

Our People: Fellowship fosters Rachel's love for livestock

CATHERINE MILLER 21 Nov 2010, 3:30 a.m.

[Sheep](#)



Rachel Chirgwin, Chirgwin Livestock, is a commission-based agent for FarmWorks Australia and the recipient of the 2010 Peter Olsen Fellowship from the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia.

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AGRICULTURE may be plagued by an ageing farmer population but the 2010 recipient of the Peter Olsen Fellowship Rachel Chirgwin is among a talented new crop of farmers.

The Kangaroo Island Suffolk breeder and livestock agent who has youth, enthusiasm and a keen eye for good sheep and cattle on her side was thrilled to win the prestigious Agriculture Bureau Award last month.

Now in its 10th year the \$8000 award recognises excellence among young South Australian farmers, enabling them to undertake an innovative research or study project of their choice.

Rachel will now realise a three-year dream to visit the United Kingdom and import some of their Suffolk genetics for her Curlew Valley stud, which she established eight years ago.

"It has given me the opportunity to fast track this direction for my stud, something that I would not have been able to afford for a few years yet," she said.

The 25-year-old self-starter hopes to expand her stud to the mainland and believes the UK sheep will add more muscle and weight to the Australian Suffolk flock without compromising their hardiness or lambing ease.

"I am aiming to breed sheep with plenty of muscle and length, while avoiding lean rangey sheep to retain intramuscular fat for improved eating quality," she said.

"I believe we need to breed towards heavier lambs because ultimately weight is what the producer is being paid for."

Rachel will depart from Australia in early December on her 24-day study tour visiting about 15 Suffolk studs, the Innovis Reproductive Centre in Edinburgh, Scotland, and even an abattoir on the Isle of Arran.

"I plan to import embryos from Scotland's leading studs, and, after assessing their performance in Australian conditions, mate them back over a group of my elite suffolk ewes. The aim is to produce a Suffolk that is 25 per cent Scottish and 75pc Australian, having the structure and style of the Australian Suffolk, but with increased muscling."

Rachel says one of the Suffolk breed's major advantages is its resilience during dry periods which has really shone through with a string of highly variable seasons.

"This makes them ideal for our seasonal conditions with lambs responding well after feed shortages. High growth rates and good yielding percentages also makes them ideal for feedlots or to finish on stubbles."

"With the shortage of lambs, black skins are not an issue and if you do lose a bit in skin value it is more than made up with the extra kilos of meat."

In September 2002 she established the Curlew Valley stud on her parents property at Cygnet River on Kangaroo Island with five ewes from Updown Park at Mount Pleasant, and two ewes and rams from the Letts stud at Strathalbyn.

It has now grown to a flock of about 300 ewes and supplies about 60 rams a year.

This year, Curlew Valley's fourth on-property sale was the stud's most successful yet with a \$621 average and wide geographical spread of buyers including 25 rams bought by West Coast clients and a few to the Upper South East.

Rachel admits her first love is farming but says most young people now need to work off-farm to generate enough money to buy their own property.

She has chosen a career as a stock agent, joining the growing company FarmWorks Australia in February and says she is undeterred about working in a man's world as one of the State's few female stock agents.