

# Honing perfect specimens

**TRIGGER VALE STUDS**  
**Andrew and Mandi Bouffler**  
**LOCKHART, NSW**



**T**O SAY progressive sheep breeder Andrew Bouffler knows his flock backwards is an understatement. Armed with foresight and the skills and knowledge attained during a global farming scholarship, Andrew, from Lockhart in the NSW Riverina, has positioned his operation, and the broader industry, well for the future.

Andrew and his wife, Mandi, run Trigger Vale Studs with almost 2200 White Suffolk and Poll Merino breeding ewes on their 1630-hectare family farm.

But don't for a moment think the Boufflers' is a traditional stud operation. These sheep are run under commercial conditions. Poll Merinos are shorn twice a year to maximise survival rates and rams are selected for muscle, fat and growth traits as well as for their wool.

These are breeding and management philosophies honed after Andrew's Nuffield scholarship tour of South Africa, South America and Europe in 2007 to learn different ideas about sheep breeding.

It was in South Africa that Andrew discovered producers "all talked about their meat-to-wool ratio". "That really hit home," he says. This, along with an interest in performance recording and genomic technology, saw Andrew implement a plan to boost the carcass attributes and fertility of Merinos without sacrificing wool by concentrating on fat, muscle and growth traits.

"I understood that having a sheep in the right body condition was not only about what went down their throat, and that genetic selection for these traits was extremely important," he says.

The results speak for themselves.

Ewe death rates have all but disappeared on the Bouffler farm as the sheep cope with the stress of lambing and raising a lamb much better due to their ability to draw on higher fat and muscle reserves.

The shift to twice-a-year shearing has helped lift conception rates and boost ewe and lamb survival and mothering abilities. It has also led to a 8-10 per cent lift in wool cuts.

Andrew and Mandi's attention to detail and their ability to look outside the square while focusing on their bottom line makes them deserving winners of *The Weekly Times* Coles 2014 Sheep Farmer of the Year.

**Academic excellences:**  
 Andrew and Mandi Bouffler, with children Ruby, Jamieson and Henry, have applied lessons learned overseas.

