

Cheviots hit the ground running



“The hoggets just spit them out and they’re on their feet real quick,” Daniel McIlwrick said. Daniel and his father Paul have mated their hoggets to Kylemore Cheviot rams for the past five years, and wouldn’t use anything else.

The hoggets lamb easily, but you’ve got to have fast legs and a good crook to catch a Cheviot lamb - they hit the ground running.

The McIlwricks farm 3200 Coopworth-Texel ewes and have recently lifted their ewe hogget numbers to 950 on their 550ha flat to rolling property, Strathaird, at Dipton. They bought the farm 15 months ago after selling part of their sheep farm at Browns, near Winton.

Daniel and his wife Tracey are in charge of the day-to-day running of Strathaird which they operate in a four-way partnership with Paul and his wife Lydia.

“We were looking for more land but we surrounded by dairy cows. “To get bigger we had to move,” Paul said.

Hogget lambing has been an integral part of the McIlwricks farming operation for the past 20 years and they expect to achieve about 80 percent this year. While other ram breeds have been used in the past, they prefer Cheviots over their hoggets for their ease of lambing and low lamb birth weights.

“Hogget lambs are much more than a bonus lamb. We plan on getting enough to make it pay,” Paul said.

The hoggets averaged 49kg to the ram this year and teaser rams were used for 17 days before the actual start of mating, which the McIlwrick’s believe helps conception rates.

The ewes, which are mated back to Coopworth-Texel rams, typically achieve 139% to 149% lambing.

Using Cheviot rams also means both twin and single-bearing hoggets can be fed well right through their pregnancy and liveweights are not compromised in the process.

Previously, the single hoggets were held back to prevent lambing

problems, which Daniel didn’t like doing.

“This way we are able to keep feeding them,” Daniel said.

The hogget lambing results have been variable over the years - ranging from 65 to 93 percent at best, but the McIlwricks are continually striving to do better.

Last season the singles were lambed on the rolling and the twins on the scrubby hill blocks.

The McIlwricks don’t keep any of their lively hogget lambs which are weaned in the New Year.

The hogget lambs, are about a month younger than the rest of the lambs, but once weaned they really take off.

“They seem to do well later on,” Daniel said.

The McIlwricks aim to finish their lambs at 18kg carcass weight for Blue Sky Meats, but last season the decision was made to finish them as stores because of the on going dry conditions.