

A producer can add value to his clip by sharpening up his classing.  
*Photo: Liesl-C Schoeman*



# Add value to your clip by proper classing

Wool classing is the first and probably the most vital link in the quality chain and presents the woolgrower with a significant opportunity for adding value to his clip.

One of the most important criteria of classing is evenness of any measured (or immeasurable) characteristics within an individual line. Thus, minimum variation around the mean for characteristics such as micron, length, strength, VM, yield, quality and appearance is essential.

However, unnecessary fragmentation of a clip is not encouraged as this increases post-farmgate handling and marketing costs and does not guarantee a higher price for the grower. The key to efficient classing is balancing these two conflicting requirements for maximising the income from the clip.

The second, and equally important, responsibility of the classer is to identify, prevent and remove all contamination from a line of prepared wool before it is packed and pressed.

No matter how well a clip is classed, if it is contaminated with baling twine or any other foreign object, the buyer suffers severe financial penalties imposed by his client, particularly if such contamination is not visible in the display sample.

The converse is also true – a clean, uncontaminated but poorly classed clip will be discounted by the buyer. The guiding principle of wool classing is therefore to build confidence with the buyer, to allow him to purchase his requirements from lines that are predictable, true to type and do not hold any surprises when delivered and opened at the processing mill.

Guidelines for the classing and packing of wool are provided in the Code of Practice for the Preparation of Wool Clips, which is the result of inputs provided by a technical working group representing the various industry interest groups and stakeholders.

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### **The general guidelines for the classing and marking of wool are:**

- Raw wool must be classed into different classes or lines to ensure uniformity within lines regarding characteristics that are important to processors, such as mean fibre diameter (micron), staple length and tensile strength, vegetable matter (VM) content and appearance.
- Contamination with baling twine or any other loose object must be avoided at all cost.
- Wool stained with tar, urine, dung, blood, paint, branding fluids or discoloured by fungi or chemicals must be removed prior to shearing.
- White wool contaminated with pigmented fibre or kemp must be removed and packed separately.
- When marking ink is used to identify the contents of a bale (either on the farm or after rehandling and packing by brokers or other traders prior to delivery to processors), great

care should be taken to prevent the ink from seeping through, staining the wool inside.

### **Classing and marking of Merino-type wool**

#### **Definition**

Merino-type wool is white wool that by nature is free of kemp and hair, has a fibre diameter of not more than 27 micron ( $\mu$ ) and displays all the characteristic properties of wool from the Merino sheep.

#### **Fleece wool**

The portion of the fleece that is sound in tensile strength (no break), which remains after the backs, broken fleeces, bellies and pieces and locks wool have been removed, must be packed separately and marked according to an appropriate combination of symbols denoting the estimated length (AA-EE) and average fibre diameter of the wool (FF, F, M, S, SS).

Wool with a break in the staple must be marked with the symbol “TDR”.

**Table 1: Fineness classes (microns)**

Length groups	Superfine (<19)	Fine (19,1 – 20)	Medium (20,1 – 22)	Strong (22,1 – 24)	Over-strong (24,1 – 27)
>90mm	A AFF	A AF	A AM	A AS	A ASS
80-90mm	A FF	A F	A M	A S	A SS
70-80mm	B BFF	B BF	B BM	B BS	B BSS
60-70mm	B FF	B F	B M	B S	B SS
50-60mm	C FF	C F	C M	C S	C SS
40-50mm	D DFF	D DF	D DM	D DS	D DSS
30-40mm	D FF	D F	D M	D S	D SS
20-30mm	E EFF	E EF	E EM	E ES	E ESS
<20mm	E FF	E F	E M	E S	E SS

### **Backs**

If wool from the back of an adult sheep does not deviate in appearance, quality and vegetable matter (VM) contamination from the rest of the fleece, it doesn't need to be removed and packed separately. Otherwise, backs must be removed and marked as follows:

**Table 2: Backs**

Mark	Contents
<b>BKS</b>	Dusty, noticeably weathered backs.
<b>BKS2</b>	Inferior backs, dusty, badly weathered, short or with high VM.
<b>BKS3</b>	Highly contaminated with crow's nest and/or excessive VM (for example feedlot sheep).

### **Broken fleeces**

Neck-fold wools, breech wool or portions of the fleece from an adult sheep containing excessive vegetable matter must be packed separately and marked with a single-length symbol according to the guidelines given in table 1. If the wool is less than one bale, or if it is too short or unattractive in appearance, it can be blended with the appropriate bellies and skirting lines (see table 3). Good quality neck wool (if sufficient in quantity to qualify for a separate line – one bale or more) must be marked as “NKS” with the appropriate preceding length symbol.

### **Bellies and pieces**

Wool removed from the belly area of an adult sheep and/or portions removed from the fleece that deviate from the overall characteristics of the fleece, must be packed separately and marked as follows:

**Table 3: Bellies and pieces**

<b>Mark</b>	<b>Contents</b>
<b>CBP</b>	Long belly wool (at least 60mm) or fleece pieces, white to cream.
<b>BP</b>	Short belly wool or fleece pieces (40-60mm), deep cream or slightly yellow.
<b>CB</b>	All belly wool, deep creamy or yellow, at least 50mm.
<b>BP2</b>	Belly wool shorter than 40mm and yellow in appearance.



### **Locks wool**

Dung- and urine-stained matted wool, brisket wool, top knots and cheek wool, double cuts and sweaty wool shorn from an adult sheep must be packed separately and marked as follows:

**Table 4: Locks wool**

<b>Mark</b>	<b>Contents</b>
<b>LOX</b>	Long top knots and cheek wool with an attractive colour – minimum length 40mm.
<b>LOX1</b>	Sweaty locks, matted brisket wool, short, inferior belly wool with deep cream or slightly yellow colour, top knots and cheek wool – minimum length 25mm.
<b>LOX2</b>	Shankings, short topknots and cheek wool, double cuts, hard sweaty pieces, maximum length 40mm.
<b>LOX3</b>	Light urine- and/or dung-stained wool.
<b>LOX4</b>	Very heavy, sweaty locks.
<b>LOX5</b>	Matted, very seedy locks, stained or unstained.

In the next issue we will give more information about the correct marking of wool.

The Code of Practice for the Preparation of Wool Clips can be downloaded from the Cape Wools website at [www.capewools.co.za](http://www.capewools.co.za). It is also available in Afrikaans. 