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SHEEP IMPROVEMENT LIMITED

INTRODUCTION

The aim of Sheep Improvement Limited (SIL) is to facilitate cost effective genetic improvement across the New Zealand sheep industry in cooperation with the previously existing sheep genetic improvement schemes including Studfax, Flocklinc and Animalplan.

Development of the new combined scheme began in 1998 with the formation of SIL as a joint venture company between the New Zealand meat and wool boards. A project team drawn from the existing schemes and their parent organisations (AgResearch, Lincoln University and Massey University) set about construction of a new database structure and genetic engine. At the same time SIL provided overall management of the development and facilitated initial and ongoing consultation with breeders and delivery bureaus from the existing schemes. Operation of the new internet based system, managed by SIL with AgResearch staff contracted, began on a trial basis in June 1999 and commenced commercially in October 1999.

The rationale for producer board involvement in a genetic improvement scheme for sheep was to provide farmer levy funding for both development and ongoing maintenance. It was also perceived that existing industry infrastructure for both research and development and extension would be more effectively used for genetic improvement through direct involvement of the two boards. An early goal set by SIL was to facilitate two percent annual genetic improvement in breeder and ram buyer flocks across ten percent of the industry within five years and fifty percent within ten years.

Even though the prime aim of SIL is genetic improvement there are other planned dimensions including use of the database as a vehicle for biotechnology, traceability, quality assurance and product differentiation. In addition there is considerable scope for international collaboration with other sheep genetic improvement schemes including LAMBPLAN in Australia which is similarly industry based.

This contract includes a range of contributors covering the genetic improvement, database and delivery aspects of SIL. In addition there is an outline of the operational structure of SIL and an analysis of the economics of genetic improvement to the industry.

K.G. Geenty