



Kareela Wool – The product at the end of the line

Mary Hall

"Kareela" Golspie Road, Laggan, NSW 2583

Kareela is a 200 hectare mixed farming and grazing property located 20 kms north of Crookwell on the Southern Tablelands of NSW. Soils are granite derived with 750 mm annual rainfall and an elevation of 920 metres above sea level. The mixed farming enterprises consist of medium wool Merinos, prime lamb production and both stud and commercial Hereford cattle. Cropping consists of oats and triticale for winter fodder and grain for on farm storage and summer fodder cropping to finish live-stock for markets.

Pastures

Pastures consist of perennial grasses and clovers. Phalaris, cocksfoot, ryegrasses, subclovers, white clover and balansa clover are used in pasture mixes. A typical pasture mix sown on "Kareela" is Kangaroo Valley ryegrass 2.0 kg, Balansa clover 0.5 kg and Mt. Barker subclover 1.0 kg. All of the property is pasture improved although there are still some native grasses present. All pastures are sown under a cover crop, which is mostly a grain only cereal, usually triticale, using a converted Connor Shea seeder for direct drilling. Liming has become an essential component of pasture establishment with the lime being applied at 2.5 t/ha before a cereal crop. Fertilizers are applied annually to pastures.

Summer fodder crops consist of forage rape or millets and are essential on "Kareela" for finishing livestock. Reedy Creek allows us to irrigate the summer fodder crops and 8ha of lucerne. Lambing is normally in July/August and we aim to market a 25kg carcass from our crossbred ewes in December/January. Stocking rates are the equivalent of 7.5 sheep plus 0.5 cattle per hectare. We have our own machinery for fodder conservation and this also enables us to both contract and sharefarm. Fodder conservation on "Kareela" consists of both big and small square bales of hay and 100-200 big square pitted silage bales depending on seasonal conditions. Potatoes and vegetables such as zucchinis have also been grown in previous years as we looked for diversification on the property.

Tree planting

A tree planting program commenced 10 years ago to provide windbreaks and shelter on the property as wind is one of the major environmental hazards faced in this area. Our aim is to plant an additional windbreak every year.

Background to Kareela Wool

I was born in Wales UK and first came to Australia in 1968 to work as a jillaroo. I worked on cattle and sheep stations for 4 years before going home to help on the family farm. In the late 1970's my late mother and I owned a classic English clothing outlet for nine years. I returned to Australia in 1984 and settled on "Kareela" with my husband Noel. Because of our property size and low wool prices we have been forced to diversify. Noel has a trucking business and is also a wool classer. We decided together to form our company Kareela Wool in 1993 and have slowly grown to become recognized for our quality products.

Over the past 4 years we have successfully diversified into making Australian native animals out of Australian wool, under the company name "Wild N Woolies" and more recently formed a clothing business, "Kareela Wool" with custom designed fashion for women using Australian wool.

I began research and development for the production of the Australian native animals made from wool, in 1993. A key feature of the toys is to maintain the authenticity of hand knitted toys which our grandparents made and then to use the technology of today to produce a quality woolen product. Research went into such areas as to what strength, thickness and yarn to be used so the wool filling would not migrate out and the safety of appendages attached to the animals. The toys are made using crossbred wool at 28 micron from "Kareela" and the Southern Tablelands and carpet wool at 32 micron to fill the toys. The 32 micron of the carpet wool (a Dorset Down blend) has very good spring allowing the toys to keep their shape. The range includes a platypus, wombat, koala and kangaroo.

All wool used is scoured in Goulburn or Orange, spun and dyed at Ramsfield Yarns, Goulburn and sent to Sydney to be knitted up to our specifications. Ramsfield Yarns have recently closed down so we are currently looking for another company. The wool is then returned to us as a roll of cloth. I have a warehouse in Crookwell and all distribution is done from Goulburn.

All my staff work from home, most of them being rural women. I find they work harder and more efficiently in their own environment. I have 47 staff, 20 full-time and 27 part-time. I train my staff over a

three month period. They are trained at the Business Enterprise Centre in Goulburn using State and Regional Development officers based in Goulburn. Once the staff are trained we meet on a monthly basis. My policy for the company is contentment, happiness and satisfaction for the staff, but in return my quality control is of paramount importance.

I am currently selling the toys in 36 select shops around Australia. I am exporting to markets in USA and have small export orders for Asia and Europe. At present we are expanding into the mail order market in the States and Asia.

I have three 5 year goals set for the Wild N Woollies:- the toys will be dressed with wool felt vests and hats by 1998 - this is near completion, voice boxes will be fitted by 2000 and establishment of home/television selling in other states in USA as well as in Asia for the Toys by 2000.

Besides making knitted toys filled with wool we also make Merino leather skinned toys - Platypus and Teddy Bear. I spent some time at Fletcher International, Dubbo to learn about selecting the best Merino leather skins for strength and tanning. Our tanning is done in Geelong and then comes back to us in Goulburn and I have one gentleman who makes the leather toys for us.

As a consequence of my research and development of Wild N Woollies I have value added again and used merino wool to develop classic country clothing under the name "Kareela Wool". The clothing company has been running since October 1996. The merino wool used in the clothing is between 19.5 to 22 micron and is taken from the best fleeces in New South Wales and Victoria. The wool

is scoured in Wagga Wagga and knitted at Macquarie textiles in Albury. All the wool is cool wool meaning it must weigh under 200 g/m². I have four manufacturers constructing garments. One of these includes a small Sydney firm who makes all the jackets. All garments are made by order using individual measurements. I design the clothing in conjunction with the manufacturers. There are no retail outlets for "Kareela Wool" clothing. I do my own marketing through exclusive fashion parades, trade fairs and country cocktail parties.

"Kareela Wool" clothing has been on display in the Wool Pavilion at Sydney Royal Show for four years, and at trade fairs in rural and city venues. As part of my Regional Networking Program I have facilitated and organised trade and fashion shows at the NSW Country Embassy, Rural Show Committees, NSW Polo Association and private charity functions. It is planned in the year 2000 to have a Rural Expo designed to bring quality products under the one roof, enabling tourists to see and buy regional products. These products will include wool, cotton, leather, wine and food all of which will be 100% Australian owned and made. The Rural Expo will be run under the banners of 'Taste of Country' (who are sponsored by CRT) and 'From Paddock to Product', two companies which are owned by myself.

I consider "Kareela Wool" will develop into a substantial business and encompass a large share of the domestic and international market by the year 2000.

We are proud at "Kareela Wool" because we are earning export dollars for regional NSW, employing regional people, using Australian wool and keeping everything 100% Australian.