

● When replacement ewe prices hit a high three years ago, Mark Quilter decided it was time to move to a self-replacing flock ... and never looked back. Picture: KIM WOODS



## A Dohne deal for Quilters

KIM WOODS

WHEN it comes to running sheep in his Riverina farm enterprise, Mark Quilter is squarely focused on profit.

The grain and livestock producer, who manages a family-owned aggregation of 2631 hectares near Narrandera, is after what most sheep-wheat zone farmers want — a dual purpose, polled and plainer bodied sheep.

But, the bottom line is, they must have the carcass, be bale-fillers and be profitable.

Mark, his wife Kerri, children Shaun, Renae, Brett and Dale, and his mother Laure, operate the three holdings, Belalie, Elimatta and Ellerslie.

They run 2000 Dohne and merino ewes with a European Union accredited herd of 270 angus females, turning off yard-weaned calves at nine to 10 months of age, at Wodonga.

The family crop 810 hectares of wheat, canola, barley, oats and lupins, complemented by 202 hectares of flood-irrigated pasture and 60 hectares of summer crops.

Mark uses 1100 hectares of lucerne, medics, chicory and serradella to finish lambs to trade and export weights.

The Quilters had run merinos until a footrot scare in the early 1990s resulted in a switch to prime lamb production.

When replacement ewe prices hit a high three years ago, Mark decided it was time to move to a self-replacing flock.

His shearing contractor, John Evans, suggested Dohnes had the carcass and wool quality in a self-replacing package Mark was seeking.

Mark bought some Dohne ewes joined to Border Leicester rams from Condobolin and was impressed with the 115 per cent lambs marked.

He then invested in AA grade

"Our F1 Dohne wether lambs shorn in February cut \$23 worth of 19 micron wool and were sold in March at Corowa for \$122," Mark said.

"This compared to our white Suffolk cross lambs averaging \$90 as suckers in October."

The F1 Dohne wool sold for 679c/kg greasy.

Ewes are joined in December and shorn in February to fit in with the cropping enterprise.

The dry autumn prompted Mark to source orange, apple and

of the Dohne, they do well in the dry seasons.

"Being polled and plainer bodied helps minimise fly problems."

In an effort to increase Dohne blood in the ewe flock, Mark bought 300 purebred flock ewes at the Uardry Dohne dispersal for \$110.

With the farm run with virtually one labour unit, Mark is simply focused on the easy care, bale filling and profitable attributes of the Dohne.

John Evans switched to Dohnes a decade ago in a bid to lift lambing percentages, minimize fly control and increase market flexibility in his own commercial wool enterprise.

The Dohne infusion has enabled John to put lambs in the marketplace with carcass weights of 22 to 24 kilograms at seven months of age and cutting 2.5 to 3 kilograms of wool.

His Coleslea Dohne stud is run in tough 400 millimetres rainfall country north of Leeton.

Commercial ewes were sold to restockers in February with plans to lift stud ewe numbers from 180 to 300.

High fertility has been a bonus — Coleslea stud ewes marked 154 per cent lambs last year.

"That's what the breed can do, and we have proven it firsthand," John said.

*"I also like the foraging ability of the Dohne, they do well in the dry seasons. Being polled and plainer bodied helps minimise fly problems."*

rams from John's Coleslea Dohne stud at Leeton.

"Our adult ewes average 22-23 micron and are cutting six to seven kilograms of wool — John classes the hogget ewes for us with the culls joined to white Suffolk rams," Mark said.

Dohne-cross wether lambs are sold either direct out of the paddock or as suckers through the yards at Corowa.

The seconds are fed lupins and sold off-shears in February-March with a month's skin.

carrot pulp for \$28/wet tonne delivered from Griffith.

This is mixed with silage and hay for the cattle, and barley for the sheep, before being fed out in the paddock every second day using a mixer.

The cattle receive 35 kilograms a head per day while the sheep receive three kilograms.

"I like an early maturing lamb — one I can turn off at three to four months of age," Mark said.

"I also like the foraging ability



# Dohnes star in balancing act

## AT A GLANCE

- ◆ Janie McClure, Nelyambo Sydney Road, Wilcannia, NSW
- ◆ Runs 4500 Merino and Dohne-Merino breeding ewes on certified organic property
- ◆ Owner/manager of Rural Organics, a certified organic and biodynamic wholesaler of beef and lamb



By JAMIE-LEE OLDFIELD

**S**UPPLYING certified organic lamb and beef to eight butchers across Victoria, NSW and SA, Janie McClure knows good produce. So when she says Dohne-Merino crossbred lambs are filling the seasonal gap for lamb throughout autumn, you're inclined to agree with her.

Running 4500 breeding ewes on her outback NSW property, Nelyambo Sydney Road, Ms McClure now joins her maiden and older ewes (six to seven-year-olds) to Dohnes.

"It is hard to get crossbred lambs for the butcher shops at this time of year and the Dohne crosses have filled that gap," she said. "Dohnes are more robust with a faster growth rate, and you are able to sell them as a lamb, not a hogget. The butchers we supply say the Dohnes have a different shape, with a longer leg, and they are doing the job."

Ralph Redina, Redina Butchery, Balwyn North, is one of those butchers, and has been getting lamb from Rural Organics for about five years.

"I have found they had good muscle, which gives it good cutting and eating qualities," he said. "This type of year makes it harder on the quality because of the feed throughout autumn, but that's nature. The Dohnes come through at a good size."

Ms McClure chose Dohnes as a crossbred option as their wool was more suitable for the market, and it eliminated the risk of contamination from shedding sheep.

She has also been keeping on all the Dohne-Merino ewes as breeding stock, while surplus wether lambs sell into Arcadian Meat Co, one of



## ABOVE:

Weaner wether lambs going to finish off at Nick and Fiona Miles property Miles Haybaling, Naracoorte, SA.

**LEFT:** Janie McClure with a fleece during this year's shearing at Nelyambo Sydney Road.

Australia's largest organic meat suppliers.

"You just can't beat a wool sheep in my eyes. It keeps you warm and fills your tummy – the two things you need. When we class the ewes, we put them all together and there is little difference in the wool – the Dohne-cross ewes are just bigger. I am also trying to prove the credibility of the Merino and Dohne meat."

Looking for that perfect balance between wool and meat, Ms McClure said she was always considering ways to improve what she was doing, and she liked what was happening with the Dohnes.

They also survive well in the outback climate, Ms McClure said.

"Because of the good season, we will really have to watch for fly-strike this year – we will isolate the Dohne lambs and monitor how they go. It is better to have a live healthy sheep than a dead organic one, so we will treat for strike if we have to."

Twenty other suppliers from all sides of the Darling River supply meat for Rural Organics, two of which grow Dohne lamb.

Ms McClure said her range of certified organic and certified biodynamic suppliers kept continuity through her supply chain.

"It is a niche we supply for, but it's growing – it's quality meat and the consumers know it," she said.

"We are forever improving the product quality because of the direct feedback we receive."