

SAMM key to overhauling Joyces' farming

By **CAITLYN BURLING**

IT was either overhaul their sheep flock or crop the lot for the Joyce family.

Farming at their Kukerin and Tarin Rock properties had reached a crucial crossroad in 2004 after a devastating fire wiped out the entire ewe population that was grazing the paddocks of their Kukerin home block.

The disaster led Colin and Ronni Joyce to seriously question their operation, consider their options and other ways of moving their family farming operation forward.

The answer came from their eldest son Josh (dec), who had weighed up all the facts and figures on numerous sheep breeds and determined Prime SAMM was the breed of the future.

They purchased Rockdale Prime SAMM genetics to kick off their prime lamb operation, and eventually shifted to local Lake Grace stud Tiarri for their ram requirements.

Working with a pure Merino base provided the Joyce family with quality breeding stock to build their Prime SAMM enterprise to where it is today, totalling 1400 pure Prime SAMM breeding ewes.

It was the precise change the Joyces needed to reinvigorate their sheep operation and keep them in their farming mix, rather than giving into the temptation of a total cropping scenario.

"I have been farming for a long time and have a very good memory of the heights the wool markets reached in the 1980s," Colin said.

"But when the wool market continued to decline, we knew we had to change something.

"Wool was a big factor for the change and there just wasn't many more incentives to stay with Merinos, so we opted to try the Prime SAMM.

"Obviously every farming operation is different, but the



□ Kalan Joyce with some of the family's Prime SAMM ewes and lambs.

Prime SAMMs are a good fit for us because they are much less work and require the least amount of care."

Part of their easy-care strategy is to join the rams with the ewes for five weeks from the beginning of January, ensuring a late lambing in July when there is usually plenty of feed available.

Colin said their aim is to lamb late and feed less, simplifying their processes and reducing the amount of sheep husbandry jobs they need to carry out throughout the year.

It hasn't affected their lambing percentages, and if anything, the Joyces' lambing figures remain as strong as ever, lifting from 85 per cent lambing with Merinos to a consistent 115pc with Prime SAMM.

In the initial years of the Prime SAMM conversion, Colin started pregnancy scanning to monitor the conception rates, but they became so consistently strong he soon did away with it.

One of the best traits of the breed was the robust lambs that hit the ground running, ensuring the conversion of



□ Colin and Ronni Joyce's late son Josh was the driving force behind getting the family into running Prime SAMMs.

feed to muscle was a fast one, with the top line of lambs usually ready to be turned straight off their mothers by the end of October.

They are usually sold to processors and have all the desirable traits of a good eye muscle, hefty weight and large frames.

While the meat traits are the main focus, Colin said they haven't totally disregarded the wool component, shearing the main flock in early February and the rams in May.

Their fleece has consistently averaged 21.5 micron since becoming a total Prime SAMM flock, compromising a little on weight but still producing a saleable fibre.

Just as Prime SAMM kept Colin interested in sheep, particularly in the years following Josh's death, Colin's younger son Kalan has returned to the farm with a keen interest to continue their sheep program – with Prime SAMM at the forefront.