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Wool brokers seek wool from non-mulesed sheep for a premium in European and US markets



Wool brokers are reporting growing interest in non-mulesed wool with premiums possible, if the fleece is of good quality.

Mulesing is the surgical practice of cutting skin around the breech of a lamb to prevent blowfly strike and it has attracted the wrath of animal activists for a decade.

Wool brokers say animal welfare may only be a niche market concern of buyers in Europe and the US, but they are seeking out more non-mulesed wool than Chinese buyers.

Fox and Lillie, one of Australia's biggest wool buyers, has put the call out to farmers shearing in the next month, offering a premium for non-mulesed wool.



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Fox and Lillie's wool brokerage manager Eamon Timms says interest in wool from sheep which haven't been mulesed has been building for the past couple of years.

"Certainly there's been a marked interest in inquiry in the last month or two," Mr Timms said.

"Mainly it's because the Europeans are becoming more cognisant of this (animal welfare) factor, not much (interest) from China, apart from companies selling onto Europe.

"But it's driven by Europe and to a lesser extent US."

Mr Timms said retailers were not interested in whether the lamb received pain relief after the mulesing operation.

"A few may, but as a general rule no."

Market attitudes to mulesing

The Chinese market's attitude to mulesing fluctuates; if buying for its own market mulesing is not an issue, but if it is buying wool for export, it is.

Last week leading wool processor [Modiano](#) wrote to Australia's Agriculture Minister calling for leadership to find an alternative to mulesing, or for pain relief to be compulsory for mulesed lambs. Other wool buyers are also reporting growing interest in non-mulesed wool.

Andrew Blanch, of New England Wool, said the company's owners, fine Italian fabric makers Rada and Vitale Barberis Canonico were paying a premium for certain types of wool.

"Our main increase is people understanding exactly where the wool comes from and what the welfare credentials of the wool is," Mr Blanch said.

"In some respects that may be for non-mulesed wool, or could be wool from sheep that have had pain relief in the mulesing process.

"They want more of a story."

Mr Blanch said premiums were not just about non-mulesing.

"The wool has to be correct as well, and if it is there good quality, non-mulesed it can be 30-50 cents (higher), but it has to be the right wool.

"We have more money to spend on non-mulesed, or pain relief, because not only for the demand but it is the best animal welfare outcome for the animal."

Alternative to mulesing

An alternative to mulesing remains elusive, with liquid nitrogen injections, laser (hair) removal and sodium laurel sulphate on the skin around the breech still under trial.

Australian Wool Exchange (AWEX) reports fewer than 10 per cent of sheep are reported as not-mulesed, in the wool declarations but buyers are more interested in finding out.





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But *Australian owned TechWool, the largest exporter of greasy wool with 13 per cent, says China is not paying a premium for growers ending the surgical mulesing.

"I think it's probably a long way off, because in China it's all about price, not about the story behind the product," said Techwool's Joshua Lamb.

"With non-mulesed wool, the inquiry is not huge, 100 bales here or there. Not enough to drive a market.

"Since the Global Financial Crisis in 2009 the inquiry dropped away and it's only started to bubble back in the past 18 months."

Joshua Lamb said Chinese consumers were still worried about the economic outlook.

"The luxury end is even moving away from fine wool, so that market is likely to suffer for a bit longer."

**TechWool is Australian owned, not Chinese owned as previously mentioned.*

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-07/wool-brokers-seek-more-non-mulesed-wool/6833672#.VhXCGZZ-mV4.email>