

Editor
Straight Furrow
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Dear Sir,

It is with informed interest that I comment upon the June 1st advertorial from the unordained Priest speaking from the Pulpit. The message therein is a continuum of diatribe that dogmatically supports the only one method of livestock selection that is funded by farmer's levies.

He is very demeaning of "eyeballing" an animal as an indicator for important factors that influence the profitability of an animal such as structural correctness for functionality, birthing ease and longevity et al.

We should be talking about a principle for livestock selection that returns sustainable and profitable animals which provide quality produce. In fact it's about the viability of the sheep and beef industry.

I suggest that if we consider the impact of his particular brand of genetic selection which for the last 20 years has been dominant, why then is approximately 50% beef, lamb and wool products not effectively marketable and bankable?? Hence the dilemma that the industry is experiencing currently with rantings about a cure (marketing monolith et al) and not examining the reason why the industry is in this failing position (cause & effect). The unbundling of genetics is rife.

If "Specialized Eyeballing" is interfaced with astute knowledge of "Pure Genetics" and used with a professional methodology for livestock selection we would be delivered reliable flocks and herds that are efficient and produce quality product that incidentally is self marketing. The scientific term for the above described skill is "EPIGENETICS" The full implications of Epigenetics is understood and practiced in New Zealand, by an established entity, to the genetic and financial profit of the commercial farmers and astute breeders involved, albeit developed, researched, transferred to farmers and funded privately.

The term Epigenetics was coined by Conrad Waddington 1905-1975 in 1942 but did not appear necessary as a solution by the culture that has dominated for some 35 years. Linear Prediction can be considered left field. Uninformed "eyeballing" can be considered right field. Epigenetics centre field providing sensibility and realism to genetic selection.

If Russell Priest was fully informed he would understand that enlightened scientists are discretely re igniting positive interest in Epigenetics and indeed are applying for funding to research the intricacies of Epigenetics. He must also understand that the vital component that interprets certain dimensions of traits as expressed through physiology and skeletal configuration (specialized stockjudgment) is also genetic (human variety) and a skill that can not be traded at the farm gate, created within a trial plot or demeaned through the use of a throwaway tag "eyeballing".

Ian Walsh
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