



**CALCOOKARA POLL MERINO STUD**  
**Brenton & Jane Smith**

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## 2022 NEWSLETTER

Hi Everyone,

Firstly I'll apologise for not putting this newsletter out earlier but as you read on you'll understand that we've been under the pump big time since harvest. I also apologise for it being long winded.

I'll start with Alex finishing up here. In March 21 Alex came and saw me and said that he'd be finishing with us at the end of the year. He wanted to do more shearing (and who could complain about that) and help his Dad more on their own farm. We'd like to thank Alex for the contribution he made while he was here and wish him all the best for the future and hope he's picked up some positive ideas during his time here that may help him in future years. As most of you know he's a good lad with a good work ethic.

Well the 21/22 summer came with a lot of rain. In total 12 inches for us!! Alex and I got the crop off in good time and never had anything downgraded for rain but the weeds went berserk. However, with the weeds came copious amounts of feed. I've never in 50 years seen our hills look so green and healthy with native grasses in February. You couldn't light a fire if you tried, and I really mean that. This helped set the ewes up perfectly for lambing, thankfully without having to put any feed out until lambing started. Alex managed to get a fair bit of ground sprayed just after harvest, then I started the second round just after Christmas. The third lap came in February and March for a percentage of the country and some should have had another dose but now being by myself, just couldn't get it done.

There are many changes in the wind here at Calcookara as you will read and one of them is that we've decided to stop mothering our lambs up manually which always took us 3 weeks to do. We are instead DNA testing all ewes, rams and lambs which will also be more accurate for pedigree as well as giving us higher accuracies for sheep genetics. We also had Bill re-class all of our ewes into 5 types according to quality and breeding values to give us larger mating groups. This means that instead of mating 16 individual mobs in 16 individual paddocks we can do it in just 5 with syndicate mating's if we want, and still identify the sire for each lamb.

As a few of you know we've finally invested in new yards at Calcookara. This all started about 4 years ago after classing Bruce and Josie Hunts sheep at Keith. We'd been looking at yards prior to this but after working in the Hunt's yards we decided that they were the ones we wanted. They were heavy, well-built yards with plenty of options available. The brand that won us over was Commander Agforce. I must say they were excellent to deal with as was their contractor Leyton from Town and Country Fencing. Nothing seemed to be an issue and it took us 12-18 months to come up with a final plan between us before we started, but this was probably the most important part of the whole process, so wanted to get it right.

With a final plan in December, we paid our deposit and ordered our yards for March construction. The guys from Commander Ag visited and surveyed the area which is the same area as the old yards and the original old Calcookara shearing shed. Obviously, this meant they all had to go. This is where I thank Pat, Niel, Cameron and Levi. In January while I was getting up at 3am and spraying through to lunchtime and after, weather permitting, they dismantled most of the old shed piece by piece methodically! Just to get it into perspective it took 2 days just to empty the old shed before we could start to dismantle it. They did an amazing job heaping old useable iron/timber from scrap and crap. It was no small task and took time, but it was enjoyable with dad reminiscing some old stories. The yards were quite easy in comparison and only took a bit over a couple of days but then came what used to be the beautiful old red gum in the middle of the yards. I hate cutting such trees down, but it was on its last legs anyway so I took it down limb by limb and we cut and split almost every ounce of it for firewood as we went.

While all of this is happening I'm also on the phone to Commander Ag and Wayne and Geoff Piggott as Piggotts were levelling and rubbling the site. As I keep saying we like to support those that support us, and it was a perfect time to repay the support Piggotts have given us over the years by buying our genetics. Not only that, they're just bloody good blokes!! So, while all of this is going on we are trying to organise the contractor and electrician to get it to all fall into place for our normal 6 months shearing starting on 25<sup>th</sup> of March!! The final load of rubble was levelled 2 days before the contractor turned up with trenches done and conduit in place before they started erection on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March. I cursed the public holiday with a 4-day week knowing that we were cutting it fine, but you have to go with it! Lleyton, Damian and Quinn did a great job and again were easy to work with. We made a few final changes as construction took place and after 10 working days, we now had a new set of yards with power and water almost ready to go. The final finishing piece was getting Kings electrical out on the Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> to run the cables and hook up to the power points for the auto drafter. So with that done Sunday saw sheep being yarded for shearing on Monday!!!

Well to be bluntly honest I didn't know how easy shearing could be with a lot more holding capacity not to mention user friendly yards. It was SOOO good!!! The dogs worked better the sheep ran and there was practically no cussing!!! Highly unusual!! I have to say that for money invested versus the expected lifetime of the yards and over all ease of management we wish we'd done this earlier. Basically, what I'm saying is stop thinking about new yards and just do it. If you have any questions or want to come for a look just call us. We now drive into our place and you can't help but notice them and think I look forward to the next lot of sheep work.

Not many would know but we purchased another sire from Chad and Jess Burbrige near Murray Bridge for \$20,000 privately in September. Chad has just started a stud and we wish him all the best. This ram is a son of the \$60,000 Gunallo 295 and has very good figures, along with quality fibre and is one of the most placid animals I've come across. In sheep genetics he's in the top 20% for yearling weight and staple length, top 10% for yearling fleece weight along with being positive .43 for yearling eye muscle and positive .19 for yearling fat. Obviously we look forward to watching his lambs throughout the next 12 months.

In early March we had Bill class the young rams. It's a day that we always look forward to and were very happy with the quality coming through. I think it's fair to say we have a lot to look forward to for the future of our type of merino. Thanks to a fair bit of prodding from the very astute Jim Gordon, we started introducing rams with positive muscle and fat 3 years ago and look forward to slowly gaining more of each of these 2 traits over time. The merino is such a complicated animal which also makes it easy to upset the balance or have a negative effect by taking one or two traits to extremes. We believe that slow and steady will give us a much more predictable animal with lower culling rates and higher numbers of top end animals.

In closing we have had a terrific start to the season and hope that all areas are now up and running. After such a stunning result last year for our sale we have decided that we will put a minimum of 120 in our auction. We certainly think that the quality will be there for it and hope we can continue to increase numbers along with quality as we go in future years.

As most of you know our Facebook page was hacked some time ago. We've desperately been trying to re salvage it with no success. We now have a new page up and running under Calcookara Stud. Please go in and like the page so that you get our posts and please share it to get it out there again.

We look forward to seeing you all soon and please mark these 2 dates on your calendar.

**Inspection day 1-4pm, Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2022.**

**On-property auction 1.30pm, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2022.**

Cheers,

Brenton, Jane and boys.