



Sustainable
Cape Wools
Standard:

2021 IN REVIEW – and looking sustainably ahead

We asked **Deon Saayman**, Cape Wools general manager, to look back on the first year of the implementation of the Sustainable Cape Wools Standard (SCWS) audits, and at how sustainability standards might shape the wool market, and prices, in 2022.

(TURN PAGE)

Let us step back to 1 July 2020, the date the SCWS standard was officially implemented. What was the reasoning behind this standard and were we successful in our goals? Sustainability is one of the key drivers in today's consumer world, as brands want to ensure they do not run undue risks in their raw material supply chain.

In terms of sustainability within the wool industry, Textile Exchange took the lead by establishing the Responsible Wool Standard (RWS) in 2014. History shows that the RWS experienced similar challenges to those faced by the Sustainable Cape Wool Standard (SCWS) in the first year, with farmers not being able to see the value in going through the auditing process.

Furthermore, the SCWS was launched in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, mid-2020; and although uptake by farmers was slow to start with, momentum picked up considerably in the latter half of the year.

Holistic approach, broad participation crucial

It is important to understand that sustainability for the wool industry should be driven holistically from an industry perspective, irrespective of the number of schemes operating within the market.

Broad participation by wool producers is critical to ensure industry risks can be minimised, as not all farmers will be able to qualify for brand-specific certification schemes.

The market will dictate what is acceptable for brands and consumers, which may result in higher premiums for specific schemes when demand outstrips supply, as is currently the case with RWS-certified wools. These premiums did not materialise overnight, and it takes time for any scheme to establish itself in the market.

When volumes available within a specific scheme are too low for the buyers' clients to

source commercially, achieving the critical mass required will remain a challenge.

Over 620 farms assessed

It is, therefore, necessary to look at partnerships and cooperation across standards, where the core values are synergistic, such as the agreements reached with Schneider, the Australian Wool Exchange, and Abelusi.

Considering what other standards achieved in their first year, the 620 farms assessed under the SCWS in a little more than a year, is very encouraging.

As brands and manufacturers look at alternative certification schemes, it is particularly important for us as an industry to have sufficient volume available to meet those potential needs.



Value-add for farmers and role players further down the value chain is crucial. So the SCWS have also introduced a comprehensive shearing management system, including a shearing application, to assist in managing and recording the shearing process on-farm. The system will now also be adapted to function independently of the SCWS assessment process, which will assist in giving equivalence to comparable standards,



thereby ensuring shearing principles are applied holistically, as well as adding volume to current SCWS-accredited wools.

It is important that farmers are aware of the requirements for accommodating shearing teams and the level of skill and past shearing history of the shearer, in order to ensure that the shearing process is conducted according to acceptable standards.

We are encouraged by what has been achieved in the past year and are continuously working on enhancing the SCWS to ensure broader international recognition.

Only to your benefit

As an industry, we are focused on the broader sustainability of wool producers and encourage farmers to get accredited in a certification scheme or multiple schemes, as this can only be to their benefit.

Broad participation by wool producers is critical to ensure industry risks can be minimised, as not all farmers will be able to qualify for brand-specific certification schemes.

However, the whole industry must work at implementing sustainability more effectively, so as to not expose farmers to possible 'audit fatigue', and also cooperate across schemes and countries, where the necessary synergies exist.

We urge farmers to obtain all necessary and accurate information on the standards they are considering, which will enable them to make an informed decision on their sustainability journey. 🌱