

## Zegna's wool growing pains



📷 Count Zegna was presented with an honorary life membership of the Australian Superfine Wool Growers Association by president Simon Cameron for his promotion and dedication to the fine wool industry. KARON Photography

For the first time in the history of the exclusive Ermenegildo Zegna's wool awards, the Italian fine textiles and menswear luxury brand has paid 50 per cent above the market value to purchase 24 bales entered into the superfine competition.

Since purchasing a 60 per cent stake in the sixth generation Coventry family's historic Achill Farm located in Armidale, northern New South Wales, in 2014, the €1.3 billion Italian family-owned fashion empire has become "sensitive" to the often gruelling challenges faced by Australian woolgrowers.

Operating pressures during the recent drought consumed conversations, making Ermenegildo Zegna third-generation chairman Count Paolo Zegna well aware of farming terms which were previously foreign to him.



“There is a new sensitivity that we’ve developed,” Count Zegna said.

“You understand what they’ve said to you as the simple buyer is the reality of everyday.

“Creating new dams and irrigation system, rotating paddocks was a language we were not used to at all, and we started learning the power of putting the company and knowledge of someone that knows the business together.”

The impact has been a recently reviewed criteria for the Ermenegildo Zegna Wool Trophy which now accepts wool from sheep where pain relief is used during surgical procedures after a seven year hiatus of wool only from non-mulesed sheep. [SC1]

In 2009, the company temporarily cancelled the awards due to mounting pressure from animal activist groups to ban mulesing.

The awards resumed in 2010, however only wool from non-mulesed sheep were eligible for competition.

“The more we come and speak with (woolgrowers) has made us aware of honest difficulties the growers, and from our own experience have,” Count Zegna said.

“We understand they were not fake requests or excuses in not being able to achieve certain results – it was a reality we were living.

“With us more involved in wool growing, there is a different sensitivity now.”

However, Count Zegna said it would be a “long process” for the entire fashion industry to understand the complexities of Australian wool production.



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“It will take time but it is a process we are determined to do (in educating consumers),” he said.

Australian Superfine Woolgrowers Association (ASWGA) president Simon Cameron said since the decision was taken to change the Ermenegildo Zegna Wool Tropy eligibility criteria there had been a lot of developments in relation to improved treatment of animals, such as pain relief prior to mulesing.

“You would be surprised at the number of superfine woolgrowers that no longer mules their sheep,” Mr Cameron said.

“We have had to change because we’re the most vulnerable.

“A number of growers have developed animal husbandry methods and modified their breeding programs to avoid the need for mulesing.”

During the recent wool awards held in Melbourne, Mr Cameron presented Count Zegna with an honorary life membership of the ASWGA.

“... This relates to his contribution to our industry at a global level and the fact he has supported wool growers for many years, in good times and in bad,” he said.

ASWGA has worked in collaboration with Ermenegildo Zegna to promote superfine wool since its inception in 1971.

“There is a very important relationship between the association and the Italian textile manufacturers,” Mr Cameron said.

“However the difficulty our sector of the wool industry faces is poor competitive returns compared to other farming enterprises.

“To attract young people back to superfine wool production, our sector needs to be competitive.”

With the recent above market premium paid to Ermenegildo Zegna Wool Awards entrants, maybe this is another lesson being learnt by Count Zegna.

<http://www.farmonline.com.au/story/4566154/zegnas-wool-growing-pains-photos/?cs=5378#slide=5>