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Forward thinking producers well rewarded

Producers who entered into Hajj contracts for long tail lambs were well rewarded last year.

As the season faltered, taking lamb prices with it, producers who contracted long-tail lambs to Wellard Rural Exports were safe, knowing they had locked in a certain, high price and weren't waiting for kill space to become available. Wellard Rural Exports managing director Steve Meerwald said Wellard's Hajj contracts provided a great risk management tool for sheep producers.

"Farmers use the contracts because they provide price and market certainty for their sheep enterprise," he said.

"Plus the weight requirements for the long-tail contracts often are below the slaughter weights required by abattoirs, which helps when the season is tight. "They certainly have a lot of benefits for our farmer clients."

Wellard Rural Exports has just released its Hajj Contracts for November 2007 delivery. Prices are similar to last year's rates (see advertisement), and compare favourably to current slaughter prices.

The Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca is considered one of the most important lifetime events for Muslims.

As part of the Hajj celebrations, Saudi Arabia requires lambs which are entire and unblemished, hence the reason for the longtail requirements.

Wellard Rural Exports live sheep manager David Kerr said Australia was highly regarded by Saudi Arabia as its leading supplier of quality livestock year round, and specifically for the Hajj festival.

Wellard remains a long-term, reliable supplier of sheep to Saudi Arabia, enabling the company to offer to its Australian clients forward contracts for Hajj long tail lambs.

Wellard is seeking a large number of long tailed lambs this year to fill its Hajj commitments. It requires:

- Crossbred ram lambs

- Damara ram lambs
- Merino ram lambs
- Crossbred wether lambs
- Crossbred ewe lambs
- Merino wether lambs
- Merino ewe lambs
- Damara ewe lambs

The minimum individual weight requirement for each sheep is 35 kilograms with a condition score of 2+, and all sheep require a 5 in 1 vaccination and scabby mouth scratch on-farm to meet Saudi Arabian protocols.

The lambs must be at least five months old at time of delivery, and any horns need to be trimmed to the first curl.

The timing of the Hajj Pilgrimage changes each year, and this year long-tail lambs contracted for the Hajj will be contracted for November delivery.

Mr Meerwald urged producers to consider Hajj contracts before marking this season's lambs.

Cattle

Wellard is continuing to source cattle from across northern Australia to meet its growing south-east Asian trade.

Last year it exported more than 150,000 cattle to south-east Asia, almost a quarter of the total cattle shipped from Australia.

In 2007 it hopes to grow that figure to more than 200,000 head, including shipments from south-west WA when appropriate.

"Australian cattle are in demand across south-east Asia, though the appreciating value of the Australian dollar has inhibited the expansion of the trade," Mr Meerwald said.

"We believe that our strong client relationships - with Australian farmers and overseas importers - as well as the superior livestock vessels we contract, places Wellard in a sound position to capitalise on further growth in the live cattle export market."

Dairy cattle

The company is currently finalising its dairy export division, and will have exciting news for producers in the coming weeks when it announces a raft of new initiatives.

Wellard news

Later this year Wellard will begin shipping livestock on the world's newest livestock carrier.

Siba Ships, which contracts vessels to Wellard, will launch its new, state-of-the-art livestock carrier in the second half of this year, with a sister ship to be launched in 2008..

Mr Meerwald said the launch of the ships reflected Wellard and Siba's:

- Confidence in the future of the live export trade
- Commitment to continually innovate to improve animal welfare on-board livestock vessels.

The first of those vessels is expected to be launched in August this year, at a cost of US\$40 million.

Both have been designed from the ground (and water) up by specialists from Siba Ships to ensure optimum animal welfare conditions.

Siba also owns and operates the MV Becrux, the most modern carrier in the world's current livestock shipping fleet and the MV Deneb, the biggest carrier in the world's livestock shipping fleet.

Both are currently being utilised by Wellard.

As part of that commitment to enhance the long term viability of the live trade and its farmer suppliers, Wellard this year announced the funding of a new Senior Lecturer in Leadership in Animal Health and Production position at Murdoch University's School of Veterinary and Biomedical Science.

Wellard will provide \$500,000 over the next five years to fund the position.

Mr Meerwald said he believed the creation of the senior lecturing position "Leadership in Animal Health and Production" would entice more veterinary students into the animal production sector rather than the current trend towards companion animals.

“We are pleased to partner Murdoch University in this position to work towards that goal, to benefit both the farmers of today, and to sustain the future for the generations of farmers to come.”

Murdoch University Dean of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences Dr John Edwards said the School of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences at Murdoch University was recognised at state, national and international levels as a provider of quality research and training in the fields of animal health, production and biosecurity.

In addition to funding the Lecturer in Leadership in Animal Health and Production, Wellard will also sponsor the Wellard Production Animal Health and Management Prize.

Although Wellard Rural Exports continues to be a core operation of the Wellard group, the company has recently announced the creation of new business divisions.

These include Wellard Capital, Wellard Estates and Wellard Aviation.

The new divisions have been created by Wellard principal Mauro Balzarini to take advantage of business opportunities currently on offer internationally, nationally and within WA.

Wellard also recently adopted a fresh, new, lively logo to reflect the company's change.