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AWI refuses to fund sheep genetics program

ABC

Sheep researchers say merino breeders will miss out on financial gains, if ongoing research is not funded.

The genetic measurements of traits in meat and wool are now available, at a fee, from the Sheep Genetics program developed by a co-operative research centre.

Head of the Sheep CRC, James Rowe, says the genetic measurement program needs \$1.5 million a year from the sheep industry, but Australian Wool Innovation has said it won't fund the program.

Professor Rowe says merino breeders stand to lose money if it isn't funded.

"The return of around \$2 per ewe per year, through genetic gain, is quite possible," he said.

"That's cumulative, so bear in mind, you do that for 10 years, that's \$20 per ewe you've added to the bottom line.

"The upper limit in the merino appears to be about \$2.40, \$2.50.

"So if we really get this right, the merino industry really has a lot of benefit from getting the faster and better balanced genetic gain."

The Victorian Farmers Federation, the Wool Producers lobby, and Superfine Woolgrowers have all voiced their support for the project.

MLA says the genetic testing is of such high value it should be funded, although the MLA board has yet to sign off.

But AWI's Stuart McCulloch says his organisation isn't satisfied with the business model.

"Come a day it will have to get out of the science arena and into the commercial arena, and the commercial arena tests things all rather well, not only devices but breeding values as well," he said.

"We are of the view that that particular project failed on a lack of commercialisation that can be evidenced, and we're keen to see some hard core bridging between the science world and the commercial world."



Merino sheep in the southern Riverina, NSW. Australian Wool Innovation is refusing to help fund a sheep genetic measuring program, saying the business model is not up to scratch. (Laurissa Smith)