

WOOL PRODUCTION

Wool production is a full-time job and woolgrowers need to juggle many activities throughout the year.

Although woolgrowers on different properties and in different areas will carry out activities at different times, the types of jobs are similar between properties.

All producers need to manage their sheep and **pastures** to produce plenty of wool and keep their livestock and natural resources healthy.

Depending on where the property is located and whether other enterprises (such as cropping or cattle production) are involved, producers plan their calendar of operations carefully to make sure they can carry out all their jobs in a timely manner.

Sheep need regular monitoring to ensure they have enough **pasture** and water to stay healthy.

Producers develop a feed budget using their knowledge of **pasture** growth and information about expected seasonal conditions. A feed budget is a guide to how many sheep they can run at any one time and which paddocks sheep will move to next.

Woolgrowers bring sheep into the yards and shearing shed at different times for **drenching**, vaccinating, marking, **crutching** and shearing.

Drenching protects sheep from internal worms and vaccinating protects sheep against diseases like tetanus, cheesy gland, pulpy kidney, sheep measles, ovine Johne's disease and black leg.

Fast facts

- Woolgrowers manage their livestock, **pastures** and businesses carefully year-round.
- Every year producers need to **drench**, vaccinate, mark lambs and shear their sheep.
- Many wool producers also grow crops and run cattle as well as sheep.

Blowflies and lice are major challenges for Australian woolgrowers.

Blowflies lay their eggs in wet or dirty wool, most commonly around a sheep's bottom. As the eggs hatch, blowfly larvae (maggots) burrow into the flesh causing pain and illness and ultimately death if left unattended. This is called flystrike.

Producers can manage flystrike in a number of ways including **mulesing**, **crutching** and applying insecticides to deter flies.

Lice, like human headlice, make sheep itchy and affected sheep often

rub against fences, trees or fallen logs to relieve the itching, which damages the wool.

Producers treat sheep with insecticides after shearing to kill the lice when the wool is short.

Ewes and rams need to be brought together for joining and then rams are removed again until the following year. Rams are left with the ewes for a short period of time (usually between 3-6 weeks). This ensures the lambs are born at a similar time, which makes it easier for lamb marking and uniform wool growth.



Calendar of operations: Australian woolgrowers need to juggle multiple activities throughout the year to ensure their businesses run smoothly and animals and **pastures** are well managed.

Lamb marking is carried out when lambs are between two to eight weeks old.

Ewes and lambs are brought into the yards and lambs are: given ear tags, tail docked (removed), vaccinated and the males are castrated unless they are to be kept as rams for breeding or selling.

Shearing is usually carried out once a year by a professional team of shearers, woolhandlers and wool classers.

Depending on the size of a property and the number of sheep, shearing can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks.

Other activities

Woolgrowers do much more than just look after their sheep. There is always

Did you know?

- Each year different coloured ear tags are used for new lambs. This way, when the sheep are adults, a producer can easily tell what year they were born by the colour of their ear tag.

fencing to be done, water troughs and pumps to be checked, cleaned and repaired and machinery to be maintained.

Many producers also run cropping enterprises, so crops need to be sown and fertilised, weeds need to be controlled and when the season is finished the crops need to be harvested.

Running any business involves a certain amount of office work and woolgrowers need to develop budgets and manage their cash flow. Wool-producing businesses receive their income when they sell a commodity such as wool, lambs, surplus sheep, hay or grain.

Most producers also spend time brushing up on their skills and knowledge by attending workshops or courses on the latest production methods and technology.

Just like everyone else, woolgrowers also need leisure time and time with their families.

Taking a break away from the farm allows producers to relax and forget about work for a while.

Glossary

Mulesing — surgical removal of woolly skin around the sheep's bottom. When the wound heals, no wool can grow for flies to lay eggs into.

Drenching — treating sheep with pesticides to prevent intestinal worms.

Crutching — removing the wool from around the bottom using an electric handpiece.

Pasture — plants that are managed by farmers for livestock production.



Lamb marking: Lambs are eartagged, vaccinated, docked and marked when they are young.

Mustering

Woolgrowers move large mobs of sheep regularly for grazing and livestock husbandry purposes.

Depending on the size of the property and size of the mob, producers can use utes, motorbikes, horses, sheep dogs or even planes and helicopters to muster their stock.

If sheep need to be moved a long way, woolgrowers often start early in the morning to avoid moving stock during the heat of the day.

Many producers carefully plan paddocks and stock routes, to make mustering easier.

Woolgrowers can have staff who help

out with all the jobs on the farm, but one of the most valuable members of the team are the sheep dogs.

Border collies and Australian kelpies are the most common breeds of sheep dogs used in Australia.

Sheep dogs are working dogs that have been bred specifically to work with sheep and have a natural instinct to keep the flock together in a group.

This natural herding instinct, combined with training and skilled handlers, can save hours of time in the sheep yards.

Dogs are used in the paddocks, sheep yards and shearing shed to

keep sheep moving in a particular direction. A good yard dog can run along the backs of the sheep, helping push them up the race for **drenching** and vaccinating.



Man's best friend: The sheep dog is one of the most valuable members of the wool production team.

More information

For more information about wool production, go to:

- learnaboutwool.com
- Beyond the Bale: beyondthebale.wool.com
- wool.com

- makingmorefromsheep.com.au
- Download the free Lifetime Ewe Management (LTEM) smartphone application
- woolmarklearningcentre.com

