

WOOL QUALITY CHALLENGES

Several of the Dual Purpose sheep breeds that came to Australia in the late 1990's have been criticised for poor wool colour, style or quality. Whilst there have been some challenges in this regard, by now (2017) there are solutions to these issues. Some criticism has been generalised and is now somewhat out of date and unfounded.

In short, there are Stud Dohnes with good wool qualities and styles to be found in all of the major regions ; NSW, SA, Vic, WA.

If we deal with each challenge separately, some tips can be found for finding suitable animals for your environment and conditions.

- Nourishment – A lack of natural nourishment can lead to several different effects. Wool has a natural level of lanolin in it. This wool wax is produced in the sebaceous glands at the base of each fibre. If there is too little of this wax the wool staple is described as 'dry' and it does not handle weathering as well as it should. If there is too much lanolin for the environment sheep can end up having a greasy 'black' tip. Occasionally this is also accompanied by yellow fatty wool underneath the tip and this combination leads to much frustration and hard work.

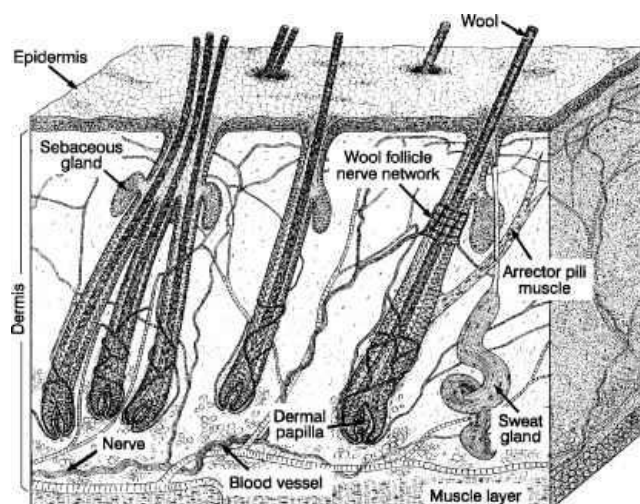


Fig. 1 Diagram of skin and wool follicle groups showing primary follicles, with arrector pili muscles and sweat glands, and secondary follicles. (From CSIRO Livestock Industries.)

It is vitally important for sheep breeders to select the right nourishment for their own environment when purchasing seed-stock. This is a learned skill and many growers have made good observations in the past for what works well for them. If in doubt, we can offer some help as we see how our sheep perform in different environments and climate conditions.

- Dust Penetration – The dryness mentioned above is also a significant contributing factor to dust penetrating below the tip of the staple towards the skin of the sheep. Poor staple structure is another factor. Dust reduces both the percentage of yield in the clip and very importantly the processing quality of the fibre. The reason for this is simple, just like sandpaper, movement of the animal leads to the dust particles having an abrasive effect on the fibres. This can reduce staple strength and Hauter measurement, important factors in determining the value of the line of wool on offer.
- Wax to Suint Ratio – Like all wool breeds, there are large variations between individuals within the Dohne population. Excess suint leads to yellowing of the fleece and is frequently accompanied by an unpleasant odour. In the case of warm Spring, Summer or Autumn rain events, this leads to increased risk of body strike caused by the Blowfly species *Lucilla cuprina* which is attracted to the smell. The smell is significantly stronger when the wool is wet. Yellow 'fatty' wool is at risk for the same reason.

At Glen Holme we have come from a background of having bred Stud Merino and Poll Merino sheep since 1946. Dohnes were introduced in 2006. We have come from a quality wool background and set out to make it our priority to improve the quality and style of wool on Dohnes.

Our experience saw us adapt our selection criteria after the extremely wet spring and summer of 1974/75, when many flock owners spent much time treating body struck sheep and jetting multiple times as a preventative measure. Identifying superior genetics was chosen as a better way forward. Since then we have employed extremely harsh selection pressure to our young sheep at classing and to all the older sheep at least annually to ensure that all of these wool attributes maintain our quality expectations.

Good nourishment with an ideal wax to suint ratio gives rise to a fleece that keeps weather damage and dust penetration to a minimum and also has a white, soft waxy, well-formed staple.

This has been a challenge for us, but has brought its own reward. We are renowned for the wool on the Glen Holme Flock.

We are happy to discuss the right wool style for your environment.