Wool Test Certificates

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Wool certificates provide information to the users and buyers of wool. Every wool bale offered at auction is tested to confirm the wool's quality and characteristics. Nearly all wool is bought and sold with an IWTO test certificate.

IWTO licenses laboratories around the world to issue IWTO test certificates, the "gold standard" in the industry. These wool-testing laboratories are audited annually and conform to the international standards set by their local standardisation body. The IWTO laboratories test the wool to international standards and according to the wool testing specifications set out in the International Wool Textile Organisation's White and Red Books.

Wool is a natural fibre and each batch will vary largely in length, colour, fineness and content. Testing is performed with a grab sample, a sample of the wool taken from the centre of the bale. The test certificate will include the following information:

- 1 Test Certificate Number

- 2 Total bales tested, stipulating the weight of each

- 3 The Yield of each bale (how much clean wool will the bale deliver, after vegetable matter, grease and dirt is removed)

- 4 VM = Vegetable Matter

- 5 LSCAN = Measuring the micron of the wool in that bale (how fine it is)

- 6 Mulesing Status (MS)
    - NM = The wool comes from non-mulesed sheep
    - M = Some or all of the sheep in the flock have been mulesed
    - PR = All the sheep in the flock were mulesed using a registered Pain Relief product
    - CM = Ceased Mulesing, meaning no lambs born on this property in the last 12 months have been mulesed and no new sheep are mulesed

The image shows a sample IWTO Test Certificate, issued by Australian Wool Testing Authority (AWTA).

Wool Declarations

In Australia, the IWTO test certificate will report how that wool has been declared through Australia's National Wool Declaration (NWD) programme. South Africa has a similar system in place. The NWD includes information provided by the woolgrower on various items, including the mulesing status of the sheep the wool came from. This information flows through the supply chain in a traceable manner, via the NWD and the test certificates:

1. Top-makers buy wool on the basis of the AWTA Combined Certificate (a combination of the various sale lots that go into one order). This reports the mulesing status of each component lot. In this way the NWD is fed into the supply chain

2. If the spinner, weaver or manufacturer demands the mulesing declaration information the AWTA Certificate or a summarised Mulesing Status Report is passed along the supply chain

AWTA provides an online Certificate Verification service that can be used to check the authenticity of the report. Making false declarations in trade or commerce is an offence in Australia and the Competition Regulator will prosecute this if necessary.

Stipulating Origins

For a spinner to spin the yarn, the specifications for the yarn must be clearly defined. The spinner orders wool – called at this stage "wool top" – from a combing mill. The top-maker's wool buyer will source raw wool (aka greasy wool) which will meet the set criteria.

It is likely that the raw wool will be sourced from different farms and possibly even different countries and blended in the scouring and combing process to produce the order's specifications. If a spinner wishes to stipulate the wool's origin, this must be confirmed with the top maker in advance, in order to track the many lots of wool in the blend.

Traceability

As mentioned above, stipulating origins is complex as the wool supply chain is long, with many steps from farm to fashion. In response to requests for transparency, to facilitate the flow of information about wool's provenance and to assure buyers of the qualities of the wool being purchased, IWTO members have developed a number of traceability systems.

The type of system and its scope vary depending on the provider. A list of traceability options is available on the IWTO website at www.iwto.org/traceability