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Branding Fluid Contamination

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In the last 12 months there have been a significant number of complaints made by processors about the increase in wool contaminated by sheep branding fluids, which do not wash out during processing.

Several major wool processing companies in Australia are going to extreme lengths to remove the brand contaminated wool before processing and at later stages after the wool has been scoured (washed). At the scouring stage of the processing chain the contamination becomes much more obvious.

The Australian wool buying company Lempriere, who are major buyers at auction, have a North American client who will not accept any brand contamination in scoured wool they buy from Australia.

To try and overcome this problem every bale of greasy wool used in batches prepared for this client is sorted by hand to try and remove the brands from the wool. Additional money is paid to the scouring plant to station "pickers" at the end of the wool dryers so that any brand marks missed during greasy wool sorting are removed. This is a very expensive operation, which should not be necessary in modern wool processing plants.

One of the world's largest worsted spinners, who buys the equivalent of 168,000 bales of Australian greasy fleece wool every year, has raised serious complaints with their suppliers in Australia about brand marks in scoured wool. They have introduced special picking procedures prior to carding and combing the wool to try to remove these brands. However some of the brands can, and do, get through into the mill. The resulting tops or yarn are being rejected by the mill's technical staff.

If the mill decides to claim on the Australian supplier, which happens quite often, there is little option but to pay or chance losing a very large client. The supplier of greasy wool or scoured wool cannot pass the claim back to the wool grower.

The problem is becoming so serious for Australian wool processors that every effort is being made to pinpoint the clips responsible for these problems. This could result in clips being discounted at auction or buyers refusing to bid on clips known to have problems.

How can we, the Australian wool industry, overcome this serious risk to our valuable wool clip?

- Growers should be advised about the threat to their income caused by methods of sheep identification.
- If marking is required, care should be taken with the use of branding fluids. Petrol or diesel should not be used to dilute the fluids.
- Any parts of the fleece with coloured brands should be removed during the skirting operation and this wool marked as "Brands".
- Everyone in the shed should be made aware of the potential problems resulting from brands getting into the bales of greasy wool.

The overseas buyer of our greasy or scoured wool is not interested in the problems of growing or preparing wool for sale. Their only interest is that they continue to receive a first class product from Australia and that the wool is free from contamination of any type.

Wool prices are on the increase and this sign of recovery can be maintained in the future. A continued emphasis on these sorts of quality issues will ensure the wool industry is not placed in jeopardy.

**Synthetic fibres do not have the quality problems associated with greasy or processed wool.
Let's try and lift our game and improve the quality and preparation of our great Australian wool.**