



## Finn sheep

Farm Diversification Information Service, Bendigo

February, 2000

AG0831

ISSN 1329-8062

*This Agriculture Note provides information on Finn sheep production.*

### Product

Finn sheep (or Finnish Landrace) is a fast growing lean sheep with high breeding rate and strong maternal instinct. Finns have a much higher lambing percentage than other breeds, this being their most notable trait. Triplets and quadruplets are common and two sets of octuplets (8) and several litters of septuplets (7) have been recorded overseas. Finns have lean carcasses and are medium sized sheep. They are a native Landrace sheep of Northern European origin with major flocks in Finland and Denmark. The original importers of Finns into New Zealand, "LambXL" contended that their imports were superior to genetics held in the United States and England as Finn sheep had developed into far superior animals to those sent in earlier exports.

### Physical requirements

Finns can be run under normal field conditions using regular sheep facilities. Extra care and management of the ewe flock is necessary however, particularly during late pregnancy. Because of the high number of multiple births and low birth weights, ewes need to be supervised during lambing, and it is desirable to house the animals for the birth. Care is needed with normal husbandary operations during this time as upsetting the ewes leads to mismothering. Ewes which have lambed should be separated from those still to lamb and a small paddocks near the lambing shed is an option. Predator control is essential.

### Production

Rams and ewes are sexually mature by four to eight months of age and ewes are often bred to lamb by twelve months. The breeding season is longer than for British breeds allowing for out of season lambs and accelerated production systems. The main use of the Finn will be in cross breeding systems as the very high lambing percentages are too hard to manage. Most of the early trials in New Zealand centered on the production of highly fertile ewes containing either 25% or 50% Finn blood. Finn cross romney lambs and Finn cross coopworth lambs grew 15-20% faster than romney and coopworth controls on

"LambXL" quarantine farms in New Zealand, although wool production dropped by 10-20% depending on whether the ewe had 25% or 50% Finn blood.

### Marketing

The main usage of Finns in Australia will be as a maternal breed, perhaps replacing some first cross ewes. They have been used in the United States since 1968 to increase lambing percentages in commercial flocks.

Sandra De Master, the Secretary of the USA Finnsheep Association, said that some interest has been shown in recent years by hand spinners for Finn wool, but basically the breed has lost popularity because shepherds do not like dealing with the extra work that multiple births entail. She said that in her experience Finns are much smaller than Suffolks, and their growth rate is slow. Marketing opportunities will exist for first cross ewes, but commercial growers will need to be convinced of the merits of the cross. Finns currently carry a premium, but if they are going to be successful in the longer term, wins in performance trials will be necessary.

A maternal breed performance trial is currently underway at Hamilton (Victoria), Cowra (NSW) and Kybybolite (SA).

### Financial aspects

Many prime lamb producers are currently experimenting with new breeds. There should be a steady demand for flock rams, so a stud should be able to produce reasonable returns. Because the Finn is still a relatively unknown sheep breed in Australia it would be prudent to proceed cautiously expanding a flock as demand grows and as you learn to cope with multiple births.

### Organisations and contacts

Secretary - Finn Sheep Breeders Society:

Marlene Sewell

RMB 308

Sugarloaf Ridge Rd

Bungendore NSW 2621

Ph/Fax. (06) 2382515

President - Finn Sheep Breeders Society:

John Dowdy

Ph. (08) 8764 2065

## References

De Master, S. (1998). Personal correspondence. Secretary  
United States Finn Sheep Breeders Association.

Canadian Finnsheep Breeders Association homepage  
<http://www.superhorse.com/finnsheep/>

Lamb XL (1998) *The Flock of the Future*. Information  
produced by Lamb XL, PO Box 213, Palmerston North NZ

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.