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New to **THE FOLD**

WHEN TWO BROTHERS TOOK ON THE FAMILY MERINO FARM, THEY DIDN'T STAY STUCK WITH TRADITIONAL METHODS.

WORDS BARBARA SWEENEY PHOTOGRAPHY SAM McADAM



SRS (soft rolling skin) merino lambs in the yards. SRS sheep do not require mulesing. **FACING PAGE** Hugh Taylor and his son Shep visit the shearing shed.



LEFT Hugh, Josephine, Mardi and Shep pictured in the garden at Gunnegalderie. Hugh loves that his job as a farmer allows him to spend quality time with his wife and children. ABOVE Geoff and Carla's son William already has a sense of purpose. FACING PAGE, LEFT Butch is in control. RIGHT TOP Carla, William, Jessica and Geoff Taylor. RIGHT BOTTOM Even at the age of four Josephine appears conversant with fine wool's micron count.

FARMING WAS ALWAYS going to be the only career option for the Taylor boys. Geoff, 34, and younger brother Hugh, 32, had been helping out on the farm since they were tiny, so without hesitation they both headed back to Gunnegalderie, the family's merino property near Wellington NSW, the minute they finished school.

Unlike many other young farmers, Geoff and Hugh were lucky in that there was room for them in the business.

"Dad worked hard to expand when he was young so that there was enough to go around," Hugh says.

Four generations of the Taylor family have run merinos around Yeoval and Wellington; Geoff and Hugh are the fifth. Their parents, Bruce and Carol, moved to Gunnegalderie 30 years ago so that the boys could attend school. Today it's also home to Geoff, his wife Carla, and children William, 3, and Jessica, 1. Hugh's family, his wife Mardi, Josephine, 4, and Shep, 2, live on Willunga, another property nearby.

"The two properties total more than 4000 hectares and we have about 7000 breeding ewes," Geoff says. "And there are 5000 ewes at a third property near Brewarrina."

The Taylors breed soft rolling skin sheep, known as SRS. It's a breeding system, developed by a former CSIRO scientist, Jim Watts, that accentuates genetic characteristics of the animals' skin rather than the traditional fleece and body measurements.

The system has its detractors in the wool-growing fraternity, but Bruce had no qualms about SRS when he adopted it 12 years ago after hearing Jim speak.

"Right from the start we thought it looked to be the way to go," Bruce says. "The general consensus back then was that if you lowered the micron, you lowered the wool cut, but this chap was saying that wasn't necessarily the case. And it looked as though you could grow better and softer wool." (The diameter of wool fibres is measured in microns. Merinos produce fine,



low-micron wool that is used in the manufacture of high-quality fashion fabrics.)

"It doesn't cost any more to grow good quality wool as to grow poor quality wool," Bruce continues. "So you may as well grow good quality wool. Our sheep are still improving — our wool is getting finer and softer, and there's more of it."

What wasn't apparent at the time is that unlike other merino sheep, SRS sheep do not need to undergo the cutting away of skin at their rears to prevent flystrike, the controversial mulesing practice. This puts the Taylors and other SRS wool growers one step ahead in meeting the Australian wool industry's pledge to phase out the practice by 2010.

The attraction to the unconventional seems to run in the Taylor family. Six years ago Geoff and Hugh became interested in new holistic farming practices that again didn't enjoy widespread support. Even Bruce couldn't see

the need to change at the time — "I thought things were going pretty well as they were."

However, his sons pressed ahead with measures such as rotational grazing and stress-free stock management and, as Hugh observes, "the paddocks probably don't look much different but when you look closer the native grasses, like Warrego summer grass and weeping rice grass, are seeding, growing and spreading", which points to an improved mineral cycle, less erosion and soil fertility.

This sympathetic environmental approach was the reason that commercial furnishing textile company Instyle chose the Taylors' SRS wool for its ethical and sustainable upholstery fabric range, launched earlier this year.

"People question the future of agriculture," Hugh says. "But from where I'm standing I can't think of anything more worthwhile. You can feed the world and improve the environment. Plus, you get to pick the kids up from the school bus." ♦