

Deer Industry News

Media Get
a Taste of
Cervena®

Velvet Regulations
WHAT TO EXPECT
FROM NEW VELVET
HANDLING
REQUIREMENTS

Clayton Station
REGIONAL WORKSHOP
LOOKS AT SUMMER
FEEDING OPTIONS,
PASTURES, HEALTH

**John Spiers
Farewelled**
FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES
PAY TRIBUTE TO A
"CALM, CONFIDENT"
INDUSTRY LEADER

Deer Industry News

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF DEER INDUSTRY NEW ZEALAND AND THE NEW ZEALAND DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

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Cover: Guests learning more about the benefits of Cervena venison from wholesaler Metro, a customer of Alliance Group. See page 12.

Deer Industry News is published by Deer Industry New Zealand in February, April, June, August, October and December. It is circulated to all known deer farmers, processors, exporters and others with an interest in the deer industry. The opinions expressed in *Deer Industry News* do not necessarily reflect the views of Deer Industry New Zealand or the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association.

Short-term pain a valuable investment

You'll see articles later in this edition about changes that are going to be required of velvetters for the upcoming velvetting season.



Dan Coup.

FOR THE DINZ team in Wellington, it has been a slightly stressful few months as we have tried to help navigate market access challenges for velvet and then started working with the NVSB to find a workable way of meeting increasing expectations from the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and Chinese regulators on velvet hygiene.

That process is not quite finalised, but getting pretty close (see summary of new requirements on page 8). The outcome will mean extra work and possibly money to be spent by some deer farmers. The inconvenience will probably be greatest for farmers who have velvetting as only a very small part of their operation.

Unfortunately, if we want access to overseas consumers, meeting their regulators' requirements is not optional. There is a little bit of room to negotiate how new requirements are described in standards and we've done our best there to make things practical, as we work closely with MPI, whose responsibility it is to implement them.

Stepping back a bit from what will be some short-term pain over the next few months, I have no doubt that the changes to how we handle and present our velvet will put the industry in a stronger position.

I hope everyone agrees that we want to position our velvet as a premium product. Observing good hygiene practices and being clear about how we care for and respect our product is a pretty basic part of that. If we were paying top dollar for a premium food product or medicine for ourselves or our kids, it's what we would expect.

A couple of slightly cynical deer farmers have commented to me along the lines of "I bet other velvet producers overseas won't be made to meet these kinds of standards". Well, they might be right to be cynical. I don't know if other countries will be made to improve their standards or not, but in some ways it would be better for us if they aren't, because these changes just enhance our market position.

Over the past 10 or so years, New Zealand velvet has gone from being the cheaper option to being the market leader – strongly preferred by high-value customers. Our velvet trades at a premium over velvet from other countries because customers trust it more. They trust that it is cleaner, safer, and less at risk of disease, adulteration or contamination than the alternatives. Implementing these new standards is only going to reinforce that current reputation and positioning of our velvet. That's got to be a good thing.

So hopefully farmers aren't cursing our names too much as they mix a bit of concrete or do some painting in the velvetting area. We don't have much choice about it, but at the end of the day I hope you can think of your hard work as a worthwhile investment in the premium positioning of your velvet, and not just another job you didn't really need.

Please have a look at the draft new standards on page 8 if you haven't already. If you have major concerns, don't understand or would just like to talk through what they mean for you practically, please get in touch. We'd be happy to talk. ■

– Dan Coup, Chief Executive, Deer Industry New Zealand

EDITOR Phil Stewart, Words & Pictures

EDITORIAL AND ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

Deer Industry News, PO Box 27-221, Wellington, Ph 04 384 4688, 021 620 399, email phil@wordpict.co.nz

CIRCULATION ENQUIRIES

Deer Industry New Zealand, PO Box 10-702, Wellington, Ph 04 471 6114, email info@deernz.org



FRIDAY 26TH – SATURDAY 27TH MAY 2017 | TE WHAREWAKA FUNCTION CENTRE, WELLINGTON

“The Business of Farming” is the theme of our Wellington-based 42nd annual conference, which will incorporate a strong emphasis on the P2P programme and its new venison markets initiative.

THE INDUSTRY IS also encouraging participation from Advance Party (AP) members who will be in Wellington attending the second Advance Party National Workshop being held the previous day (Thursday 25 May). There has been a great response early on for this and there are significant registration incentives for AP members to stay on.

Conference venue

The venue is the spectacular Te Wharewaka o Pōneke building and Function Centre on Taranaki Wharf, Wellington Waterfront (next to the NZX Stock Exchange building and Mac’s brewery complex).



<http://www.wharewakaoponeke.co.nz>

The programme features prominent keynote speakers (see page 5) to expand on “The Business of Farming” theme and its associations and partnerships, presenting a varied and balanced programme with time to engage with speakers, the Board and deer farmers during the sessions.

The NZDFA and DINZ co-host the event and we are also pleased to be able to share some of the conference activities and sessions with other vital industry players, our loyal and long-standing industry sponsors and partners who continue to show their commitment to this event.

Getting registered

To register go online at:

www.deernz.org/deer-industry-conference-2017

If you are unable to access online or would like assistance please contact conference organiser, Pat Johnston, Destination Conference Managers, phone 03 477 1377, or 027 215 9807, Email: pat@dcms.co.nz

Accommodation

The registration process allows delegates to book accommodation at the properties that have been reserved for conference guests.

These are: **The Copthorne Oriental Bay** on Oriental Parade,

The West Plaza, 110 Wakefield Street, Central Wellington or the **Brentwood Hotel**, 16 Kemp Street, Kilbirnie (near the airport and venue for the Advance Party National Workshop on 25 May).

These conference accommodation options can be booked and confirmed only through the registration website or by calling Pat at DCMS.

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continued on page 4

Conference: continued

Be quick!

Early Bird full registration at just \$370.00 (incl GST) closes on 11 May 2017.

Conference registration details

Full conference registration (Early Bird cost \$370.00 incl GST, after 11 May \$410 incl GST) covers:

- conference sessions on Friday from 8.30am – 5.30pm
- all catering during the Friday
- Deer Industry Awards Dinner on Friday evening
- breakfast on Saturday at the conference venue
- technical session 8.30am – 10.30am followed by NZDFA AGM

Friday day only registration (Early Bird cost \$160.00 incl GST, after 11 May \$200.00) covers:

- conference sessions on Friday from 8.30am – 5.30pm
- all catering during the Friday

Friday day sessions plus Awards Dinner registration (Early Bird cost \$300.00 incl GST, after 11 May \$330.00 incl GST) covers:

- conference sessions on Friday from 8.30am – 5.30pm
- all catering during the Friday
- Deer Industry Awards Dinner on Friday evening

Saturday day only registration (Early Bird cost \$70.00 incl GST, after 11 May \$75.00 incl GST) covers:

- breakfast on Saturday at the conference venue
- technical session 8.30am – 10.30am followed by the NZDFA AGM

Partners in Agriculture Session Friday 12.30pm – 2.00pm (cost \$40.00 incl GST) covers:

- lunch
- keynote presentation by Lindy Nelson

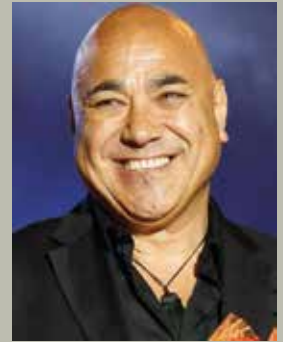
Thanks to our supporters

This year's support from Premier Sponsors, exhibitors and other partners in every aspect of the industry continues to be an outstanding commitment and there will be a large variety of exhibitor stands in association with the meals and entertainment.

Premium Conference Partners

Star power for Awards Dinner

The Awards Dinner will be held on the Friday evening, and feature the Deer Industry Award, the Matuschka Award and Photographic Award. We have chosen a spectacular entertainer to MC the evening and entertain us from start to finish, with internationally renowned **Frankie Stevens**, MNZM.



Frankie is described as “without exception, one of New Zealand’s best-loved entertainers with an international singing, acting and performing career spanning over 30 years”.

Frankie is a consummate Master Of Ceremonies and a versatile entertainer, performing as a solo singer. He had a number one hit with *My Elusive Dreams*, and over the years has recorded with CBS/Sony, EMI and Columbia.

The multi-talented Stevens has also acted in international feature films.

Live streaming from conference sessions

The conference will be available to view through host company NZX Agri website. NZX Agri, a wholly owned subsidiary of NZX, is “New Zealand’s leading specialist provider of agri information”.

Anyone can join this and can be part of the audience:

www.farmersweekly.co.nz/deer-industry-conference

- There is also a Facebook page: **deer industry conferences**
- If you wish to get pre-conference information emailed to you then register online for the livestream (there is no cost for this) and we will communicate with you in the lead up.

This live stream allows communication with all stakeholders, wherever they are in the world. Rural broadband services have now improved to the point where live-streamed video is easy for most rural people to watch.

To find out more about the conference:

<http://www.deernz.org/events>

Conference programme

A full programme and conference timetable will be available in your registration packs and will be published on www.deernz.org/events

The emphasis this year has been to continue to align a programme of excellent speakers from outside the industry, mixed with deer industry companies in the venison and velvet marketing fields, latest science and research and recent developments from the Passion2Profit project and Advance Party programme.

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Friday 26 MAY 2017

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| 8.30 – 9.15am | Welcome and state of the deer industry overview | Andy MacFarlane, DINZ Chairman Dan Coup, DINZ CEO |
| 9.15am – 12.30pm | THE BUSINESS OF FARMING: MARKETING SESSION | |
| 9.15am – 10.15am | Successful business strategy and the seven principles of profit | Bruce Cotterill: "Passionate leader of change, growth and improvement" Supported by FMG |
| 10.15am – 10.40am | Morning Tea | Industry Exhibition |
| 10.40am – 12.30pm | MARKETING VENISON International overview | Marianne Wilson, Venison Marketing Manager DINZ 20 minutes |
| | A conversation with the venison marketing companies | Featuring Jan Kunz, Luiten, Netherlands Silver Fern Farms, Alliance Group, Duncan NZ, Mountain River, Firstlight 60 minutes |
| | Panel session | Panel session " New News" and Q&A 30 minutes |
| 12.30 – 1.15pm | Lunch | Industry Exhibition |
| 12.30 – 2.00pm | Concurrent session: Partners in Agriculture | Lindy Nelson: "Aspects of Partner Power in the P2P" |
| 1.15 – 2.00pm | THE BUSINESS OF FARMING VELVET ANTLER | Rhys Griffiths, Marketing Manager, Asia: • Market update • NVSB: New standards • Panel discussion including velvet companies |
| 2.00 – 3.20pm | THE BUSINESS OF FARMING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY Environmental session update and 2017 Premier Environmental Awards Presentation | Minister for the Environment: The Rt Hon Dr Nick Smith (to be confirmed) Corina Jordan Beef + Lamb NZ Environment Policy Manger NI |
| 3.20 – 3.50pm | Afternoon Tea | Industry Exhibition |
| 4.00 – 5.00pm | THE BUSINESS OF FARMING: RIDING THE EXPONENTIAL WAVE OF CHANGE | Kaila Colbin, Curator Singularity University New Zealand Supported by Rabobank |
| 5.00 – 5.30pm | CONCLUDING SESSION, Q&A | DINZ Board |
| 7.00pm 7.30 – 7.45pm | Te Wharewaka Function Centre: Pre-dinner drinks Seated for dinner Deer Industry Award, Matuschka Award and Photographic Award | |

Saturday 27 May 2017

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| 8.30 – 10.30am | Technical Session Short, sharp technical and research updates and experiences from the Advance Party conference | DEEResearch: Catharine Sayer P2P: Innes Moffat, Rob Aloe, Pania Flint Focus will be on planned new research projects, and great tales from Advance Party experiences |
| 10.30 – 11.00am | Morning tea | |
| 11.00am – 1.00pm | NZDFA AGM | |

Keynote speakers



Bruce Cotterill:
Supported by FMG
Bruce is a passionate leader of change, and is genuinely interested in business performance improvement.



Kaila Colbin:
Supported by Rabobank
Ministry of Awesome co-Founder and chair Curator Singularity University



Lindy Nelson, MNZM:
Executive Director and Trustee, Agri-Women's Development Trust

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NZDFA 42nd AGM 2017: Constitutional matters

1. AGM: Notice of meeting

Notice is hereby given that the 42nd Annual General Meeting of the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (Inc) will be held at the Te Wharewaka O Pōneke, Wellington Waterfront on Saturday, 27 May 2017, commencing at 11.00am.

The Chairman and Executive Committee of the NZDFA invite all members of the NZDFA and industry levy payers and interested parties to attend.

2. Executive Committee Appointments

Members of the NZDFA Executive Committee (one member representing the North Island and one representing the South Island and the two "Members at Large" positions created by the Constitutional change in 2012) are elected for a two-year term. Members retire by rotation and are eligible for re-election. According to the NZDFA constitution rules, the Executive Committee elects a Chairman from among the four members, for a term that is also decided annually. This has been traditionally a 12-month term.

Nominations have been called for the two vacancies created by retirement by rotation.

Member at Large (1 position)

For the vacancy created by retirement by rotation of David Morgan, South Canterbury the single nomination of **David Morgan** (nominated Graham Peck, seconded Kelly Hudson) was received and he is declared appointed for the 2017-2019 term.

Executive Committee South Island (1 position)

For the vacancy created by retirement by rotation of Kris Orange, South Canterbury who did not seek re-election, the single nomination of **Justin Stevens, Marlborough** (nominated Jack Maher, seconded Tahi Doonan) was received and he is declared appointed for the 2017-2019 term.

The successful candidates will join sitting members **John Somerville** and **Grant Charteris** as the 2017/18 Executive Committee of the NZDFA following the conclusion of the 42nd NZDFA AGM on 27 May 2017.

3. Selection and Appointments Panel (SAP)

The SAP consists of the four-man Executive Committee and four non-Executive Committee elected members. Two of the non-Executive Committee elected members of the Panel retire annually by rotation.

SAP North Island (1 position)

A single nomination has been received for the vacancy created by the retirement by rotation policy, that of the sitting member, **Donald Whyte**, Canterbury (nominated Ponty von Dadelszen, seconded Andrew Peters) who is eligible for re-nomination and is declared appointed unopposed.

SAP at large (1 Position)

A single nomination has been received for the vacancy created by the retirement by rotation policy, that of the sitting member, **Brian Russell**, Southland, (nominated David Stevens, seconded Andrew Cade) who is eligible for re-nomination and is declared appointed unopposed.

Donald Whyte and **Brian Russell** will join current non-Executive Committee elected members **Paddy Boyd** and **Leith Chick** on the 2017/18 NZDFA Selection and Appointments Panel.

4. NZDFA appointments to the Board of Deer Industry New Zealand

Producer-appointed Board members are appointed directly to the DINZ Board for a three-year term and that appointment is advised to the Minister for Primary Industries as a formality. There are two vacancies for the 2017-2020 Board term, one created by the retirement by rotation of sitting member Clive Jermy who is not seeking reappointment, and a second extraordinary vacancy created by the signalled early retirement of current DINZ Chairman Andy Macfarlane. This is a two-year appointment. All candidates are eligible for appointment for either position and the retirement by rotation vacancy will be filled first. Four nominations have been received and brief profiles follow.

Mark Harris, Global Marketing Manager, Animal Management, Gallagher Group, Hamilton (nominated Tim Aitken, seconded Steve Borland)

My role at Gallagher involves regular overseas travel to talk with farmer and reseller customers, to identify product development strategies. I am also responsible for brand marketing. This role has taught me the importance of truly understanding your customers and the supply chains that serve them, to ensure successful outcomes for all parties, creating a brand embraced by customers, staff and stakeholders.

My wife and I live on our farm west of Huntly with our three teenage children. Strictly my weekend job, the farm is a 400-cow split calving dairy unit with a nearby small dairy beef block.

My professional training was Mechanical Engineering at Auckland University, culminating in a PhD applied to steel making. After roles at NZ Steel and the water industry in UK, I spent five years working for AgResearch in the meat processing sector (formerly MIRINZ) developing processes for chilled products.

I hold board positions on two startup companies associated with Gallagher. I am passionate about capturing sustainable value for NZ agriculture and associated industries.



continued on page 7

Kris Orange, Great Southern Deer and Downlands Deer, Geraldine (nominated Martin Rupert, seconded Hayden Roberts)

In 2000 Cathie and I moved to farm ownership, while working as Operations Manager of Downlands Deer Limited. Always looking to grow the pie for us and our three children, we have entered into partnerships to enable us to now run three farms (10,000 stock units, on 1,700 hectares). The business is geared towards venison with the aim to finish all progeny from our two tussock blocks on our Geraldine home farm. In 2007 I completed the Kellogg Rural Leaders Programme.

For the past six years I have been on the NZDFA Executive Committee and chairman for four years. This has given me a great understanding of the deer industry. I am proud to have worked alongside DINZ at such an exciting time and be part of the P2P initiative. I have plenty to offer to the DINZ board particularly now, with slaughter numbers low and velvet tonnage at an all-time high, it is crucial we map a clear pathway for the industry.

The deer industry can be proud of where it has come from, but more important is to look to the future where these valuable premium products are managed efficiently throughout the supply chain and ultimately be profitable for all involved.



Andy Russell, Te Kawa Farms, Palmerston North, Chairman Firstlight Venison, (nominated Craig Hocken, seconded Tony Gray)

I am 56, married to Barbara for 32 years and we have three adult children. We farm 400ha in coastal Manawatu: 120ha deer finishing, 170ha dairy, 60ha lamb and beef finishing, 20ha pine trees. I did a Bcom (Ag) at Lincoln and was 2003 Central Districts Farmer of the Year (sheep+beef).

I am a Trustee of Southern Rangitikei Veterinary Trust, Trustee of two other non-family Trusts, two terms on Rongotea School Board of Trustees. I was elected director of Firstlight Venison in 2005, chair from 2013. I am also a member of the Institute of Directors.

My vision is for the deer industry to remain relevant and with some clout within the agricultural sector; then we need to see a continuation of the hind



retention that is happening now. For venison and velvet we must target new, high-value markets to try and move away from past commodity market fluctuations.

DINZ can continue to assist our marketers, while making sure farmers have the best information to make good decisions.

My background and experience within the deer industry and wider fields can provide a broad experienced perspective to contribute to today's DINZ Board governance and strategy and its ongoing implementation.

Mike Wilkins, Wilkins Farming, Northern Southland (nominated Clive Jermy, seconded Bruce Hood)

I am a 41-year-old farmer, residing in Northern Southland with my wife Donna and three young children. I am the Managing Director of our family operation Wilkins Farming Co, working alongside my two brothers in a wide range of farming enterprises.

Wilkins Farming runs a large scale business. Today it has progressed from just sheep and cropping to add deer, beef and dairy. Land development has also been a key focus, including irrigating dry land or converting land to dairy or deer. Deer became part of the business when my parents, Ray and Pam invested in their first deer back in 1980. Our deer herd has now evolved into an industry leader for production of venison. This focuses on high growth rate progeny from an efficient hind through the latest technology and the best genetics. Our deer business has four income streams, venison, velvet, trophy antler and stud genetics.

The enterprise I am most passionate about is deer. I have a wide understanding on where deer fit into the agricultural scene. I am motivated to see farm gate returns improve through creating a route to market that captures a fairer share of the retail value, while improving sustainable farm productivity. I want to direct a market position that mitigates against commodity volatility and currency fluctuations.



The candidates are invited under the NZDFA constitution to present a short overview of their candidature at the 42nd AGM in Wellington on 27 May 2016 before the meeting's general business session. The Selection and Appointments Panel will carry out its interviews and make an appointment before 1 July, as required. ■

AJ Pearse, Returning Officer for the NZDFA

4 April 2017



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Velvet handling requirements: What to expect

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The shape of new requirements for safe handling of velvet antler is starting to become clearer and they will be in place in time for the next velvetting season.

THE UPCOMING CHANGES have arisen partly out of ongoing pressure from the National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSBS) for the velvet industry to lift its on-farm standards, but also from a major push by Chinese authorities to improve the safety of its food and traditional medicine supply chains.

China is the largest importer of New Zealand velvet, with the value of exports to that country rising from \$3 million to \$25 million over the past decade.

An audit of the New Zealand velvet supply chain in November 2016 by officials from China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) provided some clear direction about priorities for enhancing the regulatory framework.

A major change has been the reclassification of all velvet antler exported to China as a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) ingredient. This reclassification (it was previously an agricultural byproduct or food ingredient) has helped to trigger the requirement for new velvet handling standards in New Zealand.

The AQSIQ audit highlighted several areas where the Chinese authorities would like to see improvements. These included:

- stronger oversight from the relevant New Zealand government regulator (Ministry for Primary Industries, MPI)
- better cold chain management
- better shed hygiene and velvet storage practices
- improved traceability.

While the AQSIQ audit generally went well, it confirmed that there is no room for complacency, with all those who harvest velvet for sale needing to look hard at their facilities and practices over the coming months.

Velvet industry Regulatory Control Scheme

Rather than farms having to implement individual risk management plans, as happens in other production sectors, MPI is developing a regulatory control scheme (RCS) that will provide a legal framework for the velvet industry to continue to operate.

The RCS comes under the Animal Products Act and will provide a legal tool for the government to oversee food safety in the velvet production system, including producers, buyers, processors, pack-houses and exporters. The good news for the velvet industry is that the current system of governance under the NVSB system will be able to be extended, with the NVSB adding a user-focused section on velvet hygiene and food safety that meets the needs of the RCS. Current tools such as the NVSB tags for identifying individual velvet sticks, and the NVSB Velvet Status Declaration forms will come into their own with greater importance under the new velvet

handling requirements.

MPI's Emil Murphy, who had a secondment with DINZ last year, is leading work on the RCS. He says the new system will avoid setting up additional layers of auditing and will be built around what's there now. He says MPI will be working closely with the NVSB as it develops practical farm standards, to ensure they mesh properly with legal requirements.

NVSB Chair, Ian Scott, says he is keen for the current system of auditing using experienced deer vets to continue. "The last thing we want is auditors with no experience of the velvet industry coming in and telling us what to do. We want to maintain the expertise we have got and make sure that direct feedback to farmers continues."

Scott is at pains to point out that the industry standards for safe handling of velvet are not just for accredited velvetters under the NVSB programme. "These standards will apply to anyone who cuts and handles velvet for export."

He says bigger operators used to handling large volumes of velvet are probably well on the way to meeting the new standards, but even they shouldn't be complacent. That said, those with a venison focus who may harvest only limited amounts of velvet from spikers and sire stags, may have more work to do to meet the new standards. He is hoping that in many cases the necessary changes in on-farm facilities won't need to cost too much.

"We need simple, yet practical steps to keep velvet clean at the time of removal and throughout the supply chain. And we need to prevent its deterioration as soon as possible by putting velvet into a freezer capable of delivering -15°C.

"For small velvet producers there should be some simple, practical ways of achieving the outcomes, but we can't say that people should be allowed to have lower food safety standards just because they're smaller velvet producers."

"We need simple, yet practical steps to keep velvet clean at the time of removal and throughout the supply chain. And we need to prevent its deterioration as soon as possible by putting velvet into a freezer capable of delivering -15°C."

In fact the RCS is going to be outcome focused which, in simple terms, means the controls are on *what* you do, not how you do it. For example, this will give farmers more freedom to work out how they'll keep velvet handling areas free from bird droppings or mess

from other vermin.

Paddy Boyd, who is one of two deer farmer representatives on NVSB, says the move to create higher standards around food safety and hygiene has come at a fortuitous time. "We had been asking MPI for some time to give us a better regulatory framework to increase standards for on-farm handling of velvet, so the Chinese authorities have done us a favour by giving us a purpose and reason to tidy things up."

Boyd said they had recently spruced up their "newish" velvet handling areas at Haldon Station and was pleased to find that it wasn't that difficult or expensive. In their case it involved stripping back the ply walls and applying polyurethane coating to make them easily washable. They also have washable floors and stainless steel benches that are easily cleaned of any dust or other contamination.

He says the industry can't afford to take a "softly softly" approach to improving its velvet handling and storage standards. "Get it right if you want to stay in the velvet business," is his advice.

Both Boyd and Scott are keen to raise awareness of having adequate freezers. "The freezer is a major part of the operation," Scott says. "Freezers need to have the capability of freezing down to -15°C or cooler. Most modern household freezers have this capability and are widely available at appliance stores. Some older freezers may struggle and now would be a good time to upgrade."

Boyd agrees. "The days of using a retired old freezer from out of the house are over."

Over the next few months there will be plenty of work done to refine the RCS and develop the accompanying NVSB standards. Draft standards relating to hygiene and cold chain management were circulated to velvet producers in mid-March, with feedback expected by late March, and final standards expected to be advised by 1 May. Inter-governmental protocols between New Zealand and China based on the RCS and standards should be signed in July.

Proposed standards

To view the proposed standards for velvet handling:
<http://deernz.org/deerhub/deer-information/antlers/velvet/nvsb>

In brief, the draft standards cover the following (this is a summary – not the draft standards themselves):

1. Hygiene

- Clean zones defined, including where velvet is harvested (e.g. crush), stored (e.g. freezer) and surfaces where it is placed (e.g. resting racks, trays for taking to freezer, freezer racks, benches).
- Clean zones have to be free from dust, soil, bird droppings, animal health products and kept clean with approved disinfectants.
- Animal health treatments kept away from velvet and not given to stags before velvet harvest (except velvetting drugs).
- Velvetters/handlers not suffering any infectious disease.
- Clean receptacle for taking harvested velvet to freezer, if in a different building.




2. Cold chain management

- Dedicated velvet-only freezers, cleaned with approved disinfectants prior to storage.
- Freezer must be able to maintain -15°C.
- Velvet to be placed in freezer no more than 2 hours after removal.

3. Transport

- Clean receptacle for transport from farm to depot.
- Velvet stays frozen during journey to next storage or processor.
- Velvet returned to a -15°C freezer within a specified time after leaving farm freezer.
- Velvet stays frozen at all times when out of freezer (e.g. for transport, grading or judging).

continued on page 10



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Velvet requirements: continued

4. Traceability

- Every stick leaves farm with NVSB tag attached
- Small pieces (e.g. regrowth) together in a bag with NVSB tag attached
- Velvet leaving farm to processor or packhouse must have appropriate documentation, identifying farm of origin, date of transfer and declarations that ACVM and NVSB standards have been met.
- If no farm-specific or company forms are available, NVSB Velvet Status Declaration to be used.
- All those receiving velvet from farms must keep records of incoming and outgoing batches.
- All velvet must be traceable to a farm or group of farms.

Frequently asked Questions: Practicalities for farmers

Why is there such a focus on hygiene and cold chain management?

Maintaining the cold chain from harvest to processing into a shelf-stable product is important to ensure the quality and safety of the velvet you produce. Once velvet has been cut, it will start breaking down straight away and bacteria will grow on any contaminated surface until the velvet is frozen.

I have only a few sire stags and a handful of spikers; do I need to spend thousands of dollars upgrading my facilities?

Not necessarily. The focus is on keeping your velvet clean and cool. This may require you to concrete a pen or two and give the yards and potential velvet contact surfaces a good clean with approved disinfectant before your vet comes out. You will need to upgrade your freezer if your current one cannot operate at -15°C .

Do I need to clean the ceiling over my velvetting area?

Only if is dirty enough to drop contamination into the immediate velvetting area. Other than that, it's about keeping any area clean that the velvet may come into contact with after its removal. The key wording is potential "velvet contact surfaces".

Do I have to clean my entire yards?

The hygiene requirements apply from the time of actual velvet removal onwards. It's a good idea to minimise any potential contamination that can be brought into the immediate velvetting area.

Does the velvet have to have a core temperature of -15°C on farm?

No. Velvet must be placed into freezer that is capable of freezing down to -15°C or lower. Velvet must be placed into the freezer within 2 hours of removal. After velvet is receipted into a premise (i.e., a pack-house) that operates a Risk Management Programme, then it will need to be managed at a core temperature of -15°C .

How do I prove my freezer can operate at this level?

Before velvetting and as you are setting up for the day, put the thermometer into the freezer. Take a photo on your phone for evidence. (Mobile phones record the date and time a photo was taken.) Alternatively, buy a data logger to record temperatures. This is a more expensive option, but may be suitable for a larger operation.

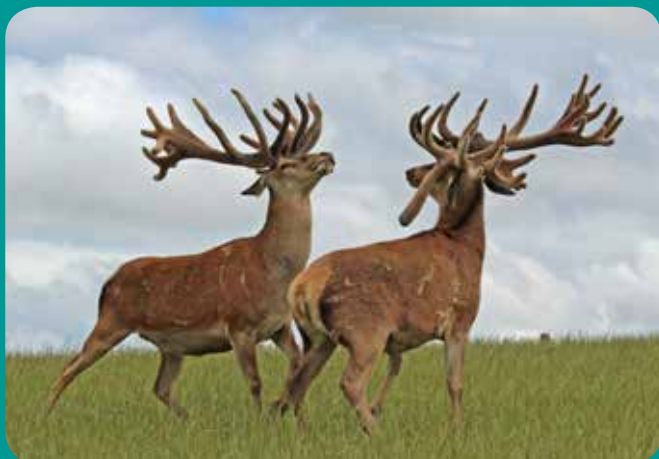
How do I calibrate my thermometer?

Calibrate your thermometer using the ice point method at least once each season.

1. Fill a large container with crushed ice. Add clean tap water until the container is full.
2. Put the thermometer stem or probe into the ice water so the sensing area is completely submerged. Wait 30 seconds or until the indicator stops moving.
3. If the temperature is at 0°C , remove the thermometer. It is ready for use.
4. If the temperature is not at 0°C , the thermometer should be adjusted in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions until it reads 0°C . Alternatively, the error in reading can be recorded on the temperature record sheet and the actual temperature recorded adjusted by the same (i.e., if the thermometer displays -1°C during calibration, 1°C should be added to each subsequent temperature reading that season). ■

Keep it cold and keep it clean

Stop bickering and get snapping!



It's not too late to enter the MSD Animal Health Photographic Awards

Entry deadline: 17 May

For an entry form contact: Cenwynn Philip, Deer Industry New Zealand, Phone 04 471 6110, email cenwynn.philip@deernz.org or download the form from: www.deernz.org/MSD-photo-competition

Photo: Emma Coutts



Obituary: Rodney Cyril Dixon

The deer industry lost another good friend and identity on 21 March with the death of Rodney Dixon, aged 73.



Rodney Dixon (right, at front) gets into the spirit of the after-dinner entertainment during the 2007 Deer Industry Conference.

A STALWART OF industry events at branch and national level for many years, Rodney could always be relied on to bring a spark of fun, whatever the occasion.

He joined the DFA in 1979 and was “inherited” by the Waikato Branch following its merger with the South Auckland DFA. In 2002 he became chair of the Waikato Branch and in a profile article at the time, Rodney praised an active and enthusiastic group who enjoyed tackling trips as far afield as Otago – for Rodney the fellowship and collegiality among deer farmers was as important as the learning.

At the time, he and wife Dawn were running 1200 red deer in the Te Akau District, west of Ngaruawahia, along with 300 cattle and Hereford and Suffolk studs.

Waikato colleague Alby Cooper describes Rodney as “one of a kind – the mould has been lost”. Alby said Rodney had huge enthusiasm for the rural sector, matched only by his love of his family. “In committee work his enthusiasm was contagious and he was the only person I knew who could argue both sides of any debate.”

Speaking at Rodney’s funeral, DINZ Producer Manager Tony Pearse said he recognised in Rodney a kindred spirit.

“On meeting we were both frequently covered in cuts, scratches, bruises, stitches, bandages, splints and plaster or on crutches – Rodney, because he was brave and heroic and had wonderfully exciting adventures; in my case it was down to an appalling sense of judgement.”

Tony recalled turbulent times in the deer industry in the early 2000s when Rodney was Waikato Branch Chair. Restructuring in the industry had unsettled many deer farmers, but Rodney’s support had been invaluable.

“Rodney was always constructive with an eye on the future. He mentored me in those early days and his advice was sound.

“He told me change is all about the people and what they think and he encouraged me to listen well, to understand, not to judge too quickly and remember that the other viewpoints were important. He advised me to remain real to myself, and enjoy diversity as a challenge. The bottom line was though ‘always enjoy the people’”

Tony said it was a mark of the esteem he was held in that during his illness the Waikato Branch committee took the trouble to hold meetings that kept Rodney close to the action and in touch with his mates.

“He loved to party. His eloquence and enjoyment were at times closely linked with his love of good red wine. It was always memorable, always entertaining, perhaps not always wise, but always Rodney.

“That exuberance extended internationally to attending world deer farming congresses. These events concluded in a gala dinner often featuring a fundraising auction of strange and unusual deer art, other quirky memorabilia, adventures and travel.

“Rodney must be the world record holder for auction support and ownership of totally useless but really interesting stuff – a wallet and coin purse made from a kangaroo scrotum included.”

Tony said that recently he, his DINZ colleague, John Tacon, and Waikato DFA chair, Steve Borland, had the privilege of spending a special hour with Dawn and Rodney in Raglan in the care home.

“As you’d expect, Rodney rose above his own challenges of the day and for that time was the Rodney of old. That visit remains a wonderful memory and farewell of a great friend.

“He generated a legacy of respect and enjoyment and has rightly earned a place in the honour roll of great characters and identities in deer farming and in life in general.

“Dawn, you and your family can justly be so proud of him.” ■



Rodney Dixon taking care of his deer on his Ngaruawahia property in the early 2000s.

Media get a taste of Cervena® in Belgium

by Alison Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Belgian food and trade media were treated to a taste of Cervena venison at events in mid-March.

CERVENA TASTING EVENTS held at three restaurants – A Piori in Haaltert, L'armentier in Genval and Vous Lé Vous in Hasselt – were part of Belgian wholesaler Metro's Cervena promotion to media to generate awareness of Cervena, DINZ venison marketing manager Marianne Wilson explains.

"The aim was to get influencers in the Belgian food scene to try Cervena and then tell people about what makes Cervena so unique and how it's ideal for the lighter fresher styles of summer cuisine," she says.

Eighty-five writers, radio journalists and bloggers eagerly accepted invitations to attend the three Cervena tasting evenings designed by the chefs, alongside DINZ consultant chef, Shannon Campbell.

"Our in-market partners were delighted with the attendance," she reports, adding the activity was a collaboration between Metro – the wholesaler who works with Alliance Group and their importer Bimpex meats – DINZ and the Jeune Restaurateurs d'Europe (JRE) chefs, a network of young and innovative Belgian chefs.

The enthusiasm of the influential JRE chefs Giovanni Oosters, Martin Volkaerts and Kristof Coppens, who each endorse free-range farming practices and have a culinary online following, was critical to the success of this project. Also of assistance was the support and attendance of JRE president, chef Steven Dehaeze, who played a pivotal role in the organisation of the dinners.

"We can't thank the chefs enough. Having them endorse Cervena and explain its qualities at the events is an ideal way to get the Cervena message out to a wider audience," Wilson says.

At each event, guests were told about the Cervena story, its quality attributes, how the animals are raised and its suitability for summer eating. Each table featured information on a Cervena farmer with whom Alliance Group is working.

The activity was organised by DINZ, Metro and Alliance group as part of the project to raise awareness among chefs and diners of Cervena as a summer dining option. This is part of the Passion2Profit (P2P) Cervena Benelux trial in the Primary Growth Partnership's programme, aiming to lift industry profitability.

This is the second year Cervena is being promoted by Metro as part of the P2P trial.

"Learning from last year, Alliance pointed to the need to raise awareness of Cervena to a wider audience. Many chefs understand what Cervena is but we need to keep broadening our reach," says Wilson.

Terry O'Connell, Alliance's export sales manager, says the cooperative has been encouraged by the response to the promotion.

"Our research shows that Cervena's delicate texture and taste lends itself to a lighter, contemporary cuisine so we're confident this programme will resonate with European consumers," he says.

The events have already been well profiled by several bloggers and food influencers on their social media networks as well as being picked up by traditional press channels and radio.

More events and activities, aimed to raise awareness on Cervena working alongside the JRE chef network are planned over the next few months. ■

For further information:

www.deernz.org/marketingpremiumvenison



Media guests ready for dinner. Each table at Vous Lé Vous featured the story of one of Alliance Group's farm suppliers.



JRE chef Martin Volkaerts of restaurant L'Amandier serving one of the media guests.



Germany-based DINZ consultant chef Shannon Campbell (left) worked alongside Vous Lé Vous chef Giovanni Oosters.

Feeding the velvet habit at Fordell

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Velvet antler is fast gaining ground as part of an integrated multi-property operation run by the Laird Partnership at Fordell, near Whanganui. The Central Regions Advance Party hosted a P2P Regional Workshop on 21 February at the Lairds' for a farm-level look at what's driving a velvet operation that has nearly doubled its output in the past three years. The day was led by facilitator Pania Flint, with Fraser Laird showing the 18 visitors around the operation.

Farm profile

The Laird Partnership spans eight blocks of mostly flat and rolling country, of which 80 percent is cultivable: two blocks are share farmed, five leased and one owned outright. Of the 714 effective hectares, 186ha are deer fenced. Deer are run on the adjacent Netherdale and Laird blocks, with more on the nearby Clarkes block.

It's a mixed enterprise with deer currently making up 29 percent of the stock units, sheep 41 percent and cattle 30 percent. The Lairds also do cash cropping, growing peas and maize. At present they have 300 velvet stags but are still in a growth phase aiming towards 500–600 stags. Fraser said this growth will be balanced by a reduction in sheep numbers.

The family have farmed deer for some time and did have a velvet focus in the past, but this had declined to only a small velvetting mob by the time Fraser Laird returned to the farm following his travels. He's been quick to start turning that around and has been buying in both velvetting stags and breeding hinds. They started with 180 mixed aged velvetting stags from various sources, before buying in a group of spikers that averaged 2.1kg as two-year-olds. Those have progressively been culled to retain only the best producers.



Sire stags on the Laird Partnership's Netherdale block.

Not content with just buying in velvetting stags, Fraser has, for the past several years, built up a breeding herd, sourcing hinds from Tower Farms, John Hunter, Steve Borland, Netherdale and

Altrive. From experience he's found it's better value when building up the breeding herd to buy in-fawn hinds during winter, rather than at the summer sales when they sell at a premium.

He currently has 220 breeding hinds (as well as 180 for venison) and no longer buys in velvetters. He's been breeding their own velvet stags since 2013 and admits to getting a kick out of this way of building the velvet business.

Fraser Laird has identified nutrition as an impediment to getting the best out of his velvet stags. He's also keen to get fawning as close as possible to 100 percent while getting the stags he breeds up to a minimum of 3kg velvet weights as two-year-olds. They are ambitious goals on the way to achieving his target of being in the top 10 percent of producers, but he's well equipped to get there.



Fraser Laird (left): Keen to build up velvet herd using home-bred stags.

Weaning

Looking at the farm-bred velvet stags, the Lairds use both post-rut and pre-rut weaning. There is not a strong imperative to wean early, so this takes the pressure off.

Post-rut weaning had the advantage of easier management with less stress on the young stock. On the other hand weaners were competing with hinds for feed and, if quality was not good, they might be worse off. In addition, the post-rut weaning could lead to poorer reproductive performance among the hinds the next season.

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Fordell: continued

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of various feed options

| Feed | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Deer nuts | Palatable, highly digestible, pretty well balanced | High cost, need to store and keep dry, how to feed |
| Barley | Easier to store if whole; higher protein than maize | Less digestible |
| Maize | Easy adaption, easy to store in silo, good flow (Advantage feeder), palatable. | Digestibility of whole grain by young animals; risk of acidosis; low protein and calcium |
| Baleage (lucerne) | Forage based, high protein and high calcium: phosphorus ratio; good for balancing diet | Low ME, not good for growing animals, high cost |
| Palm kernel | High ME, good results, reasonably well balanced, cheap. | How to feed? Slow to adapt to it, social concerns, biosecurity |
| Palm kernel/ grain blend | Better balanced, better adaption to eating it | Storage, how to feed |
| Red clover | Highest quality feed, best growth rates; surplus can be cut | Requires suitable conditions and management; can't graze in winter |
| Lucerne | High quality, well balanced. Can be cut for hay/baleage | Requires suitable conditions and management; can't graze in winter; spraying can have long-term effects |
| Chicory | Very palatable, good growth rates, good minerals | Management |
| Plantain | Maintains quality in autumn, moderately palatable, versatile | Management |

Feeding weaners

All agreed that weaners need to get off to the best possible start in their first autumn to take maximum advantage of the growth potential during this period and accelerate pedicle development. The first crop of stag fawns bred at the Lairds' were post-rut weaned and cut an impressive 1.86kg each as spikers (including regrowth). Fraser says they were well grown. The 2015-born stags were pre-rut weaned and not so well grown, yielding only 0.82kg of spiker velvet. Although better-grown weaner stags produce more velvet in their first season, it's not clear whether this advantage carries on in following years. Fraser is also focusing on genetic improvement to lift weights.

It was agreed that it was hard to make valid comparisons between pre- and post-rut weaning when dealing with different mobs in different seasons.

Ken Norman, another member of the Central Regions Advance Party, said he had trialled supplementing weaners with maize to see the effect on spiker velvet weights. He said the maize-fed group cut their velvet earlier than the grass-only group, but the net amount cut (1.5kg) was the same for both groups. While the maize-fed group had heavier liveweights, the extra cost of the maize couldn't be justified in terms of velvet production, he said.

The workshop group agreed that pedicle development and spiker velvet weights weren't good predictors of weights at two and three years of age, so a boost at spiker stage may not be sustained. Factors such as genetics and absence of stress were at least as important to achieving good weights.

Pania Flint said autumn was a key period when weaners' growth potential was often not met. Poor rumen development could be another issue, she added.

As a general principle, weaners need to be acclimatised to supplements such as maize before they leave mum, and also introduced to new forages such as chicory beforehand. Pania presented a range of options for autumn supplements for weaners (see Table 1 above).

Feeding velvet stags through the seasons

Because deer are such strongly seasonal animals there are huge variations through the year in the way they access the metabolisable energy (ME) that they need, and the amount of protein they need in the diet.

The period of highest feed intake for stags is from August through to December, which is when they are growing antler and stacking on weight lost during the previous autumn and winter. From February through to May, by contrast, a lot of the ME they need for maintenance comes from their own body weight rather than feed.

Pania Flint shared figures that showed the ME stags get from their feed in April is less than half what they get from their feed in October. In March and April they are stripping their own body reserves by more than 500 g/day.

Spring

This seasonal pattern means velvetting stags should be "fed like crazy" in spring, right from button drop or before. This doesn't necessarily mean using supplements, but rather something like a high-quality, high-protein pasture diet – say a short rotation ryegrass and red clover. The protein content of the diet at this time should be at least 18 percent, compared with about 12 percent over the summer.

A high sugar ryegrass such as the AberMagic being used by the Lairds was a good option. Ken Norman commented that the only advantage from using a supplement for stags in spring would come if it freed up quality pasture for other stock classes.

Summer

In summer and after velvetting, stags can continue to be fattened up, which is relatively easy to do as the weight gain is so strongly hormone driven. "They look after themselves pretty well at this time of year," Pania said.

Autumn

The weight loss in autumn is also an inevitable consequence of hormone and photoperiod changes and it was suggested that

there wasn't much point in fighting nature by giving stags the best quality "rocket fuel" pasture at this time. Rather they should be given space if possible to prevent stress and bullying during the roar. If space is tight, opening a few gates can help relieve the pressure.

Supplements can be used in autumn, but care was needed. Bins, rather than feeders were suggested as a better option to prevent too much conflict. Fraser Laird has tried lifting and feeding out fodder beet to stags during the roar in early April last year and found it was well utilised. Others use baleage during the roar.

Pania said that while stags don't eat much during this period, what they do eat should be palatable and high quality.

Winter

Putting weight back on stags in winter can be an uphill battle. They lose about 25 percent of their bodyweight during the roar and to replace this takes a lot. "For every kilogram [of bodyweight] that supplies them with 25 megajoules of ME, to replace it the stags need to eat 55 megajoules of ME," Pania explained. "They have to eat twice as much to replace the energy that's come off their backs. It's a bit easier with hinds."

Ken Norman told of a trial he did putting stags on palm kernel straight after the roar, while also on good pasture covers of at least 1,600kgDM/ha. "We only managed to get about 10g/day on them over June and July. Last year I just gave them baleage and they lost about 1kg over the same period." He said that rather than trying to resist nature it was better to make sure you had plenty of quality feed ready for button drop in August.

Other suggestions for keeping the stags ticking over during winter at low cost were self-feed silage pits on the edge of a forest block, which suit deer's preference for sheltering in trees and coming out to feed.

Fodder beet and other forages at Netherdale block

Fraser Laird showed visitors around the deer fenced Netherdale block, where they have been successfully growing fodder beet for the deer for the past three years. They currently have 3ha of SF Brigadier, which is fed in situ, and 4ha of the lifting variety, Rivage (half of which is sold). Fraser said Rivage has fairly low crude protein at about 5 percent, but Brigadier has about 14–15 percent.



Brigadier fodder beet is break fed to stags during winter and then hinds in spring.

The fed-out fodder beet is eaten over 42 days from 1 April at a cost of about \$16.80/head, allowing for 4kg per head per day (although a bit more might be needed to account for waste). Fraser said stags are settled and in good condition going into winter after their stint with the fodder beet.

He said the leaf on Brigadier will regrow after grazing and the bulbs can put down new roots if they get knocked over. "The stags get addicted to it."

The stags are break fed on the Brigadier for 60 days from mid-June to mid-August, with access to a runoff gully paddock with fairly poor pasture. Wastage is higher than with the fed-out crop and the total cost per head for this period is estimated at \$43.80. Because no other supplements are needed during this time and there is no feeding out required, this also enables a saving.

During winter when the ground was muddy there was less soil damage on balance from feeding out the fodder beet from the tractor, than letting deer graze a standing crop. However, keeping the deer confined to a smaller area spares soil from pugging on the rest of the block.

Hinds are also given a crack at the fodder beet from mid-August to 1 November, with the crop allowance of 2.4kg/head/day supplying most of their maintenance needs. Cost per head for the hinds over the 75 days is just \$18.

Establishment of fodder beet was always the tricky bit, but if that was done correctly, yields were good (25 tonnes/ha). Powdery mildew was a mild nuisance as the crop matured, but not worth the expense of spraying.

Providing the fodder beet yielded as planned, the cost was fairly modest at about 10c/kgDM.

Grass was established well following fodder beet thanks to the good weed control in the crop.

The group next looked at a chicory and Relish red clover paddock, currently in the second year of its planned three-year life. The chicory was in flower, which the crop needs to do at some stage. Fraser said it wasn't difficult to graze the crop back down to get vegetative growth going again after the flowering, "but don't let it go too far, or the deer will stop liking it". He's very happy with the Relish red clover, which is just as well, since he has bought a 600kg bag. "It should last me a while."



Workshop visitors check out a crop of chicory and Relish red clover.

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Fordell: continued

The final paddock we were shown was an AberMagic ryegrass and white clover mix, looking good into its third season following a crop of barley. This will be used for the pre-rut weaned weaners to help take advantage of their autumn growth potential. They were due to go onto the pasture by mid-March.

Pointing to another paddock of pure chicory in the distance – due to be followed by peas or barley and then an annual grass – Fraser said he’s pleased with the winter and summer balance of feed they are growing for their deer.



The AberMagic ryegrass and white clover pasture will fuel weaner growth during autumn.

When to cull velvetters?

There was a lively debate within the Regional Workshop group about the best strategy for culling velvetters. No clear answers emerged but it was useful nonetheless. These are some of the salient points to come out of it:

- Don't be too hard on your two-year-olds. Some of them take until year three to express their full genetic potential, so delay some of your culling decisions until then. Remember it's about feeding as well as breeding.
- If they still don't pass muster as three-year-olds, all is not lost: they've put on another 15kg of liveweight for venison and you've still had another clip of velvet from them.
- When breeding your own replacement velvetting stags, putting a lot of selection pressure on will give you genetic gains but remember it comes at a cost. This is because you have to have a good-sized breeding herd to give you the range and they use feed and space.

Trace minerals

Copper is a perennial issue and there is no hard and fast rule on managing levels because individual farm situations vary so much. The following points came out of February's Central Districts Regional Workshop discussion on copper:

- Unless there is a real copper deficiency on your farm, you probably won't get a velvet production response to copper supplementation.
- For deer, pasture needs to have at least 11mg of copper available per kilogram of dry matter, but many factors such as molybdenum, iron, sulphur and pH levels can interfere with and complicate uptake.

- The best time to test for copper deficiency is around August, when levels are lowest. Having liver tests done on a sample of at least 10 cull hinds that go to the works after pregnancy testing is a good way to check levels. The later this is done in winter the better.
- Testing older hinds will give you a better picture.
- Blood copper levels lag behind liver copper levels, so a liver test will give your earlier warning of copper deficiency than a blood test.
- If there is a deficiency, get local advice on how best to improve copper levels (e.g. by injection or bullet, or applying with fertiliser).
- Chicory, being deep rooted, can make much greater levels of copper available to deer than ryegrass. Other deep-rooted forages such as plantain or lucerne will also make more copper available.
- The best time to be giving copper, whether through fertiliser or directly, is during winter, as levels are at their lowest by early spring.
- Copper can be sprayed directly onto pasture, but grazing restrictions following application can make this impractical. Deer are unique in the way "reverse osteoporosis" occurs as a result of annual antler growth cycles. As antler is growing, **calcium** is drawn from the bones, creating osteoporosis. Once the antler has almost finished hardening and starts to strip, calcium flows back into the bones from the diet. Some forages such as lucerne have high calcium and it's advisable to make sure deer have access to good levels of calcium, especially during antler growth, to minimise losses.

Calcium and phosphorus are related minerals and Pania Flint said it is better that levels of calcium in the diet are higher than phosphorus. Lucerne baleage and brassicas both supply good levels of calcium compared with phosphorus, which provides a good balance with supplements like maize or palm kernel.

Parasites

A few good points came out of discussion at the Central Regions Regional Workshop on parasites:

- Fawns take about 9 months to develop resistance to lungworm and 15 months for *Ostertagia*-type gut worms.
- Stress, poor nutrition, trace mineral deficiencies and other diseases will always make deer more susceptible to internal parasites and delay the development of immunity in young deer.
- Lungworm is very responsive to stress, especially in young deer in warm, wet summers.
- Condensed tannins in crops like chicory are of limited use for parasite control, but grazing a pure stand will help because the larvae are less accessible to deer grazing this crop.
- Parasites in velvet stags are hard to kill during winter, so if drenching is used, it's best done before winter.
- By and large there is no need to blanket drench velvet stags (Fraser Laird said he only drenches scoury looking animals).
- Where there is drench resistance on a farm, use of an oral triple combination treatment is the best option.
- Don't use pour-ons.
- Avoid under-dosing. ■

Winter kale helps lift velvet weights

by Alison Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Wintering mixed age (MA) stags on kale and paying attention to what goes where is taking Hawke's Bay breeding and velvetting property, Tuivale, in the right direction.



Doug Charmley: Aiming to lift R2 hind weights in time for mating.

TUIVALE, A 570 hectare farm near Waipawa is owned by Rob and Deb Wilson and managed by Doug Charmley who looks after the operation including 1,560 deer, 500 cattle and 100 sheep.

Recent changes to the farm's breeding programme sprang out of discussions with others in the Hawke's Bay Progressives Advance Party (AP), which has a focus on velvet.

Participants in an AP commit to sharing farm data, encourage each other to achieve their goals and share ideas. Advance Party Facilitator, vet Anyika Scotland, sat down with the group at the start of the process 16 months ago to work out what each farm's goals were to lift their farm profitability.

Three goals were set for Tuivale:

- increase weaning weight to a 50kg average within three years
- lift R2 hind weights to 85kg by 1 January within three years
- increase the velvet weight average and velvet herd numbers.

Performance was reviewed at the end of the first AP year, in November.

In November, the R1 hinds were averaging 80kg and on target to be 85kg+ by the first week in January. However, drought hitting the region late last year affected advances towards the first two goals.

"The cut-off weight was going to be 82kg for selection, but despite a promising start, the R1 mob lost 2kg on average in December. Because of the conditions, I selected for type over weight because of the need to build the herd," says Doug.

However, in spite of the recent drought, Tuivale's velvet harvest

is steadily increasing. In the 2015/16 season, the farm harvested 1,480kg of velvet antler off all its stags.

"We saw a 0.21kg average increase in the MA crop in the 2015/16 season. This season we budgeted for 1,600kg, but managed to cut a little over 1,800kg," says Doug. "The average cut was 4.5kg from the stags over four years old, which I'm quite happy with. The aim is to eventually get to 6.5kg."

Doug puts the good results down to trialling Tuivale's MA stags on kale for the first time.

"Last year we put the MA stags on 5.3ha of Regal kale over winter, instead of the R2 stags. I'm very happy with the result because I think it lifted the velvet weights." The 143 MA stags were block grazed using four breaks over 82 days.

The system is low labour, easy to manage and means that Doug retains some grazing control. He's looking at shorter breaks on the kale and putting the hinds in to clean up some of the stalks after the stags.

The kale crop yield was around 15 tonnes per ha, more than expected. In addition, MA stags were given access to lucerne baleage.

This year, the kale planting has been extended over 8ha and, having had limited success with fodder beet, all age classes will get more lucerne baleage cut on another Wilson property finishing bulls.

"Given the results, I'd like to plant even more kale to get 120 R3 stags off pasture and to allow more younger stock onto it. This will also allow us to shut up more grass for button drop," he says.



Kale planting has been expanded this year following the success of the first kale crop.

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New \$7 million plant investment for SFF

South Canterbury and North Otago farmers now have a brand new \$7 million venison processing facility in their region. Silver Fern Farms (SFF) officially opened its deer slaughter plant at its Pareora site at the end of February.

DEER FROM MORE than 300 SFF suppliers are now being received into specialist deer yards, designed with the technical help of DINZ Quality Assurance Manager, John Tacon.

He says it was a pleasure to be involved with people throughout the design stages who understood deer and their requirements for handling and lairage. Where they didn't, they were prepared to listen, so when discussing changes, everyone understood why and how.

"Silver Fern Farms now has world-class facilities catering for the health and safety of the workers, who have the ability to move deer throughout the yards from above, and yards that provide a welfare-friendly environment for the deer at all times while in lairage."

The decision to build a new venison plant more central to its livestock supply in the region was made in May last year, SFF chief executive Dean Hamilton explained at the plant opening.

"It followed the closure of our Islington site in Christchurch, which was leased and undergoing redevelopment into a business park," he said.

The new facility adds to beef and sheepmeat processing at the site, making it the first three-species plant for the company. This brings improved employment prospects and longer seasons for its 840 staff.

A key focus is on ensuring the company has the world's best chain of care, said Hamilton.

"Here at Pareora, to achieve that, we are looking to invest in our plant network to create modern efficiencies – higher yields, improved quality and lower costs."

The venison development is a significant milestone for SFF Pareora, which was originally built in 1903 by the Canterbury Meat Company as a sheepmeat processing plant; beef processing was

added in the 1960s. The revamp has included expanding the cold storage facilities to allow for better regional consolidation and less use of external facilities.

SFF produced a video during the construction phase, featuring one of its venison suppliers Orari Gorge Station. This can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/2oSNKCP>.

More than \$200 million worth of red meat is processed annually at Pareora – 94 percent of that for export. In excess of 1,400 containers of natural grass-fed beef and sheepmeat left the plant for offshore markets in 2014/15. From this point on, there will also be venison on board. ■



Inspecting freshly packaged venison off the SFF Pareora processing line is Waitaki MP Jacqui Dean (centre), with Silver Fern Farms chairman Rob Hewett (right) and SFF Pareora plant manager Robert Lindsay.

Winter kale: continued

Another area Doug felt the operation was missing out was in genetic gain.

Traditionally, the purchased stags were being mated to the R2 hinds, he explains. "But, because of the smaller size of the resulting fawns, I don't believe we were selecting replacement hind fawns for the following year from the first fawners. So, we started to pay attention to what goes where," he says.

Last year was the first for an experiment mating Tuivale's best R2 stags at a ratio of 1:10 to the first fawners, which were selected for size. Rob Wilson also buys three new stags a year, last year from Grant Charteris, which are multi-sire mated at a ratio of 1:35 with the second fawners.

"The system had already been proven elsewhere by other

farmers in the area," he says. "We're on the right track. At weaning, the first fawners' calves are much bigger this year and look similar to the second fawners'."

Being involved in the Advance Party has been a good experience for him. "It's given me the confidence to try new things like this. I've made new friends and it's been great to nut things out with others in the group."

With results like the ones he's getting, Doug is excited for the future of the deer industry.

The Hawke's Bay Progressives AP is one of a network of 24 nationwide, which are part of the Passion2Profit programme. The APs are supported with funding from DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries' Sustainable Farming Fund. ■

Deer lifting their contribution at Clayton Station

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

It takes bold thinking to turn a problem into an opportunity, but that's what happened five years ago at Clayton Station in South Canterbury. A fence rebuilding programme in the wake of a big fire on the property provided the perfect opportunity to expand the deer fenced area and the Orbell family did just that.

AT A PASSION2PROFIT Regional Workshop hosted by the Mackenzie Advance Party on 28 February, about 50 visitors heard how Hamish and Anna Orbell took the opportunity to double the deer-fenced area to 927 hectares on the rolling-to-steep station.



Clayton Station has been in the Orbell family for three generations.

This is the third generation of the Orbell family to farm the property after Hamish's grandfather took over the pastoral lease in 1964. It has since been through tenure review and a massive transformation. The original 9,200 hectares comprised five hill blocks and just 12 paddocks running about 7,000 stock units. Today the post-tenure-review property has halved in size to 4,100 hectares (1,000ha flats/contoured and 3,100ha of hill), divided into 159 paddocks and 27 hill blocks. It is running 19,500 stock units, of which deer make up 21 percent, sheep 58 percent and cattle 21 percent.

Thanks to two years of drought that level is down a bit from a peak of 23,000 stock units in 2014. Deer numbers, along with sheep and cattle, were wound back, but there are plans to increase their contribution – first through making the existing herd more productive through improved pastures, and then by lifting the overall breeding herd size.

Deer have been farmed there since the 1980s, but with the expanded deer fencing, there is now much more scope for integrated grazing with sheep and cattle.

Hamish told visitors that the original wild-caught herd had been enhanced with Warnham and Woburn genetics, but progress just buying stags had stalled and the returns weren't great, so they also began buying in well-bred hinds. "Doing that has sped up

our genetic improvement by 10 years. Our spikers used to be just that – spikers – now they're growing 30 points! I'm not a great fan of AI. We'd rather tap into the hard work others have done with breeding."

That genetic improvement helped reignite the Orbells' passion for deer. The expansion five years ago – and participation in the Focus Farm programme also played their part as catalysts for improvement.



Hamish Orbell enjoys the velvet and trophy side of the deer business.

This reawakening of interest in deer was echoed by a couple of other Mackenzie Advance party members at the workshop. Hamish Mackenzie of Braemar Station said deer used to be very "low profile" but being in the group had opened their eyes to the potential. Glentanner Station's Mark Ivey said they had been "muddling along" with about 250 hinds selling straight red weaners and making very little. Being in the Advance Party had provided a timely "kick in the arse". They were now buying in replacement hinds and breeding good weaners with a B11 sire, while paying far more attention to strategic feeding.

Hamish Orbell is feeling similarly energised. He loves the velvet and trophy side of the business, but venison production also plays an important role and they have an excellent working relationship with the Orange family and Ashburton farmer David Ward, who finish the crossbred store weaners bred at Clayton. It's an innovative and mutually fair breeder-finisher relationship which sees Clayton paid 80–90% of the market value with the balance paid at slaughter based on the schedule price realised.

continued on page 20

Clayton: continued

Table 1: Deer numbers at Clayton Station (2016)

| | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| MA hinds | 1,075 |
| Sire stags | 21 |
| Velvet stags | 125 |
| R2 stags | 175 |
| R2 hinds | 146 |
| R1 stags | 250 |
| R1 hinds | 130 |
| Total deer | 1,922 |

Goals and challenges

The Orbell family want to farm sustainably while continuing to develop and improve the station. For the deer business they want to balance good environmental stewardship with farming deer in their natural environment. Their ideal breeding hind is in the 105–115kg range, producing 54–58kg weaners with a weaning percentage of 90–95 percent. Keeping costs of production under control is a big priority.

Maintaining feed quality in late lactation is one of the biggest challenges to achieving these goals. The hard winters can push up costs, while dry summers also threaten production goals. Maintaining water quality as part of a sustainable system is another challenge. Hamish Orbell has also identified breeding good replacements as a key to reaching his targets.

Half of the red breeding hinds at Clayton Station go to elk terminal sires, with the hinds and fawns run on the better front country to promote good growth and get the weaners off to a flying start. The balance is an elite mob used for breeding replacements, using velvet/trophy sires. Between 50–70 in-fawn R2 hinds are bought in each year. All stag fawns from the replacement mob are retained for velvet, with culling decisions made at velvetting.

The close relationship with the finishers means good communications channels are set up. “If we get feedback that the weaners aren’t growing, then we’ll look at ourselves and change what we do.”

Hamish said the challenge is to look after the elite hinds on the back country, which is a great fawning environment but weedy. At the same time they also want to create a good environment for the terminal hinds on the front country, which can dry out. What to do with the pasture on the front country was one of the topics tackled by visitors at the workshop.

Options for the hill block

A 44-hectare hill block on the better front country was chemically topped last October after dressing with lime and sulphur. It was then oversown with the following mix:

- 10kg Grasslands Nui perennial ryegrass
- 3kg white clover
- 3kg cocksfoot
- 1.5kg chicory

A mob of hoggets were put on for a week to trample in the seed. This was followed by a dressing of 40kg/ha of urea and a fortuitous 50ml of rain. A mob of 360 terminal hinds and fawns were put onto the paddock on 20 February and were looking well settled



Looking down to the flats from the hill block.

when the Workshop group visited a week later.

This mob had been supplemented with grain and palm kernel in January; a separate terminal mob of 180 hinds had been fawned on grass only with no supplements. Hamish reported that the hinds with access to palm kernel and grain were 0.5 body condition score better than their grass-only herdmates and their fawns were an average 1kg heavier. He’s looking forward to seeing later in the year if there was also a response in terms of earlier conception dates in the supplemented mob, and seeing how the costs and benefits compare.

Hamish was not sure what to do next with the oversown paddock, which has strips of matagouri preserved for shelter. “We want to improve the hind performance through grazing rather than having to cart grain or baleage up here – it’s not very safe on this country.”

There were a couple of niggling worries about clover in this block. The first was the possibility of residues of metsulfuron persisting (this was used for scrub control) and knocking out clover as its roots reached deeper. The other was the likelihood of clover root weevil taking a bite out of production.

The group considered a few options for further improvement on the paddock (see Table 2 next page).

Talking over the options later, the workshop agreed the following would be the best options for the block:

- broadcast annual clovers in autumn with fertiliser
- consider adding plantain and red clover to mix and cocksfoot on sunny faces
- chemical top in spring with 500ml/ha Roundup
- lock up November–February to let clovers establish and seed
- test for metsulfuron residues
- source parasitic wasp to control clover root weevil (via AgResearch)
- separate sunny and shady faces on next block
- reassess in 12 months.

Feeding hinds and fawns better during lactation

This topic is getting increasing attention and visitors split into workshop groups to chew over the pros and cons of various options to maintain feed quality and quantity during this crucial period. See Table 3 opposite for what they discussed:

Hamish said improving the quality of forages on the hills

Table 2: Options for hill block, pros and cons

| Option | Pros and cons |
|--|--|
| Spray out completely to kill native grasses and weeds before resowing | Fresh start but too much risk of weed reinvasion, especially thistles. |
| Spray out completely and sow with leafy turnip, followed by permanent pasture. | HT turnips probably OK on hill, but too much risk of soil loss and erosion. |
| Chemical top in spring to open up (500ml/ha Roundup); follow with grass/clover/chicory mix | Could increase proportion of quality forages. |
| Lock up paddock to let clover seed and establish better | Shutting from November–February could help this process and fit in with grazing requirements |
| Oversow with annual clovers in autumn, with fertiliser; follow with sheep to trample in seed and shut until spring | Could work well. |
| Add red clovers to oversowing mix | May not survive this environment and grazing |
| Add plantain to oversowing mix, added to fertiliser and clover | May not survive in this environment and cost could be a factor; chicory may be a better option as it reseeds |
| Use ryegrass on dry faces | May not survive; cocksfoot or brome a better option but not prairie grass |
| Subdivide dry and shady faces | Would allow better targeted mixes to suit conditions |
| Maintains quality in autumn, moderately palatable, versatile | Management |

Table 3: Options for improved feeding of hinds and fawns during lactation

| Option | Pros | Cons |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Summer brassicas (rape) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High quality and palatability Concentrated on a small area Improves hind body condition Easy to feed Calms weaners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs good moisture; risk of failure or poor production Risk of soil loss on slopes Need to manage breaks Transition management |
| Summer cereal crops (ryecorn) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More reliable than other cereals Good spring feed Foolproof, plenty of bulk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard to control Can bolt and go to seed |
| Improved and saved pasture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long payback period, part of pasture development programme Easiest to feed Cattle can help maintain quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relies on seasonal growth and grazing to maintain quality Risk of failure Establishment can take too long |
| Whole crop standing maize | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good weaner grown rates in late lactation No problems with transition Runoff paddock used High yield | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More wastage as crop matures and cobs form Hard to keep up with crop as it matures. |
| Barley | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Palatable Deer adapt fast NZ grown Easy to store and feed (ground or feeders) Low volume, high ME | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High, variable cost Gorging, hoarding at feeders Variable intake Wastage and teeth wear (ground feeding) |
| Oats (grain) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More digestible and safer than barley | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower ME More expensive |
| Palm kernel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheaper than grains Good for lactation High protein, fat, copper Good training for weaners Hinds keep condition No gorging, safer to feed More weatherproof | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fawns take 2–6 weeks to adapt if hinds aren't present Labour cost feeding out Not good flow in Advantage feeders Security of supply, price Lower quality due to improved oil extraction Biosecurity risk Negative perceptions about palm kernel |
| Lucerne | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High feed value, cheap to grow Easy transition Durable crop (7–10 years) Harvestable in spring, versatile Keeps quality during lactation Can wean onto it – Rumenzyne at weaning helps with transition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't grow in winter Won't grow in all conditions Sprays Grazing management |
| Lucerne baleage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy transition Brings high-quality feed to hinds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of baling and feeding out Lower quality and higher wastage than grazed standing lucerne |
| Clover/plantain | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy transition, relatively cheap Suits Mackenzie country | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs right growing conditions Grazing management |

Clayton: continued

through lactation gives him the flexibility to prioritise the flats for weaners and velvetters. He said the Advantage feeders have played an important part, especially over the past two dry years.

“The palm kernel has saved us. If that hadn’t been available we’d have had to find something else. Unfortunately grain has been too expensive. It needs to be less than \$350 a tonne to be economic for us.”

He said palm kernel and barley could get a bit hard when mixed for the feeder. Deer saliva could make crushed barley “turn to porridge” and not run properly, although utilisation was better than for whole grain.

Palm kernel did not appear to have significantly lifted copper levels in deer that were fed it.

Keeping stock healthy

In the final workshop session of a busy day, visitors teased out animal health issues and how best to handle them. For a summary of what was discussed, see Table 4 below.



Workshop groups talked over animal health issues.

Winter crops and supplements

Clayton Station has used surplus shipping containers to make a minimum-waste, self-feed silage pit for breeding hinds during winter (see *Deer Industry News*, February 2015, page 8 for more in this innovation). This takes pressure off the heavier country during winter and cuts down the need for winter crops. About 24–28 hectares is used to feed the silage pit, which makes about 80 tonnes. A further 8 hectares of kale and swedes is grown on the flats for wintering mixed age hinds. Fodder beet is also an important winter crop, with 25 hectares yielding about 18 tonnes/ha currently grown within the deer-fenced area for the fawns, young hinds, stags and mixed age hinds. The crop is break fed.

- For further information on Clayton Station see *Deer Industry News* issue 69, December 2014 and issue 70, February 2015. ■



The hinds and fawns on the front country were in good shape by the end of summer.

Table 4: Health issues and management options

| Issue | Management options |
|---|--|
| Johne’s disease | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease stocking rate and avoid wet, heavy soils • Better feeding • Reduce stress and parasite burdens • Test and cull R2 and R3 hinds and cull all clinical cases • Buy resilient genetics |
| Leptospirosis (not a big issue in this area, probably because it is relatively dry) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good personal hygiene • Vaccinating stock (this can also improve liveweights where subclinical disease is a factor) • Preventing access of deer to wallows and waterways, as the disease organism is spread in water. |
| Toxoplasmosis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise exposure to wild cats • Investigate through veterinarian if you suspect fetal losses are caused by toxoplasmosis • Vaccine available but effectiveness not proven in deer |
| Copper deficiency (an issue at Clayton Station) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test soil status and animal levels at the right time of the year (end of winter). If status is low at other times (e.g. during lactation), you have a problem. • Be aware of Mo status, as this affects copper uptake. So does S, Fe and a high pH level. • Test to ensure your chosen treatment (bullets, fertiliser etc.) are giving a response. Appearances can be deceptive. |
| Selenium deficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selenium prills • Injection • Selenised drenches |
| Iodine deficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injection or drench, but not proven in deer • Fodder beet is possibly better for avoiding iodine deficiency in winter than brassicas |
| Mismothering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good calving environment with cover and contour • Settled social structure in fawning mob (don’t fawn R2s with older hinds) • Minimise outside disturbance |



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Angus Irvine (Firstlight, on left) with Anna and Hamish Orbell.

Firstlight Environment award presented

Angus Irvine from Firstlight was on hand at Clayton Station to present the Orbells with the Firstlight Award for total commitment to farming sustainably with a strong customer focus.

Angus said the Orbells farmed deer successfully in a challenging environment with an excellent fit between land and stock classes. The development of an excellent supply arrangement with a finisher, where the finisher also had input into decisions about genetics, underlined the Orbells' customer focus.

Environmental best practice including fencing of streams, monitoring water quality, maintaining a wetland to filter nutrients and an extensive tree planting programme started by Hamish's mother Ruth Orbell had all contributed to the award.

App for Alliance suppliers

DEER FARMERS SUPPLYING Alliance Group now have a handy new smartphone app to help them manage the processing of their stock.

The Farm Alliance app was developed as part of Alliance Group's business strategy to support its 5,000 farmer shareholders, including about 400 deer suppliers.

Deer farmers will now be able to see their own livestock processing results in real time, access their latest kill sheets, make booking requests, check statistics and schedule, and receive industry updates.

Kill sheets can be delivered straight to deer farmers' mobile phones as soon as their stock is processed and they will be automatically notified when new information is available, says Mark Blandford, Alliance chief information officer.

"The menu also includes all of a farmer's kills for the previous six months and annual kill statistics. These can also be filtered by species."

The cooperative will explore making further enhancements to the platform in the months ahead, he says.

"This is another example of our business strategy in action as we seek to improve our co-operative's performance and lift returns to our farmer shareholders," says Heather Stacy, Alliance Group general manager livestock and shareholder services.

The app accounts for patchy coverage in some rural locations by saving information, such as booking requests and sending it only when the connection is active, she says.

- Alliance deer suppliers can download the Farm Alliance app free from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

Obituary: John William Spiers, 1954–2017

Members of the deer farming community gathered with friends and family at the beautiful Oruawharo Homestead in Takapau on 1 March to mourn the passing of John Spiers, one of the most respected and influential deer industry figures of his generation.



IT WAS A mark of the esteem that John was held in, that deer industry friends and colleagues from throughout New Zealand made the journey in such big numbers to pay their respects. With the hall overflowing, several hundred shared the Spiers family's celebration of John's life in the shade of the giant chestnut trees surrounding the venue.

They heard of an intensely loyal and loving family man with a penchant for adventure, courage in spades and a strong sense of fun. Devoted husband to Marie and proud father of Daniel, Bridget and Trina, John's family also remembered son and brother Mark, who was tragically lost in a childhood accident.

Affectionately known as "The General", John had been an accomplished hockey player in his younger days, with a healthy streak of mischief as a schoolboy. He was as passionate about his fishing and duckshooting – indeed he was heralded to the event with a duck call – as he was sentimental about his much loved dog, Mitch. These insights from John's family, and old friends Larry White and David Tennent, helped build a fuller picture of the man who also gave so much to the deer industry.

DINZ Producer Manager Tony Pearse, who had been honoured with Life Membership of the Hawke's Bay DFA by John Spiers at the same venue only months earlier, delivered a tribute on behalf of the deer industry. The following is an extract from Tony's address, which he appropriately titled "Monarch of the Glen".

You don't need much inspiration to review the life and

contribution that John Spiers has given to the New Zealand deer industry for nearly 40 years.

The famous 1851 red stag painting by Edwin Landseer, "Monarch of the Glen", is an iconic image of a red deer. This powerful classic 12 point Royal stag set against a brooding violet sky in the rugged Scottish highlands suggests a calm, confident authority – a Monarch of all he surveys. That's a fitting image for the life of John Spiers in the deer industry and life in general.

But beyond that and beyond "Maranoa Deer" is the NZDFA stag's head logo, an organisation he gave to without reservation, unselfishly, and with total commitment.

Within the DFA, he was a great contributor across all areas, planning and securing the DFA at branch level and nationally as a valued and effective producer organisation.

He assumed the national DFA President's role in 1997 as the first "Second Generation" President, defining his role as "prudent leadership to ensure deer farmers received the best possible returns while the industry wrestles with increasing growth and sustainability issues".

From his entry into deer farming in 1978, working with father Ian to convert the Maranoa property to deer, he was associated with the Hawke's Bay Branch from its inception in about 1980. That continued right through roles as committee member, in conference groups, Branch chair (1991–94) and being honoured in 2004 as the Hawke's Bay Branch's first life member.

With the untimely loss of John's father, DFA President Ian Spiers, in the mid 1980s, it wasn't long before a role in national leadership emerged for John. Game Industry Board contributions in those years were based around velvet farming and the practicalities of farmer accreditation, through his time on the National Velveting Standards Body, which he joined in 2001.

He also helped develop the on farm QA programme, being a member of the committee from 1993–95.

Throughout this period he was the strong calm voice of reason in DFA politics and at AGMs, encouraging fair debate and representing Hawke's Bay Branch views.

National roles were a foregone conclusion, beginning around 1994 as a NZDFA councillor. He was appointed Vice President in 1996–97, continuing in portfolio roles that had a strong focus on animal health and animal identification systems.

That work extended into a fierce interaction with DOC over feral ranges, fencing specifications and status of deer farming in New Zealand's sensitive conservation areas. He was a strong negotiator but always prepared to incorporate others' viewpoints for the greater common good.

At the 1997 AGM, John was elected unopposed as DFA President, replacing Andrew Orbell.

In *The Deer Farmer*, John was described as "onto it".

"He knows exactly what's happening day to day ... a burly character with a quick mind, easy laugh, bad tobacco habit and a love of deer."

He remained immensely proud of his fellow councillors for their roles in lobbying, representation and policy work and the loyalty to the aims of the DFA. Their commitment was of course a response to the example he set as President.

In 1998, John represented the industry at the Second World Deer Congress in Limerick, Ireland.

In the same year, the Hawke's Bay DFA initiated the landmark Richmond Wrightson Deer Performance Programme, three years in the planning. John was a founding member of the committee, which he chaired from 1999–2001. It allowed him to follow his passion for excellence in deer performance, productivity and profitability. That remarkable piece of work has kept Hawke's Bay deer farming at the forefront of the industry.

In 1999 as outgoing DFA president (fittingly in Napier), the AGM was noted for its preparation, so typical of John's style of leadership. It was observed that his presidency was marked by enormous respect and characterised by an unruffled approach and full control over the Association's direction.

John Spiers was awarded the Deer Industry Award in 2000 for this national contribution and went on to serve a three-year term on Deer Industry New Zealand Board from 2006–2009.

He remained as one of the longest serving Hawke's Bay committee members, active, inquiring and supportive as ever and enormously proud and excited by the next generation as they take the reins.

He received DFA life membership alongside friend and DFA colleague David Stevens in 2015 at the deer industry conference in Napier.

He has been the family trustee of the Ian Spiers Memorial Trust since its inception. This year the Trust and DINZ are supporting two Kellogg Rural leadership candidates. The Trust also supports The DFA's Next Generation Conference. Its work was very close to

John's heart.

This lifetime of dedication to the deer industry was given freely, honestly and passionately.

Just a few short months ago in this very building, John Spiers led the Hawke's Bay DFA's surprise honour, awarding me a Life Membership of the Branch.

I thought I should give him a man hug and do the mutual back slapping, awkward affectionate thanks. I appreciated then what a big hearted and big man he was. I got my arms around the sides and they flailed ineffectually like fluttering moths, while his big arms rearranged most of my upper body. I'm really glad we did that.

Cheers, farewell and thanks, John.

Kua Hinga te Tōtara i te Waonui a Tāne

The totara has fallen in the forest of Tane

Provelco role recalled

John Spiers was a foundation member of Veleco Ltd, the company that became the farmer owned co-operative now known as Provelco Co-operative Ltd.

He was an enthusiastic member, a strong supporter of co-operative principles and how these could be applied to the industry that he was clearly passionate about – for the benefit of all velvet producers.

I remember a Veleco meeting held in the deer shed at his Maranoa Stud where a thunderous hailstorm all but drowned out the speakers, but we weren't allowed to finish and have a beer until we had delivered the full programme, regardless of the incredible noise.

In July 2010 John was elected to the Provelco Board and served for nearly seven years. He was utterly reliable, honest and forthright but also diplomatic. With years of experience to draw on when he did speak, he brought a calm authority and I admired that greatly.

He will be missed.

Ross Chambers, General Manager, Provelco

Important role in NVSB

When I worked with John in the National Velveting Standards Body he had a consistent, no-nonsense approach, always thought through issues and was a powerful advocate for the deer farming community. John had a special ability to look for solutions that kept red tape minimal for farmers but incorporated all the bigger picture issues that were necessary for the industry to survive and move forward.

He was passionate about velvet and particularly about its quality throughout the entire process – conception to harvest to sale – maximising farmer returns at every step. Whenever an industry-protecting video had to be made, or research planned, John was always first to volunteer his property, animals or services. You could always count on everything being done to the highest technical skills and standards. John was a true farmer professional with a political driver built into his genome.

He was a big man with a bigger heart, who devoted a lifetime to ensuring this industry always made the best of its opportunities.

Thank you, John. ■

Ian Scott, Chair, National Velveting Standards Body

Less is more

by Alison Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Venison volumes have fallen, but that isn't necessarily a bad thing as the industry starts a herd rebuilding phase, the effects of drought lessen and actions to reposition New Zealand venison take hold.

IN LINE WITH lower slaughter numbers last year, DINZ statistics show that in the 12 months to end December 2016, volumes of venison exports fell by 16 percent on the previous year, while total value dropped 11 percent. Positively, however, chilled markets continued to grow as a percentage of total exports. Chilled venison volume, which accounted for 19 percent of the total shipped, dropped only by six percent over the same period.

On another bright note, the tighter supply and good demand in key markets also meant venison prices increased, averaging \$12,647 per tonne over the year, a five percent increase over the year ending December 2015 (see Table 1). At December 2016, chilled venison had reached an average of \$23,000/tonne over the year, \$500/tonne more than the 2015 average.

Table 1: Average venison prices in key markets 2015 and 2016

| | 2015 | 2016 | % change |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Germany | \$11,627 | \$13,830 | 16% |
| United States | \$11,085 | \$10,711 | -3% |
| Belgium | \$15,081 | \$16,970 | 11% |
| Netherlands | \$19,348 | \$21,154 | 9% |
| United Kingdom | \$9,694 | \$10,059 | 4% |
| Switzerland | \$16,097 | \$18,458 | 13% |
| Finland | \$6,861 | \$7,479 | 8% |
| France | \$15,366 | \$15,375 | 0% |
| Sweden | \$9,134 | \$10,561 | 14% |
| Canada | \$10,245 | \$9,736 | -5% |
| Others | \$10,265 | \$10,285 | 0% |
| Total | \$12,046 | \$12,647 | 5% |

Source: Deer Industry New Zealand

Slaughter statistics record a reduction in venison production so far this season, with 17 percent fewer deer (100,052 head) going through the works in October to December – the first quarter (Q1) of this season – than Q1 2016.

Customer impact

As expected, exporters note that the lower supplies and higher prices are affecting customers with European retail processing companies unable to purchase the quantities of venison they have historically, or choosing not to pay the higher prices for New Zealand venison this year.

“This will have a significant impact on the supply of further processed venison items for European retailers,” comments

Duncan New Zealand's General Manager Marketing Glenn Tyrrell, who is a member of the deer industry Marketing Working Group (MWG). Tyrrell notes it may prove challenging to recover these accounts when production levels increase if price levels are maintained.



Glenn Tyrrell, Duncan New Zealand, one of the five venison exporters managing low supplies with one eye on the industry's future.

So, how are venison exporters and marketers managing the period of low supply to the New Zealand industry's long-term benefit?

With market conditions firm in Europe and North America, priority is being given to customers whose vision for marketing New Zealand venison matches the New Zealand industry's, says Tyrrell. This means reductions to some traditional market sectors.

“With market conditions firm in Europe and North America, priority is being given to customers whose vision for marketing New Zealand venison matches the NZ industry's”

Germany remains highly important for New Zealand venison, but venison marketers' strategies are to diversify away from reliance on the seasonal European game market and continue to re-position New Zealand venison in new and promising market niches, he explains. Some of Europe's traditional markets may see less New Zealand venison, even when volumes increase.

“Venison has moved away from some European markets that tend to be highly seasonal and rely on a three-month consumption period over the Northern Hemisphere autumn and winter,” he comments.

Premium summer option

More New Zealand venison may also find a home in markets where it is not competing directly with European wild venison. This includes developing Cervena® venison as a premium summer option in Europe.

Exporters agree on the benefits of developing these new Cervena markets, such as Benelux, for chilled European summer

continued on page 27

The 2017 Hanos Cervena® Masterchef

We have another winner! Anne Hemminga of Meadows Restaurant at the De Roode Schuu hotel in Amersfoort in the central Netherlands is the 2017 Hanos Cervena Masterchef.

HEMMINGA HEADED OFF eight other finalists, from the Netherlands, in late February at Hanos's flagship store in Delft to win her new title and prize of a trip for two to New Zealand.

The final chefs had been selected from two semi-finals held in 2016. The competition theme was street food, which meant the chefs had to focus on cooking Cervena venison in a non-game style and created their dishes live in front of judges and customers at the final, explains DINZ venison marketing manager, Marianne Wilson.

Hemminga's winning dish was a New Zealand-inspired hangi-smoked Cervena on a caramelised kumara sponge cake, served with kumara chutney and sweet and sour beetroot.

She liked working with Cervena because, "it's a high-quality meat which, when prepared correctly, is very tasty". Her win means a lot to her, because she put a lot of time and passion into it, as her first ever competition entry.

Cervena bolar, from the shoulder, was smoked in a barbecue with charcoal, lava stones and branches along with soil and spices, which gave the meat an earthy taste and enhanced the seasonings. The dish was also accompanied by pulled venison, which was also slowed-cooked in hangi-style.

Delighted that her long-time dream to go to New Zealand has come true, the chef is now looking forward to her trip to the other side of the world later this year.

"And, to see where the Cervena deer come from!" she says.

The new prize-winner will follow in the tracks of Simon Feitsma, the Dutch 2016 winner who visited New Zealand recently (see *Deer Industry News*, February/March 2017). He was one of the trio of 2017 judges, joining DINZ consultant chef Shannon Campbell and Herlinda de Clerck of *Passion Hi*, a Dutch magazine targeting hotels, restaurants and caterers, which covers the

competition extensively for its readers.

"The judges said the food produced was of a very high standard and extremely creative in presentation," says Wilson. "You could see a lot of work had gone into the submissions."

Martijn Jansen of Ria Joosten Catering & Evenementen, and Jeffrey Schoeman of Herberg De Zoelensche Brug, were the second and third place-getters. Each won a Big Green Egg, a Kamado-style ceramic charcoal barbecue.

The Cervena Masterchef competition was again organised by Benelux foodservice wholesaler Hanos and supported by DINZ as part of the joint deer industry-government Passion2Profit programme. It aims to introduce Cervena to the Benelux countries as a summer dining option. ■



The winning dish.

Less is more: continued

sales from March to August. Four companies – Alliance Group, Duncan New Zealand, First Light and Silver Fern Farms – are supplying chilled Cervena to Benelux this year to introduce Cervena as a premium healthy summer protein.

Mountain River Venison is leading a project in China, another part of the P2P Programme, where inroads are being made to new venison distribution channels.

Finally, growth is being achieved in the United States and Canada, which benefit from a lack of domestic venison supply, explains Tyrrell. Duncan New Zealand has seen increasing demand in both North American markets that together showed growth of nine percent over the past year, with chilled venison up 16 percent – largely at the expense of Europe.

"New Zealand venison benefits from growing US and Canadian demand for natural grass-fed, high-quality, healthy proteins that

do not have antibiotics, are not genetically modified and have no hormone growth promotants. All of this suits our production systems."

DINZ P2P Manager Innes Moffat says the venison marketing companies agree continued investment in market development activities is necessary during this period of lower supply to ensure customers exist that are ready to take increases in volume at current prices.

"A reliance on the inelastic seasonal European game trade would see prices falling as increased volumes are offered back to this market. That's why investment during this period on repositioning New Zealand venison when volumes can be carefully managed will benefit New Zealand venison producers in the long term," he explains. ■

Provelco's intern directorships

In an effort to ensure the producer owned cooperative is relevant and connected to the next generation of deer farmers, Provelco has introduced a director internship programme. Intern director **Lorna Humm** will already be known to many in the industry. The following article profiles Lorna and her thoughts on the velvet sector.

Your impressions of the velvet industry?

The velvet industry is an exciting one to be involved in. The production gains made in recent years, as well as the increased collective knowledge in genetics, feeding and health to achieve these outstanding results, are remarkable.

Productivity gains made by the velvet industry are an under-

told success story that would rival most others in the primary sector. I am always impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the farmers in this.

The velvet industry has enormous potential for further market development. There is scope for more within-industry collaboration to raise the profile of New Zealand deer velvet

Leading ginseng brand in NZ

Branded stores for one of South Korea's leading health products have opened in New Zealand and more are to come, thanks to velvet processor Rokland Corporation Limited.

ROKLAND RECENTLY BECAME the first authorised New Zealand distributor of the Korea Ginseng Corporation (KGC)'s leading brand of world-class ginseng products, CheongGwanJang. KGC is the largest single retailer of New Zealand deer velvet products and a company the New Zealand deer industry has worked proudly with over the past eight years.

Two new CheongGwanJang-branded stores have opened in New Zealand, the start of a planned retail chain says Rokland Corporation's managing director Michael Lee.

He explains CheongGwanJang is well known and respected for supplying high-quality Korean Red Ginseng around the world. It has held the title of the "World's Number 1" ginseng brand over the past decade. CheongGwanJang products are often presented as gifts to world leaders and Korea alone has 1,300 branded stores.

"I thought it would be great idea if I brought it to New Zealand, seeing as there are no brand shops here," he explains, adding the company's aim is to sell to both locals and overseas tourists. I am excited for the future of CheongGwanJang in New Zealand."

The Lee family of six have hands-on involvement in the two retail stores. The first, and main, 63m² store is next to Rokland's factory in Hornby, Christchurch. This mainly handles distribution to the other shops.

The second is in Christchurch, run by Lee's children, Susan and Matthew. The company also distributes the range to Auckland and is planning expansion into Wellington, Queenstown and Dunedin.



Michael Lee with his wife Julie in one of the new stores.

The move comes 15 months after the Korea–NZ free trade agreement (FTA) came into force in December 2015, which, as a velvet processor, Lee has warmly welcomed.

"Because there was a decrease in tax for dried deer velvet, it was good for processing and exporting factories here in New Zealand to export to Korea," he says.

DINZ figures for years ending January bear this out. The value of exports of processed velvet from New Zealand to Korea grew 90 percent from January 2016 to \$9.2 million in January 2017. This represents a leap of 217 percent on the year to January 2013.

"The FTA has given New Zealand velvet a unique advantage," explains DINZ Market Manager Asia, Rhys Griffiths.

"There is also increasing consumption by food companies that are keen to get their velvet processed in New Zealand. With the FTA only gathering further concessions for New Zealand-processed velvet and our drive to the food sector, we hope this recent trend will continue," he says.

KGC, established in 1899, is now one of New Zealand's largest customers for deer velvet, buying about 50–60 tonnes a year.

"When the world's number one ginseng brand and New Zealand deer velvet are combined as ingredients to make high quality products, it is very exciting," Lee says. "I cannot wait for future products from KGC using deer velvet."

Many of the CheongGwanJang products, such as "CheonNokSam" use processed New Zealand deer velvet as a key ingredient, he explains.

"After my father Charlie Lee – the pioneer of the New Zealand velvet processing industry – tried CheonNokSam he told me, 'I have taken a lot of health products in my life so I know which are good or not. CheonNokSam? This is really incredible!'

"I think products like this will bring more recognition of New Zealand deer velvet." ■

internationally. There is potential for the New Zealand velvet industry to come across as disjointed, with multiple exporters, processors and retailers of processed velvet.

The New Zealand velvet industry is strengthened by having demonstrably high standards as supervised by the National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSB). To position ourselves as having velvet with the highest standards in food safety and product integrity, we need to have robust quality assurance, and the NVSB is pivotal in providing this. Verifying product origin and guaranteeing the quantifiable quality of our product will be increasingly critical to provide assurance our markets require.

Our markets have a strong preference for a certain style of antler. This needs to more clearly guide on-farm decision making.

What areas are of greatest interest?

Our product is something special. The scientist in me is excited by the properties in velvet and the range of opportunities that provides. I have particular interest in the immuno-regulatory and anti-inflammatory properties of velvet, as well as its effect on wound healing, nerve regeneration and blood health. VARNZ's velvet research strategy is pivotal to the future opportunities to market our unique product. Investment in research to support health claims for velvet and to identify individual bioactive peptides responsible for these functions is well justified.

Is the cooperative model a good one?

It should be! To me, the outstanding feature of the farmer-owned cooperative model for the sale of velvet is that producer interests

are prioritised. Shareholder ownership governs operational and strategic decisions and the payment structure (including the deposit paid to producers) is favourable for producer cash flow.

Getting the best short- and long-term outcome for producers means developing and maintaining long-term relationships with buyers in target markets. This is done particularly well by Provelco. There is now a track record of trust, integrity and quality that is held in highest regard by our customers.

A farmer-owned cooperative model is in the best position to link consumers with producers – an essential component of building the story of our product and giving consumers that sense of connection to the product they are buying. ■

• **Article supplied by Provelco**

Lorna is deeply involved in the deer industry, both professionally and personally. With husband Duncan, she farms 320 deer in Canterbury and as a large animal veterinarian she has grown her experience of managing deer health issues. In January 2016, she strengthened her professional involvement in the deer industry when she took up the role of P2P Deer Health Project Manager with Deer Industry New Zealand. This position is complemented by her membership of the Canterbury Advance Party – part of the P2P programme – and her role as Facilitator for the Mid Canterbury Advance Party. More recently, Lorna was selected to participate in the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme, where she is completing a project on deer industry leadership, communication and engagement. Lorna's governance skills and knowledge of the deer velvet sector have recently been enhanced with her appointment to velvet marketing cooperative Provelco as an intern director.



Lorna Humm

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Venison update

Production

- The national kill for the 12 months ending February 2017 was 296,544, down 19% year on year.
- Production for the 12 months ending February was 16,868 tonnes (CWE), down 16% year on year.
- The total number of hinds killed in the 12 months to February 2017 was 146,210, equating to 49% of the total kill and down 26% for the year to date.
- The kill during February was up 2%, with production up 5% versus February 2016. Average weight per carcass was also up year on year at 60.41kg versus 58.82 kg. The higher weights were influenced by the greater proportion of stags in the month's kill.

Exports

- Total venison exports for the 12 months ending February 2017 are recorded as 12,600 tonnes, down 19% year on year and reflecting the lower kill numbers. The value of these exports was \$161 million, down 15%. The average FOB sales price per kg over the past 12 months was \$12.74, up 5%.
- The United States overtook Germany as the leading export market, with volume up 27% year on year and firm demand, particularly from manufacturing customers. In contrast, exports to the Netherlands and Germany were down 42% and 41% respectively. This change illustrates the diversification focus exporters are pursuing to balance up the importance of the German market while mitigating risk by growing and developing alternative markets.

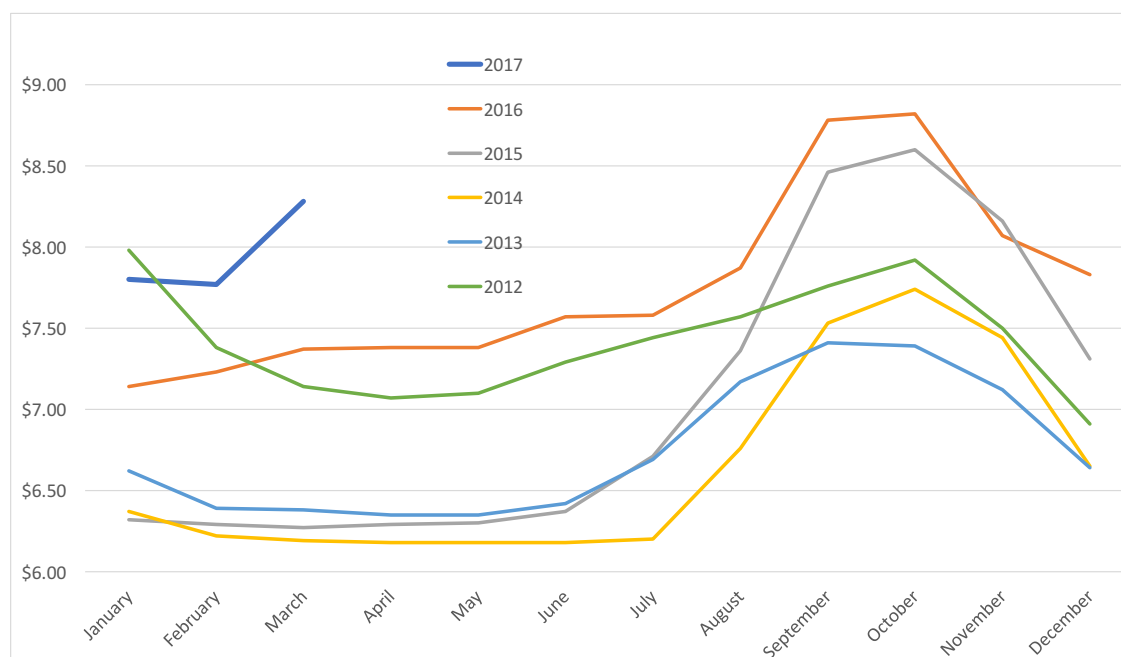
Chilled exports

- Overall the total volume of chilled exports decreased by 5% with value down by 4% year on year. However, chilled exports to the United States were up 29% by volume with 757 tonnes shipped, worth \$16 million.
- The US market's steady growth is linked to an increased demand from chefs and consumers for the quality credentials of grass-fed meat, as well as to the development of the smart casual restaurant scene where eating out is often just as cost effective and time saving as "cooking from scratch". The growth of the premium snack foods category is another factor behind these volume increases.
- Chilled exports made up 19% of total exports by volume and 34% by value. The average FOB sales price per kg over the past 12 months was \$22.58, up very slightly by 1%.

Schedule, currency movement and market observations

- The published schedule throughout March climbed from \$8.08/kg. At the time of going to press (early April), the schedule had firmed to \$8.28/kg.
- A range of factors, beyond procurement pressure, led to the higher-than-usual venison prices recorded at this point in the season.
- Exporters report good demand across all markets and comment that prices for middle cuts are strong in the food service sector as is demand for leg muscles from retail and food service customers.
- Some exporters also have observed unprecedented demand from the luxury pet food sector, which has kept bones and offal items firm. Exporters also report an increase in demand for manufacturing material such as necks, shanks and trim

Figure 1: National published schedule: 2012–2017 (\$/kg gross)



- For the week commencing 27 March the US dollar was trading at 0.70 cents to the NZ dollar and 0.65 cents to the euro, down 3% and 5% respectively year on year. This slight weakening of the NZ dollar has also played a part in schedule rises. ■

Velvet update

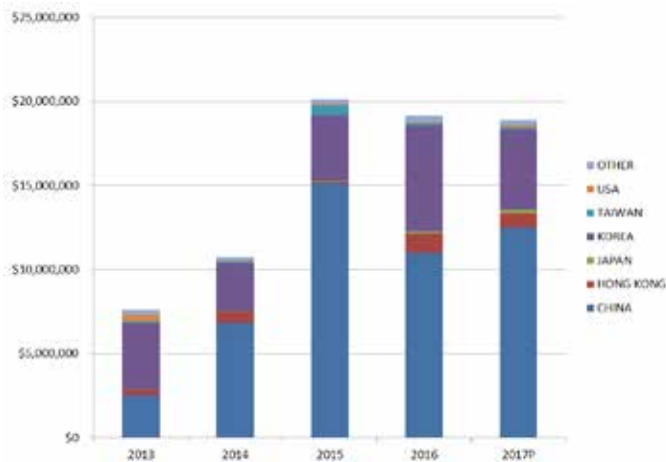
Strong underlying demand resulted in continued velvet exports throughout the season. Export volumes were at similar rates, or higher than previous seasons. Promotion of New Zealand velvet products in Korea ramps up another notch.

Going, going, gone

Although one or two buyers may be holding some stock, most exporters report they have little (if any) velvet remaining from this season. Some Korean importers expressed surprise when they have struggled to buy velvet at this late stage of the season. Many had expected some carry-over due to the velvet regulatory changes in China. In fact, exports remained strong throughout the season, particularly to China.

With the price decrease this season (estimated to be around 20%), the graph (Figure 1) that reports velvet exports by value proves that volume exports remained strong – if not stronger – compared with previous years. At the start of every season, there are pressures to reduce prices. The regulation changes enabled some of this pressure to stick. However, strong underlying demand meant trading volumes could continue as normal

Figure 1: Velvet exports by value (NZ\$ FOB) to main markets Oct–Feb



Source: Statistics NZ

The majority of New Zealand velvet has been exported, which is a tidy way to finish a stressful season. Focus can now be to ensure the industry is well prepared for next season – to meet the changing requirements outlined on page 8.

Marketing of NZ velvet ramps up

KGC, the biggest customer of New Zealand velvet, has taken its advertising of hero product, Cheong Nuk Sam to another level. They have launched a 30-second advertisement widely promoting this New Zealand velvet-based product. The advertisement, featuring famous actor Han Suk-kyu, is getting aired on Korean primetime television as well as throughout on-line forums.

DINZ has received a lot of comment from people in Korea not necessarily associated with the industry.

This advertising complemented the recent (and ongoing) promotion of a new New Zealand velvet-based product through Lotte Home shopping. A high-profile celebrity doctor (Dr Lee), gained a lot of attention showing images of New Zealand velvet production in Central Otago and Southland.

These types of proactive advertisements will continue to generate further demand for New Zealand velvet products. ■



KGC's new TV advertisement featuring famous actor Han Suk-kyu and the New Zealand velvet mark.



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“Proud as Punch” to win best venison dish

Greg Piner is as “proud as Punch” that he and his team won this year’s Best Venison Dish in the Silver Fern Farms Premier Selection Awards, announced in February.

THE GROUP CHEF of Dunedin’s Vault 21 restaurant says he was “very, very happy” with the outcome.

“For me though, it’s very much a team win. I couldn’t have done it without the guys behind me.”

It’s also plain he is passionate about working with the meat.

“Venison is amazing and is the most underutilised meat in New Zealand,” he believes. “It’s lean, super-healthy, really good to work with and has a great flavour.”

The team spent two to three weeks working on and perfecting the winning dish with its hero, cured Silver Fern Farms venison short loin – “an exceptional product that tastes really good,” Piner says. This was plated up alongside a trio of mushroom, pickled shiitake, cep puree, tempura needle mushrooms, compressed radish, ponzu (a tangy citrus-based sauce), black truffle salt, pea tendrils and crispy shallots.

“Our philosophy is to think outside the box,” he says, noting that Vault 21 was the first restaurant in New Zealand to serve exotic items like locust and cricket flour.

“This dish paints a picture of a deer walking through the forest,” he explains, adding it was positioned to be light and fun.

“We worked to include all the elements, blending all the senses together in the combination of softness of the venison, versus the tartness of the dressing with the crunchiness of the radish. We’re aiming for whole stimulation of the mouth.”



Greg Piner (left) with Silver Fern Farms CEO, Dean Hamilton.

The restaurant has sold a “phenomenal amount” of the plate and he intends to keep it on the menu.

“We’ve got some exciting stuff coming up and we will definitely do another venison entry next year.”

Piner’s dish was one of 12 finalists in the competition, whittled down from 73 entries. These were re-judged by Kerry Tyack and Tony Adcock, both well-respected food and beverage critics and experienced judges in national food competitions.

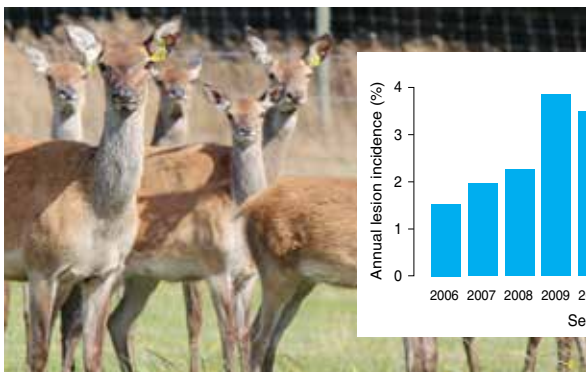
Paul Limacher, chef de cuisine at Chameleon Restaurant in Wellington, took out the supreme Premier Master of Fine Cuisine, along with Best Beef Dish and Best Metropolitan categories. Runner-up was Daniel Hill of Pitches Café and Restaurant in Ophir Central Otago, while Geoff Ngan, head chef at Shed 5 Wellington won Best Lamb Dish. All were required to make Silver Fern Farms’ venison, beef or lamb the hero of the dish.

Piner echoes judges’ comments about the high standard in the competition, now in its fourth year.

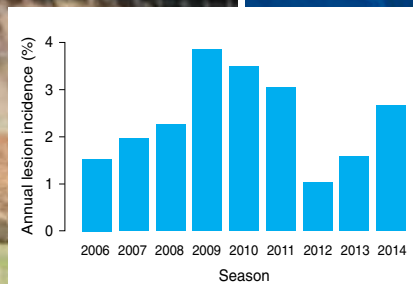
“The level of competition was so high. When we’re lined up with those other guys, we’re as proud as Punch.” ■



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