



Meet Isabele and Ridgehaven - Winners of 2023 Gundagai Lamb Pioneer's Award.

Isabele and her family, including her sister Ruth, brother Floyd and husband Pete, run a mixed farming business, with a primary focus on sheep, called Ridgehaven, located in Cudal NSW.

At the heart of their business is the drive to produce a high-quality product; one that is sustainable, efficient, and profitable in the production system.

The family also run Ridgehaven Poll Dorset stud, selling over 400 rams each year across the eastern states. These genetics influence over 100,000 prime lambs annually.

Supporting their stud breeding program is a flock of Poll Dorset research ewes. These lambs are measured for production and carcass traits, providing immediate feedback for how their genetics are performing at a commercial level. This research program is open to other Poll Dorset breeders as well, helping drive the whole industry towards a better-quality product. Gundagai Lamb are a vital part of this program, both in their capacity to measure carcass quality traits during processing, and their willingness to open their system for producers to experience and understand what production outcomes are needed to achieve a premium product.

Ridgehaven also supply over 5000 prime lambs each year, some of which are consigned to Gundagai Lamb. The feedback received for these consignments is used to improve production systems and management decisions.

‘The potential for this feedback loop in the lamb industry is huge!’ Isabele keeps telling us, and we agree!

Isabele first came to Gundagai Lamb in 2020 and saw an early design of the Gundagai Lamb price grid.

‘Even at that point it was very apparent that Gundagai Lamb was going to create a shift in the producer/processor relationship by providing usable feedback about the quality of the lamb that has been consigned. As a genetics producer it can be very difficult to align the time, money and effort put into developing high value eating quality traits when (at that time) there was no avenue for the lamb producer to be rewarded. This initial conversation with Will Barton showed an opportunity where lamb producers were being paid for both weight and quality of their lambs’.

When asked what winning the Pioneers award meant to Isabele and Ridgehaven, Isabelle told me she is, ‘humbled and appreciates the opportunities to provide Gundagai Lamb with a lamb production/genetics capacity point of view’.

Isabele also enjoys learning from the other members of the Pioneer Program who are open to sharing knowledge and experience and enthused to be involved in future focussed discussion.

‘This award provides assurance that the questions we ask inside our own lamb production business, are also the ones that the meat processors are interested in, so we must be heading down the right track.

The development of the Pioneers Program shows a commitment by the Gundagai Lamb Team to the producer/processor relationship, and the value that is found in shared knowledge. All the Pioneer producers have a similar goal – to produce high quality lambs in a profitable system – but all of them are also different in location, production inputs, management programs and experience. It is a great space to be in, and one that can help achieve great things for our industry’.

Well done Isabele – we love your passion for what you do.

Isabele loves that farming is a great big complex system; so many moving parts that combine to make a whole. Their business thrives on knowledge and understanding how certain things impact others, and then utilising this knowledge to simplify production. She also loves being outside, working with animals and being part of a team of people working together to achieve a common goal.

I asked Isabele what she loves to do when she isn’t working, and as a busy mum of 4 (ages 11 to 17)- keeping the house running and taking the kids to sport and activities, takes up most of her spare time.

When she can, she enjoys time with friends, listening to live music, cooking, and eating good food, and an early morning run. She would also love to spend more time in her garden, but for right now all her plants must be self-sufficient and drought tolerant!

Thank you, Isabele, and the team, at Ridgehaven. We love your work and working with you.

The Gundagai Lamb Pioneer Award is awarded in acknowledgment of an individual or organisation who have gone above and beyond to assist with the growth and development of the Gundagai Lamb brand. This could include;

- Engagement and feedback with the Gundagai Lamb
- Brand advocacy