of this paper is to provide results of a survey of wool producers on quality assurance and wool selling strategies.

There are approximately 4000 professional wool producers in the main wool producing area (Woolbelt) of Western Australia. The Woolbelt covers 27 Local Government Areas where 55% of the state's greasy wool clip is produced by 44% of wool growers. Interviews with 280 randomly selected growers stratified across the woolbelt was carried out in early 1997.

Production and management details are provided by McFarland and Shaw (1997). Time of shearing is shown in Table 1. At least 30% of properties have less than 300 wethers, or none.

Table 1. Shearing periods for ewes and wethers

Shearing period	Percent of properties	
	Ewes	Wethers
Spring (Sept, Oct, Nov)	36	41
Summer (Dec, Jan, Feb)	25	21
Autumn (Mar, Apr, May)	22	10
Winter (Jun, Jul, Aug)	17	28

Of the wool growers interviewed 12% were involved in a quality assurance scheme; 65% of these were participating in broker operated schemes (eg Clipcare, Dalcare) while the remaining 35% were active in grower developed schemes. Those involved with a quality assurance scheme (QA) stated that the main benefit of being involved in a scheme was the improved standard of clip preparation. Although there may be no obvious financial rewards currently, most believe that these will occur in the future. Four percent of producers interviewed had previously been involved in a scheme but had withdrawn with the major reason being that they received no financial benefit from participating. Of those growers that have never been involved in QA, 22% chose not to be involved as they could see no reward or benefit from participating and many considered that they carried out suitable clip preparation techniques without the necessity of being involved in a specific scheme.

For preparation of the clip, 41.5% were classed by the grower and/or a member of the family, 58% were classed by a professional classer with the remaining 0.5% being classed by a workman or other person. Brokers exerted influence over how the clip was classed on 58% of the properties. The main recommendations being on the divisions or boundaries between lines of wool and the skirting requirements of the market. 86% of producers sold their wool through the auction system, 10% by private treaty and 4% by forward contracting, sale by tender or other means.

The awareness of quality and quality assurance amongst wool producers is relatively high, but the adoption and involvement in quality assurance schemes remains relatively low.

McFARLAND, I.J. and SHAW, S.J. (1997). *Anim. Prod. Aust.* **22**, 400.