

ROMNEY SUCCESS STORY – 2012 MINT LAMB COMPETITION

'Top lamb: Basic sheep breeds offer farmers the potential for good performance gains, says Oxford farmer Hugh Taylor.'

Hugh Taylor's Oxford farm has become a hotbed of performance breeding, but a good eye selected the romney lamb that won the Mint Lamb Competition.

The large single lamb outperformed entries from throughout New Zealand at the Canterbury A & P Show contest after meat yield analysis and a tender test with finalists undergoing taste testing before a panel of judges.

Taylor was encouraged by another farmer to enter the competition for the first time with two purebred romneys.

He admits his selection policy was less than scientific.

"On the morning we picked the two lambs entries, myself and my son, Marcus, went out with a trailer and picked five lambs in a corner and isolated two lambs and that was it."

He still does not know if the whole lamb mob is high in the taste stakes and is looking forward to the day when farmers will have the technology to consistently identify lambs producing the most tasty and tender meat.

The Taylor lamb is the first known romney to win a major taste-based competition.

The lamb was born on September 5 and slaughtered on October 29, with a growth rate of about 600 grams a day. The carcass weight was 16.8 kilograms with a lean-meat yield of 54.53 per cent.

The 10 highest yielding lambs judged on the hook at an Alliance plant were selected as finalists, tender tested at Lincoln University and then prepared into meat cuts cooked by Christchurch chef Gary Miller and tasted by judges.

Taylor said he had another set of lambs he was not far from picking and his goal was to enter twins in next year's competition to further prove the value of registered romneys.

He said this was the first time a dual-purpose sheep had won the competition and that told him basic breeds had a place in farming, with there being no need for farmers to "chase rainbows" to get performance gains.

"The win is an acknowledgement of all the fine work many people have done behind the scenes and demonstrates we don't need foreign breeds to achieve our goals, " he said.

Taylor's farm near Oxford, Gleneyre, has been one of two farms running the Merial Ancare Romney Trial for the last six years with Lincoln University.

Each year, 20 elite rams from breeders around New Zealand are trialled, with 10 rams mated to commercial ewes at Gleneyre and the rest at the North Island farm of Ashhurst owned by Kerry Osborne. The lean-meat yield of registered romneys has risen during the six-year trial by 50 per cent, with lamb carcasses averaging 54.4 per cent and the odd lamb yielding 60 per cent.

The trial has shown there is potential to lift the average romney lambing percentage of 109 per cent, with trial ewes reaching 190 per cent.

Taylor said the trial had given romney breeders a performance baseline and allowed them to identify the elite ewes through yield grade scanning at Alliance Group meat plants to further improve the genetic linkage. Taylor won a trophy and prizes valued at \$1700.



**Written by Tim Cronshaw
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