

Big Gun judges Angoras at the 2019 Sydney Royal Easter Show.

George Hope, President of the South African Ram Breeders Society and Principal of Loch Dale Angoras delivered a high- power presence to this year's Sydney Royal Easter Show.



George, son-in-law to Blake Hobson, answered wide ranging questions at the presentation dinner on Wednesday night. Reflecting on the Loch Dale operation he stated that the group farmed Angora goats in the Jansenville area of the Karoo and ran some 300 stud ewes (does) on heavily managed areas of the property. He also had a flock of up to 3000 commercial ewes (does) and wethers on less controlled areas where predation was more of a problem. The stud does produce the stud rams (bucks) sold each year under the Loch Dale brand.

Two points were made on feeding. Good mohair production requires “*ad-lib*” feeding and unlike the last big drought in 1991, the high mohair prices on this occasion had enabled cost effective fodder purchases.

When asked about “vermin” George gave some interesting details of the problem of lynx and Black- backed Jackal. Perhaps we would refer to the lynx as the Caracal, a large cat similar to mountain lion. Both predators have increased rapidly over recent times due to lack of a bounty, the spread of hunting enterprises and uncontrolled farming lands providing breeding area for the once rare animals in farming areas. Predation in some areas reduced weaning percentages to as low as 10%, literally “eating farmers out”.

Commenting on the “Sustainable Farming “ program he informed us that BKB had taken up the job of administering and auditing mohair growers and that while the PETA film had been a shock, the result may well have been hugely positive “because now everyone knew about South Africa and Mohair”. As a result, Sustainable Mohair is way ahead of the Sustainable wool program. On another rather political issue George expressed great positivity about farming, stating that while the SA Government had purchased properties for redistribution, it was generally recognised that unrecompensed farm seizures would result in farm values falling to zero and the collapse of farming. Unfortunately, redistribution of farming lands without title has resulted in lack of financial support for operators and so loss of infrastructure.

The role of the Ram Breeders Society was similar to that of a stud society with the aim of providing superior breeding animals to commercial growers. The Society inspected and approved rams for sale and these animals usually averaged R4000 (about \$400). Unfortunately, there was competition from grower “breeders” who tended to undercut the Ram Breeders with animals of “lesser quality” or depth of breeding.



George Hope supervising wether shearing for the schools performance class at the 2019 Sydney Royal Easter Show

On the stud system, George commented that each of the main studs was known for particular characteristics - fineness, length, evenness, density. All had known proponents. Loch Dale, he suggested, was known for uniformity and evenness.

George was impressed by the school's program in Australia. He felt that this aspect of the industry was missing in South Africa.

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