

Friday May 20, 2011

Sheep CRC receives 2011 STAR Award

The Sheep CRC's efforts in working with industry in the key area of genetics has been recognized with a prestigious award.

The 2011 CRC Program STAR Award was presented at the *Excellence in Innovation Awards* event held in Brisbane this week as part of the Cooperative Research Centre Association's annual conference.

Sheep CRC CEO, Prof James Rowe, says the Award acknowledges co-operation between researchers and industry, specifically in the CRC's Information Nucleus flock.

"It was obvious that the Information Nucleus flock, with its close, fruitful and ongoing collaboration with numerous Australian sheep breeders, would be a worthy nomination.

"It is a very deserving outcome for the Sheep CRC's collaborators – represented by Queensland Merino breeders Mark & Vicki Murphy and Victorian White Suffolk breeders Steve & Debbie Milne - to receive such awards as it showcases our efforts in working together for a greater industry good.

"It's also a credit to the Sheep Genetics team and the parent organisations - MLA and AWI - for their role in coordinating activities between the breeders and the Information Nucleus program.

"The focus of the STAR awards on effective cooperation with small and medium sized enterprises is an excellent initiative of DIISR's CRC Program."

Broadly, the Sheep CRC's research focuses on improved genetic gain and management of more productive, easy-to-manage sheep while re-positioning sheep meat and wool as high value niche products meeting modern consumer's quality expectations.

The Information Nucleus (IN) flock Program is central to the CRC's work; it is delivering new and far-reaching genetic information and data for genomic prediction of sheep breeding values.

Mark Murphy says: "The potential of the new genomic technologies is very significant for the Merino industry. The ability to predict breeding values based on DNA samples taken from young rams will allow us to shorten the generation interval for breeding programs and potentially increase rates of genetic gain by around 50%. Rates of increase of this magnitude are relatively rare and this makes it exciting to be involved with the research."

Steve Milne says: "Information from the IN Program has been valuable in providing a comprehensive picture of genetic parameters across all important studs and blood lines in the Australian sheep industry. New information from the IN program is already having an impact in starting to breed for improved meat quality - while still making good gains in growth and lean meat production.

Co-operation by stud breeders in the IN Program has made a major contribution to its success and is benefiting industry through the rapid delivery of results and widespread utilisation of the new information in commercial breeding programs.

During the last 4 years, a total of more than 300 stud breeders have engaged with the CRC via Sheep Genetics as part of the IN flock work, through:

- voluntarily collecting and providing semen from hundreds of young rams
- reviewing, analysing and displaying regularly updated data and information
- working on the first genomics pre-commercialisation Pilot Project, which has put the CRC and the industry at the international forefront in commercialising genomic technologies.

CRCs support end user driven research collaborations to address clearly articulated, major challenges facing Australia, many of which are global challenges. The STAR Awards recognise the vital role CRCs play in encouraging innovation and research in SMEs. More details on the CRC Program STAR Award winners and the CRC Program are available from www.crc.gov.au

<ends>

