

So if we want the price of wool to rise in the long term then we must raise consumers' willingness to pay higher retail prices and compete more for our limited kilograms."

Wool is also seen as a seasonal product and an autumn/winter fibre in the minds of consumers,

basically something to keep you warm.

Mr Swan said AWT's challenge was to get consumers to see wool as more than just a product consumed in winter but rather a product that could be consumed all year round.

"As a company we will still

defend the traditional markets, but our aim is to grow those products that have consumption all year round and the luxury items that relate to consumers paying a higher price per kilogram," Dr Swan said.

In supplying these new markets, Dr Swan said wool had a great story to tell.

"We have to tell the global audience of consumers around the world about wool's wellness and natural credentials, as people care about nature and are worried about their health," Dr Swan said. He said wool had a number of positive stories and it was impor-

Wool brings change for communal farmers

By JENNY BARTLETT

Wool is a wonderful commodity that can improve the life of the communal farmers and their families in South Africa.

That was the message from National Wool Growers Association of South Africa (NWGA) manager Leon de Beer.

Communal farmers farm on land that belongs to the government, and neighbouring farmers share the same resources such as pastures, shearing infrastructures and water points.

Mr de Beer said wool production has injected new money into impoverished communal farming communities which has significantly increased personal incomes and quality of life.

Since 1997 the NWGA had been running a Training and Development for Communal and Emerging Wool Farmers program, which invested infrastructure, training, mentorship and marketing assistance.

In that time, according to Mr de Beer, the proportion of children going hungry decreased from 43 per cent to 27pc, households with savings accounts increased from 56pc to 77pc and people who had to borrow money to send their children to school decreased from 78pc to 52pc. "Beyond the government

grants, wool is making a significant contribution towards the income of people," Mr de Beer said.

"We are proud of these figures, wool is a wonderful commodity, it is non-perishable, marketable and it is new money for these communal farming communities."

Mr de Beer said when the NWGA began working with communal farmers, it faced a challenge in the quality and quantity of wool grown.

"A majority of the time they market their wool through informal channels, and therefore get next to nothing for it," he said.

"They have a huge lack of infrastructure, and lack the knowledge and skills to produce and harvest wool to international standards, in some cases farmers are shearing their sheep underneath a tree."

Mr de Beer said the first thing the association did was look at infrastructure.

The NWGA, with government support, has constructed a number of shearing sheds and equipped them with equipment and handling facilities which are required by the international market.

These sheds were used as schools and community centres when not needed for shearing. Mr de Beer said infrastructure

was just the first step.

"We then identified 13 areas of training including animal health and handling, and shearing and classing," he said.

"We supported this with a mentoring program to ensure farmers were in a position to follow their qualifications through."

"The shearer training program has been running since 1981 and we are proud to point out the training is good enough to produce world champions."

Market support was provided to the communities and the major brokers in South Africa, BKB Limited and Cape Wool and Mohair, have assisted in preparing and presenting the wool at auction.

Mr de Beer said this meant farmers were earning good money for their product.

"In 1997 and 1998 communal farmers marketed 200,000kg through the formal auctioning system, which was worth R1.5 million (A\$155,000), last season that number jumped to 3.4 million kg sold at auction which was worth R132m (\$14m)," he said.

"Remember this income is from exports, so it is bringing new money from foreign currencies into the most rural areas of South Africa."

Genetic improvement was a further part of the program.



tant that the wool industry retained wool's wellness and natural credentials to consumers simultaneously explore new products to ensure a strong future.

"If we succeed in five years time you could be receiving more for your wool and this will be t

Mr de Beer said since 2007, 56,000 quality rams have been introduced into communal flocks.

"The programs success can be seen in the progeny," he said. "Clean fleece weight has increased by 30pc, wool price by 18.7pc and wool income by 32pc."

"We have established three communal ram breeders assisting them with training in selection."