

There is simply a lack of demand for wool

**Hamish de
Lautour**



I AM compelled to respond to a letter on the state of the wool industry in your issue of June 19.

I accept the writer is struggling for answers as to why the industry seems so unsettled and so unprofitable.

I agree, farmers have themselves to blame, in a round about way, but not in the way the writer describes.

I agree, the industry needs "enthusiastic, motivated members willing to take calculated risks in the pursuit of higher excellence".

I strongly disagree that the industry lacks this courage; in fact there are actually many totally committed (albeit, some misguided) people in the industry.

I also disagree that the failure of WPC or that "industry ticket clippers" are part of the problem. I presume the writer is viewing value chain participants as 'ticket clippers'.

The problem is painfully simple and that is the LACK OF DEMAND for wool.

Demand is not created by the value chain, it is created by consumers.

Demand is at an all-time low as the synthetic industry has outsmarted a complacent wool industry, asleep at the wheel for 40 years.

So who could you blame for our predicament? The synthetic industry, for being smarter than us?

The misguided consumers, for believing the slick synthetics marketing and not buying wool?

The levy funded research organisations we trusted to keep us in the game?

The levy paid directors and executives, for not responding to all the above?

About all growers can be blamed for is not realising what the problem really is.

That is all history now and we are where we are, but we must constantly remind ourselves not to make the same mistakes ever again.

The solution is two-fold and very simple but it will take time.

Increase demand

Capture value from the retail (consumer) end and return it directly back to growers.

To increase demand, we need to

reconnect with our consumers through strong effective retail brands — we know it can work, just look at Ice Breaker, for an example.

To deliver retail value back to growers, we need grower ownership of the brands.

The great news is we already have the two key ingredients — in the Just Shorn brand programme and the Primary Wool Co-operative.

I believe growers are unaware of the motive, commitment, investment and potential that is driving the Just Shorn brand development and also unaware of the presence and value of the Primary Wool Co-operative, its 38 years of industry experience, its profitable operation for the benefit of its 100 per cent farmer ownership and its share of the Just

Shorn brand.

So, I say to disillusioned growers: look very hard at who you are supporting when you market your wool.

Support an organisation that you can have ownership in, that is giving you an immediate annual return on your investment, that is investing in retail brand development to increase demand and that is not taking levies from you to do any of it.

You will find there is already one organisation that is providing all these ingredients and that is the Primary Wool Co-operative.

It has members nationwide and is available for all growers to join.

• *Hamish de Lautour is a Waipukurau wool grower*

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