

## Young Achiever Anthony Close

*Anthony Close is a 23 years old 4<sup>th</sup> generation family owned and operated farmer at Harrow on their 2250ha mixed farming enterprise 'Kurra-Wirra'. Anthony has returned home to Kurra-Wirra and chosen a career in farming after completing a 3 year Agricultural science degree at La Trobe University while previously having a year abroad in Canada on work experience.*

*Moving home to the farm at the end of university was a daunting prospect at the time but since moving home the local area of harrow has bucked the trend of young people moving away from the country with a large number of young people choosing farming and the country life over the city making the decision to move home to the farm the perfect one. This has invigorated the local community especially the local Football and Cricket clubs that have become the social hubs for all members of the district.*

Kurra-Wirra has had Merino sheep since inception way back in late 1800's and the merino stud was founded 55 years ago in 1960 by my grandfather Jim Close and soon after taken over by Anthony's father Robert. Back then we were mainly focused on wool production but have now moved with the times and focused on breeding merinos to capitalize on the prime lamb trade.

The other part of life for Anthony at Kurra-Wirra is a Red Angus and Red Senegus stud where the family run over 450 stud cows selling 100+ bulls a year all over Australia but mainly into QLD, NSW and NT. The experience of traveling to sales and networking with people from all parts of Australia along with breeding quality livestock is the main highlights of that side of the business.

Anthony has taken up all the performance recording responsibilities on both the sheep and cattle studs.

Anthony has embraced the new technologies available within the industry and implemented them at Kurra-Wirra, primarily to improve the genetics as quickly as possible and increasing the accuracies of data collection. This is why the decision to now use electronic ear tags as a part of our stud-breeding program in both cattle and sheep was made. Our data management program can be attached straight into our Tru-Test systems and work in conjunction with our electronic tags to collect data such as weights, classing information, joining details and all ASBV and EBV information.

The addition of the new scientific technology and data management will allow us to fast track genetic gain with the surety of measured proof. The exciting combination of Dad's (Robert) 45 years of experience and skills in the industry along with my skills with technology we feel is going to be a great combination that will move our business and genetics forward. Both dad and myself will be able to share and learn skills from each other to provide a great team to take Kurra-Wirra into the future.

By lambing our most genetically advanced 2 and 3 year old commercial ewes and our studs to merinos we can maintain a very healthy flock structure of merino ewes. We then mate all remaining ewes that lamb yearly right up until 8 years of age to a white Suffolk ram producing a prime lamb as well as a very valuable wool clip.

The evolution of the Kurra-Wirra merino type with highly fertile, production, long stapled and low micron sheep have enabled this to happen like never before. **Merinos – The best of both worlds.**

Anthony is very passionate about his merino breeding shown by his involvement as a member of Victorian Balmoral Sire evaluation committee and involved in the lifetime productivity trial committee.

As a young person in the industry I know that the modern merinos are as profitable as any other breeds or farming enterprises. But the question is, who knows about it? The industry is too politically divided between wool (AWI) and prime lamb/sheep meat (MLA) industries and we need someone looking after the combination of the 2 merino sheep enterprises together. There is a need of data to support the viability of the modern merino prime lamb/wool combination against other enterprises. This information needs to be up to date and regular. If we compare with the US Cattle Feedlot information they publish a weekly report on the profit margins – I think the wool industry has for too long relied on anecdotal information and has failed to develop any meaningful data systems to not only identify the positives but to also assist producers in production and marketing decisions.

I see a problem with the latest economic profitability analysis that is was done way back in 2012 for the 3 different types of merino (Dual purpose/Merino production/Fibre production) enterprises vs other sheep and farming enterprises (Prime lamb/Cattle/Cropping). The point I'm trying to make is that this analysis becomes irrelevant if it is not current and the opportunity to promote the enterprise when the analysis is released is missed if it's not a regular occurrence. The Dual Purpose/Wool argument must be stronger now, but where is that information? We need to be promoting this otherwise we will struggle to keep the next generation of farmers interested in Merinos and Wool. The future of the wool industry desperately needs this good information put forward to ensure its ongoing survival.

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