

East Friesian gamble pays off

By ANNABELLE BEALE

THE proof is in the production for the Foster family at Casterton – the introduction of New Zealand bloodlines into their flock has boosted fertility by 30 per cent.

On a mission to improve lambing percentages, survival and carcase yield in their Haven Park flock, the Fosters explored breeds to work as a fertility kicker in their composite flock and took a gamble with the relatively unknown East Friesian.

Graham, Shirley, Rick, and Nancy Foster introduced the breed to the Western District in 1997 with New Zealand semen, and in 2012 bought breeding ewes from Prospect, Kyneton.

They say the breed has seen growing interest for its good mothering and fertility ability.

It is a predominantly prime lamb operation, which runs 4000 breeding ewes, 200 Poll Dorset stud ewes, and 70 East Friesian stud ewes across its 1140-hectare property.

“We were looking to increase our production and hence fertility was the key driver,” Mr Foster said.

“So we looked at the East Friesian for the fertility but also because with the fertility you need to be able to feed those extra lambs and the East Friesians have the milking ability which was really important.”

Grappling with genetics in the past eight years has paid dividends, as the Fosters transitioned their flock from pure Corriedales to East Friesian,



BREED BOOST: Rick and Nancy Foster, Haven Park, Casterton, with their children Hugh and Alison, have been able to boost their flock's fertility by 30pc with East Friesian sheep.

Corriedale, and Border Leicester-cross ewes, and used Poll Dorset as the terminal sire.

“We are hitting domestic and export weights, with most lambs being turned off at 26-28 kilograms at five months by November, and fertility rates consistently average 140pc,” Mr Foster said.

“The season is starting to turn by end of November so we sell them off as sucker lambs.”

The family – respected veterans on the Corriedale show circuit – made a successful Friesian debut when they won reserve champion for their East

Friesian at the Australian Sheep & Wool Show at Bendigo last month.

The Corriedale-cross was introduced for the skin and wool type, which Rick said was to avoid loss of wool type and the ordinary skins often seen in composite flocks.

They were maintained for the base wool quality, black feet, and good structure as a sound cross-breeding base, while the East Friesian fertility, milk, mothering and ease of lambing was to complement the Corriedale base.

East Friesian is one of the world's

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