

Commercial growers win Zegna trophy

The prestigious Zegna trophy for an extra fine wool fleece has been won by Victoria Valley commercial wool producers Bruce and David Fry.

It is the first time commercial growers have won the award.

The Frys run 3000 ewes and 3000 wethers on their 930-hectare Brooksdale property which has been owned by the family since 1892.

The flock is based on the neighboring Sierra Park Merino stud, where rams have been bought for the last 44 years. Average ewe production is four kilograms of 18.5-micron wool.

Bruce Fry said their aim had always been to produce increasing quantities of high-quality superfine wool. Ever since 1945, they had increased the total quantity of wool sold each year.

This remarkable result has been achieved by sowing down the entire property to improved pasture.

But the extra feed has complicated management as far as superfine wool is concerned, particularly when early autumn breaks produce a flush of high quality pasture.

The Frys do their own sheep classing and aim for an even line of sheep. They are continually culling ewes for off-types and sell all ewes at five-years old.

The cast-for-age ewes are a marketable commodity and are sold on the property through Elders Ltd. Last year they sold for \$50 a head in the wool.

Mr David Fry, a graduate from Glenormiston Agricultural College and the Melbourne College of Textiles, took over responsibility for classing the clip in 1985.

He said their fleece wool was generally divided into three wether and three ewe main lines and sold in Elders superfine wool sale in February. The oddments were sold in November.

Mr Fry said the Zegna award fleece was selected from about seven at shearing last October.

"It was from a two-year-old wether and was an exceptional fleece. The wool was very bright, had an even and pronounced crimp and great style. It was 90s-100s quality," he said.

Despite a major drop in price for this year's clip, it was sold on the first day of the first scheduled sale of free market sales in February, the Frys are confident in the future for superfine wool.

"Look at the stockpile, there are only about 2000 bales of 18-micron wool in it. So there is plenty of demand for our wool and the interest from companies like Zegna prove it," they said.