

Marketing

Rural Organics discusses certified organic lamb

In the past five years Rural Organics has completed many deals with certified organic lamb producers. JANE McCLURE describes what contributes to a very successful sale.

When growing certified organic lambs, as with the conventional market, a quality finished product is required if the lamb is to go into supermarkets, butcher shops or to the export markets.

Failing these markets, producers have the second option of keeping their lambs to grow them for the yearling sheep meat/hogget market or sell them into the store market. These decisions may depend on seasonal conditions and available feed – or on hay and grain storage and silage on the property at the time.

There are many breeds of lambs; it is best to choose breeds that best suit the operation. The most important factor is that the breeding program be planned properly so that there is a market for the finished lamb. Traditionally there has always been a market for the British crossbreed lamb (such as the Border Leicester-Merino cross). Quoting these lambs to the market place, it knows what it is getting.

However, graziers are now finding that markets are readily accepting many other types such as pure Merino, Dorper-Damara-Merino, Wiltshire-Dorper, SAMM-Merino and Dohnes-Merino. Some of these breeds are more adaptable to certain environments and contribute to the whole operation being more sustainable and economically viable.

Before making contact with the certified organic market to quote on lambs, it is important to ensure that a producer's certification is current. The certificate will show the producer number and specify A-grade organic or In-Conversion. Some markets may accept In-Conversion lambs.

When organising transportation of livestock, it's important to instruct the transport company that stock is to be transported in accordance with the Organic Standard. Other conditions that apply to the sale of organic livestock and are similar to those that apply to conventional sales include:

- carcase weight as negotiated with the market;
- a clean crutch is vital to eliminate contamination of the carcase during the slaughter;
- identification of stock - that is, ear tags and ear marks;
- vendor declaration forms and transport border crossing forms (if required);

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- sex – ewe, wether or ram;
- value of skin – wool shedding lambs or length of wool if a wool lamb;
- transaction and meat levies and kill fee if sold to a processor; and,
- terms of trade.

There are many benefits of going organic, including increased demand from consumers.

There are three main reasons why consumers are choosing organics. Health is an issue that families are increasingly aware of. Our certified organic farmers are the first link in the chain to addressing health problems. From healthy soil comes healthy food – including meat

from livestock grown on clean, healthy pastures. Consumers are also recognising that product identified and sold as certified organic is grown by farmers who care about the management and sustainability of their properties. Third, consumers are beginning to choose organic for its better taste.

Organic property management also provides long-term environmental and financial benefits to growers.

An added benefit of marketing your lambs as certified organic is the fact that they are traceable back to your certification number, wherever they are sold. This has a food safety advantage.

Rural Organics believes going organic has a brighter future. ■



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