

LAMB ROLL

LAKE Grace farmer Ross Taylor sold Prime SAMM lambs to a top of \$154 last week, the best price he has ever received.

Mr Taylor said the small line of lambs sent to WAMMCO, which included the \$154 top price animals, averaged \$140. The rest of the 330-lamb line averaged \$112.

"The top lambs were very heavyweights. They dressed out at 35kg, while the others dressed out at 25.57kg," he said.

This price was \$4/kg for the extra heavyweights and \$4.37/kg for the heavyweights.

There was no skin value included in the prices.

Mr Taylor said it was very good time to sell the lambs.

"The market hit a high point that week," he said.

"Normally, we would sell them a bit later in the year, but we were able to get them off a bit earlier and at a time when there weren't too many lambs coming onto the market.

"The lambs were fed a grain mix that we make up ourselves."

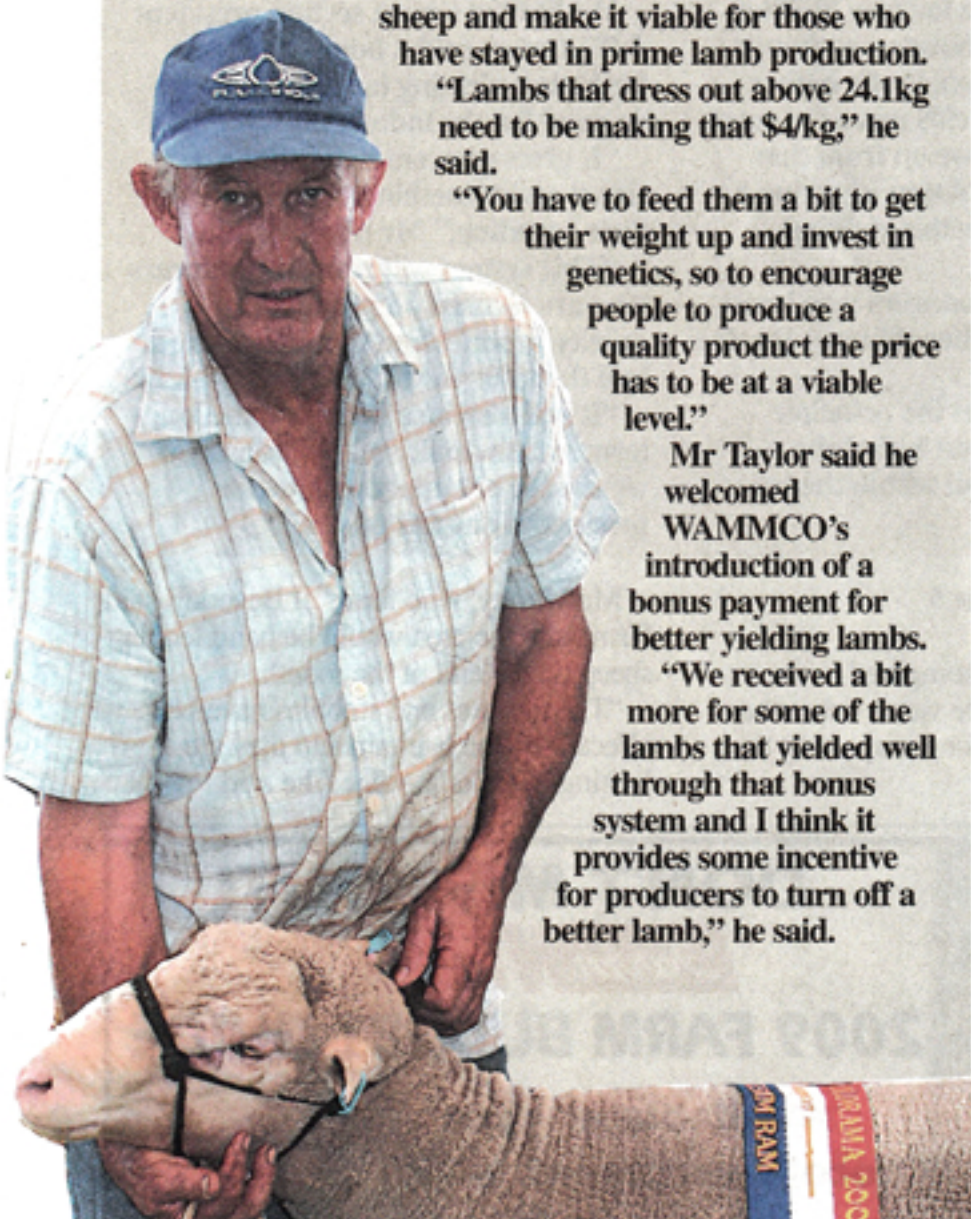
Mr Taylor said he agreed that prices really needed to be above \$4/kg to attract WA farmers back to sheep and make it viable for those who have stayed in prime lamb production.

"Lambs that dress out above 24.1kg need to be making that \$4/kg," he said.

"You have to feed them a bit to get their weight up and invest in genetics, so to encourage people to produce a quality product the price has to be at a viable level."

Mr Taylor said he welcomed WAMMCO's introduction of a bonus payment for better yielding lambs.

"We received a bit more for some of the lambs that yielded well through that bonus system and I think it provides some incentive for producers to turn off a better lamb," he said.



By TRAVIS KING

RECORD lamb prices are greeting growers who are able to turn off heavyweight lambs.

The high returns are a result of a protracted harvest and unusual seasonal conditions causing a lack of supply of quality trade lambs to the local market.

Lambs hit \$120 in Katanning last week and weight and grade prices greater than \$100 are now frequent.

But how long will it continue?

Many producers believe the price for quality heavy lambs needs to stay above \$4/kg, not only for the industry's viability but to also attract more producers back to sheep.

Hillside Meats director Polly Trefort said there was money to be made out of sheep if prices stayed around the level.

"You could buy stores last year that were 38kg liveweight for \$1.30/kg and turn them off for \$80 or \$90," he said.

"It might cost \$12-\$13 per head to feed them so the money is there.

"With the way prices have kicked off this year there is even more of a margin at the moment.

"To keep farmers producing lambs the price really needs to be at that \$4-4.20/kg mark.

"Supply is tight at the moment as the late harvest has caused the turn off of lambs to be delayed and this is causing the price to increase."

WAMMCO chief executive officer Des Griffiths agreed with Mr Trefort.

He said that unusual seasonal conditions and the harvest finishing later than normal in some parts of the state were contributing to a price hike.

"Supply is tight at the moment

but we expect an easing of prices in February or March as more lambs come off stubbles," Mr Griffiths said.

"We don't know how well finished those lambs will be as the value of the stubbles is probably down due to the amount of rain in November last year.

"The higher prices of \$4.20-\$4.30/kg are being paid for really good lambs.

"We are getting underdone lambs coming through and producers need to be mindful that lambs have to be of the highest quality to attract those premium prices.

"The underdone lambs should really be put on a feeder, but producers may be reluctant to do this and instead sell them to the live exporters, which just adds further to the supply problem for processors."

Mr Griffiths said numbers of lambs processed at the company's Katanning abattoir were down for December.

"We were able to maintain full production by processing more mutton, but we don't want to be handling too much mutton," he said.

WAFarmers meat section president Jeff Murray said farmers would produce more lamb if they knew they were going to receive a \$4/kg minimum for heavyweights.

"Prices need to be about that level now days for producers to stick with sheep," he said.

"The critical mass of sheep numbers is being threatened and producers need some price incentive to continue to produce or increase production.

"We are not getting paid any

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