

# Hop on board

The biggest and most  
Border Leicester studs in  
the world – and it's only  
100 years old.  
run by the Sutton family  
in NSW, has the Australian  
government judged the best this nation  
has ever produced a number

most of awards and trophies  
received in its short history  
and broad ribbons lining  
the Sutton's shearing shed  
it could hope to win in a

theoretic rise for the Suttons,  
Sydney to buy a couple  
of acres as a weekend.  
a quantum leap though –  
and it was natural for Jeff  
to see the family's link with the

with the Border Leicester  
guidance from fellow stud  
men able to produce an  
record in a short time span.  
to pay tribute to those who  
run, especially local Border  
Leicester Barry Harper from the

come a mentor for Jeff,  
one of the first genetics  
to establish the Wattle Farm stud.  
I know much about the  
breed but I could see that

## The Sutton family have taken their young stud from strength to strength, writes FIONA MYERS

running a stud could help maximise  
returns from an initially small land area,  
which has now grown to more than  
800ha," Jeff says.

"Barry has helped with invaluable  
amounts of time and knowledge, showing  
how to run the stud sheep and run a stud  
the proper way."

The Cadell stud doesn't show and  
hasn't since the late 1980s – its reputation  
means ram sales are always strong – but  
Jeff decided showing was the quickest  
and most effective way to lift the profile of  
his newly formed stud.

They started showing sheep in 2009,  
and attended up to 16 shows a year to  
spread the knowledge of the Wattle Farm  
sheep's quality.

"We started showing for the specific  
reason of lifting the profile of the stud,"  
Jeff says.

"It was about attending as many as we  
could and doing as well as we could."

The hectic showing program was  
supported by Jeff's parents, Marie and  
Reg Sutton, who provided extra hands  
and resources when the show team hit  
the rings.

Now that showing program has been  
fine-tuned to attending just the major  
events - the Royal Easter Show at Sydney,  
the Royal Melbourne Show, the Australian  
Sheep and Wool Show at Bendigo and the  
NSW sheep show at Dubbo.

And Jeff is committed to supporting

country shows throughout the Riverina  
too.

The biggest success story at Wattle  
Farm is Exceed, a 1 1/2-year-old ram which  
is the current Australian champion and  
has taken the most broad ribbons across  
eastern Australia in the past 12 months.

Jeff is extremely proud of the ram,  
which he describes as not extreme but  
balanced.

"Exceed has an excellent outlook, good  
barrel, tremendous spring of ribs and  
a wonderful dense, true to type Border  
fleece," he says.

Semen from Exceed has already been  
sold to breeders in NSW and Victoria, as  
well as an order from New Zealand.

"He's not the biggest ram in the line-up  
but he is a balanced sheep," Jeff says.

And that's exactly what Jeff is aiming  
for in the stud. They won't be the biggest,  
or the most extreme sheep, but they will  
offer commercial producers what they  
want – a true to type Border Leicester  
which has excellent conformation, bone  
and a quality fleece.

"Clients want fertile rams with excellent  
carcass characteristics that produce long,  
well-muscled ewes, and that's what we  
aim to consistently deliver," Jeff says.

"They want a ram that is hardy, not one  
that lies under a tree and dies!"

All of the sheep, which includes 600  
Border Leicester ewes, are scanned to  
give feedback on the genetic performance

of specific sires, and all are Lambplan  
recorded.

And in their own test of their genetics  
the Suttons run 600 Merino ewes joined  
to their own Border Leicester rams for  
first-cross production.

It's just another check to make sure the  
stud is heading in the right direction – after  
all, their commercial flock is a client of  
their own stud.

Wattle Farm held its inaugural Border  
Leicester sale last year, and seven  
stud rams averaged \$2200, 50 flock  
rams averaged \$700 and 21 stud ewes  
averaged \$450.

It was a solid start for the stud in a tight  
season, and Jeff says they wanted to build  
on this.

"Eventually we would like to sell about  
150 flock rams each year and develop a  
market for the stud rams too," he says.

"It's our ultimate goal to influence the  
stud ram market and, to not only have a  
solid base of commercial clients, but to be  
able to sell high quality semen and rams  
to studs."

He's equally proud of the fact that three  
new Border Leicester studs have already  
been established on the Wattle Farm  
genetics.

Talk to Jeff for long enough and the  
love of this breed and his passion for  
breeding high quality Border Leicesters  
is clear.

It's also clear that the passion is  
unlikely to wane any time soon.

"We have a slogan at Wattle Farm,  
and that's hard work delivers luck, and if  
that's seven days a week, so be it,"  
Jeff says. ■



**Border pride:**  
Showing  
sheep helps  
spread the  
Wattle Farm  
message.

