

# Prime SAMMS offer the right balance

By **CAITLYN BURLING**

PRIME SAMMs produce a prime lamb that brings in a very nice profit for Michael O'Neill.

The Lake Grace farmer has been no less than utterly impressed with the performance of the Prime SAMM breed since introducing it into his sheep operation.

Wool wasn't contributing much to the O'Neill family's bottom line and meat markets and prices were on the rise, so five years ago Michael made the switch.

He purchased some Tiarri Prime SAMM rams from local Lake Grace stud breeder Ross Taylor to produce an F1 Prime SAMM-Merino ewe from which they could breed well-rounded, fast-growing lambs.

These days Michael runs 460 F1 Prime SAMM-Merino ewes and this season they achieved an excellent lambing of 107 per cent or 497 lambs on the ground after they finished dropping throughout May.

He believed the Prime SAMM had a commercial edge over other breeds because they were plain-bodied, fast-growing and low maintenance, but above all, they didn't go to fat if they weren't sold straight away.

"The best thing is being able to turn them off quickly,



□ Lake Grace farmer Michael O'Neill has been very impressed with the performance of the Prime SAMM breed since introducing it to his sheep flock five years ago, after purchasing rams from the local Tiarri stud.

or if there's a glut in the market, you can hang onto them," Michael said.

"If you do have to tide them over, they don't go to fat like some British breeds.

"We can just back them off the feed a bit and then amp up the feed, so when the market increases again, they are sold in peak condition.

"We usually sell our lambs at three to four months old to WAMMCO when they dress out at 24kg."

The prime lambs are turned off in large drafts from the O'Neill's property from October onwards and are always in top condition after having ample access to quality feed.

Michael said they ran their

sheep with a light stocking rate so there was always plenty of feed available, in addition to lick feeders, which usually contain barley and plenty of hay.

Using the lick feeders meant he didn't have to disturb the sheep during important periods such as lambing in May or when the Tiarri Prime SAMM rams joined the F1 ewes at a rate of 1:60 on December 10.

The rams were left in with the females for a long joining period to get the maximum number of lambs on the ground, only being removed at shearing time at the end of February.

By using the Prime SAMM rams over the F1 ewes, the

progeny was a profitable mixture of Prime SAMM and Merino, not only for meat but the wool cut was still worth reasonable money.

The first-cross ewe was also an important element for the O'Neill's operation, as they were easily maintained and plain-bodied which provided them with an excellent breeding platform for prime lamb production.

"Prime lambs just seem to be in demand at the moment," Michael said.

"Wool is generally a by-product of the lambs, but it's still good quality and saleable.

"But Prime SAMMs offer us the right balance between the two and we are keen to continue with the breed."