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Massy praises the merino

The author of Australia's definitive work on merino sheep says it deserves more recognition for its contribution to Australia's economy and development.

Charles Massy says the breed was the basis for Australia's agricultural wealth. Today is the anniversary of the first 13 Spanish merino sheep arriving in Australia back in 1797.

Mr Massy says it's better to celebrate the merino's anniversary than the horse's.

"If we are going to have a birthday, it probably should be a merino rather than a horse for this country," he said.

"The outlook for agriculture and including an animal that produces a wonderful fibre and meat, I think, is terrific.

"We still have a wonderful natural fibre and if we can get the politics out (of the industry), we have got to feed a world as population increases and viable agricultural land decreases, and so do our systems, and so I am very upbeat."

Mr Massy says the industry was synonymous with Australia as the Spanish sheep became the hero of Australian agriculture.

"It's a mongrel because it is over 25 different breeds in its background, but that gives it its strength and that allows clever breeding."

He says his current Australian National University PHD study on sustainable agriculture and innovation shows the importance of sheep farming and agriculture to feeding the world, and for Australia's ability to reduce carbon.

"We have a sustainable business well into the future."

Mr Massy sees grazing sheep as sustainable long term in a low-carbon economy, if the industry reduces in-fighting and politics.

"If only we could get politicians to realise that if farmers develop healthy grazing landscapes, it is the grazing landscapes, not the forests, that can fix enormous amounts of carbon," he said.

"By increasing healthy landscapes by less than 10 per cent, we could fix the whole of Australia's carbon emissions in our landscapes in long-term carbon storage, deep rooted, stable humus matter, and that is pretty remarkable, so why don't the politicians see that we have part of the solution to their problem?"

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