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Deer Industry News

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

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Contents

Cover: Bryan Thompson and Tony Pearse (facing camera) talk pasture utilisation with Next Generation Programme participants. See pages 4–14. Photo: Phil Stewart

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A positive mindset

Since I came onto the DINZ Board last year, and then stepped into the role of Chair in July, one thing has struck me in particular: right throughout the industry, from the farm to the people who deliver our products to overseas consumers, we are in excellent heart.

Ian Walker.

SURE THERE ARE always challenges, but that optimism is setting us up well for the rebuilding phase ahead. It also puts us in a much stronger position to cope with those unexpected "Black Swan" events that my predecessor Andy Macfarlane mentioned in the previous issue of this magazine.

I was attracted into this leadership role by the very good balance at governance level between producers and processors and Andy's leadership over the last seven years has made the transition for me very easy. Not all primary industries enjoy the benefits of this close relationship around the board table.

The successful Passion2Profit (P2P) programme is providing much-needed momentum for growth and improved profitability, but the challenge will be to maintain that energy. We live in dynamic times and it's inevitable that circumstances outside our control will change through the life of the programme. We will need to constantly review our strategy and make minor changes to the way we implement it as conditions demand.

Already in the short time that P2P has been running, we have seen a growing emphasis on the need to protect our social licence to operate. We only have to look at some of the negative publicity that's affected other livestock industries to see how quickly that licence – society's approval of the way we care for our animals – can come under threat.

The other adaptation has been the promotion of environmental management within P2P, to have equal status with genetics, feeding and health as a cornerstone of a successful and profitable industry. Good environmental management is closely associated with profitability and productivity, so it's been a logical move.

We've just had a hard-fought general election and environmental issues were to the forefront with farmers copping some unfair criticism at times. I often witness frustration and anger from farmers about the disconnect between the excellent work they are doing on their own properties to manage nutrient and soil losses and enhance biodiversity, and a barrage of negative stories in the mainstream media.

We need to make sure the good news stories are being told in a way that's accessible.

Helping our industry keep pace with changes in environmental regulations and respond to the challenges these pose is one of the many tasks being done by our hard-working executive team at DINZ. Becoming a Board member and now Chair has really opened my eyes to what an outstanding job they do and I'd like to publicly thank them for helping keep the industry focused on the risks and opportunities ahead.

Our processors and marketers, working with DINZ, are doing a fantastic job building and diversifying markets. Keeping those satisfied while we wait for more venison to flow is a tricky balancing act. On the velvet side, the introduction of new market requirements and the Regulated Control Scheme has created challenges but it has also opened up a tremendous opportunity for us to lift our game and differentiate ourselves from our competitors. I'm seeing producers getting stuck into the jobs they need to do in their deer sheds with enthusiasm and a positive frame of mind.

That attitude will set us up well for whatever lies ahead. ■

– Ian Walker, Chair, Deer Industry New Zealand

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.

EDITOR Phil Stewart, Words & Pictures

A waiting list to get in, and plenty of fresh faces, were sure signs that the NZDFA Next Generation Programme is still going strong with plenty of support in its fifth year. This year the two-day programme was hosted at AgResearch Invermay, an inspired choice of venue that showed its worth last year when Dunedin hosted the Deer Industry Conference. Fifty attendees came to the event, which was sponsored by Perrin Ag Consultants, Rural Livestock Ltd and PGG Wrightson.

Growth curves tell interesting story

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

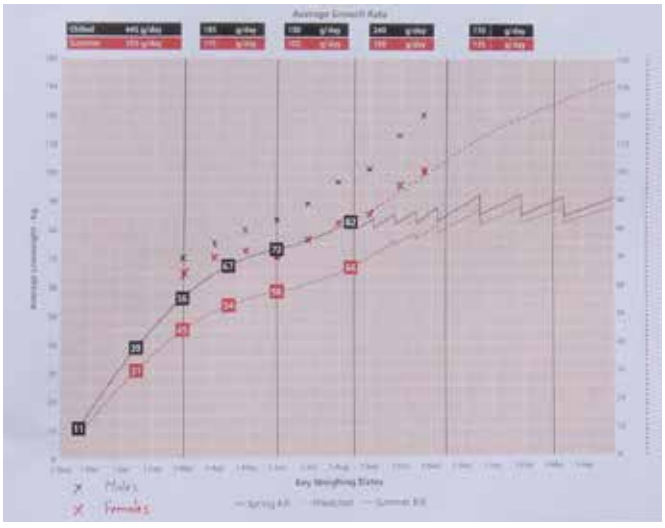
Trying a new drench in the weaner finishing mob put a dent in growth rates at the AgResearch Invermay deer farm last year. But by regularly weighing and recording the growth progress of the 180 weaners from the "Tomorrow's Deer" programme through winter, staff were alerted to the problem early and were soon able to pinpoint and remedy it.

DEER UNIT MANAGER Rachel Worth told Next Generation conference visitors that the AI-conceived mob was weaned in early March at about 100 days, with the stags weighing 70kg and the hinds 65kg. By slaughter on 26 October, the gap between the stags (120 liveweight, 66kg carcass weight) and the hinds (100kg liveweight, 57kg carcass weight) had widened.

Worth said the overall performance was very satisfactory and they were initially puzzled as to why the hind mob's growth rates had suffered but the stags' had not. "We realised that the weaner stags had been followed in the rotation by a clean-up mob of mature hinds, but the weaner hind mob had not. We think that's what made the difference as these young hinds would have been exposed to a higher residual parasite challenge which would have cleaned up by the hinds in the weaner stag grazing rotation."

At the time of the apparent drench failure in May–June the stags were growing at 180g/day but the hinds dropped back by 30g/day to 70g. The new drench was a triple combination (abamectin, levamisole and oxfendazole). Following this they switched back to an Oxfen C + Cydectin combination.

In discussion following this presentation, DINZ Producer Manager Tony Pearse warned that if a drench contained levamisole, there was a risk when dosing to the heaviest weaner in the mob. "If you are using a double dose, that amount of levamisole could be toxic to the smallest animals, given in a commercial mob there can often be a weight range of 30kg (40 percent) from the heaviest to the lightest," he said. ■



Growth rates for the female weaners (red crosses on chart) took a dip following the change of drench in May–June and they never really caught up.

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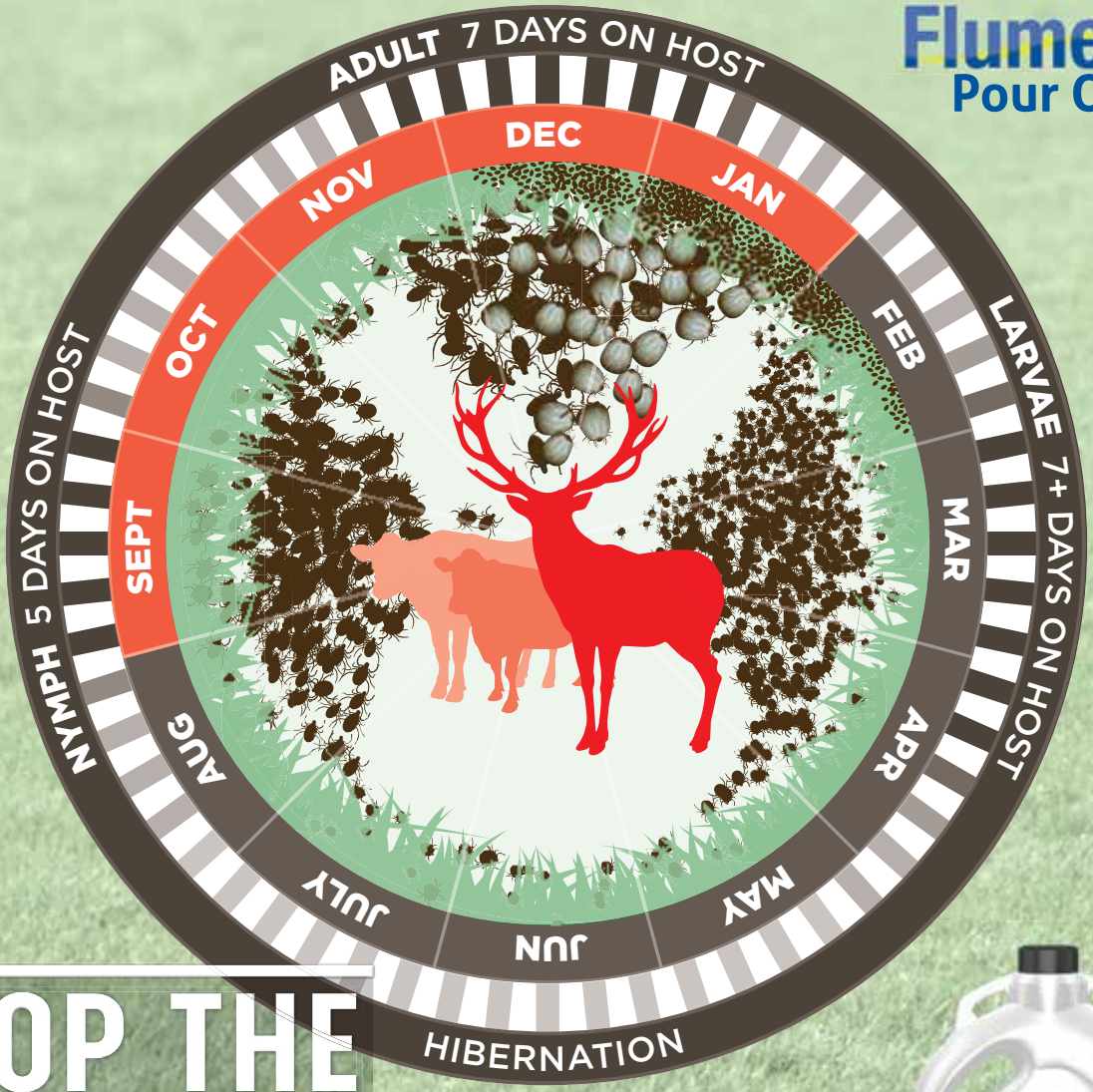

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Feed quality and quantity

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

When the Next Generation visitors stepped out onto a paddock on the Invermay deer farm to hear about grass quality and covers needed for feeding weaners, there was a definite whiff of spring in the air. And with that comes a rapidly growing appetite from young deer as their seasonal growth surge gets under way.

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE (AGRESEARCH) Bryan Thompson, Invermay deer farm manager Rachel Worth and DINZ Producer Manager Tony Pearse gave visitors a compelling visual reference for how much pasture a hind will get through to put on some weight.

Thompson reminded the group to check out the Deer Feed app developed by AgResearch's David Stevens to help calculate feed intakes and allocations.

The Deer Feed app shows how much a 75kg hind would need in August to achieve 150g/day.

He then challenged the group to look at two impressive-sized piles of freshly cut grass and guess how much dry matter (DM) they represented. Most guesses were well over – the actual weights for the two piles were 2kg and 3kg. Thompson said a 75kg R1 hind putting on 150g/day at this point in the season (late August) would need to get through about the average of these two piles (2.4kg) per day, assuming 10 megajoules of metabolisable energy per kg (see photo).

Large area needed

Thompson showed the area mown to get the daily intake needed by the R1 hind – about 45 square metres. He had mown it down from about 2400kg DM/ha to 1700kg. While that still left a generous cover, Thompson said deer would be starting to get down into dead or lower quality material below this level and would need to expend more energy getting their daily requirement. The group was struck by how large an area each animal would need to graze each day to get the optimal amount of good quality feed.

"Once covers start getting over about 2800kg, it's harder to control the amount of dead material," he said, "but at this time of year [spring] when pasture is growing fast, you just have to do what you can [to keep on top of growth].

Quite a bellyful: Bryan Thompson (second from left) points to piles of grass that show approximately how much a 75kg R1 hind would need each day to get growing in August.

"Because deer are browsing animals they are choosier about what they'll eat, so they will pick the best pasture first. The longer we leave them in there, the less opportunity they have to selectively graze." He said it is better to get another livestock class to come in after deer to clean up, as there will be still some good quality feed left behind.

He explained the best quality feed at Invermay grows in late winter and spring as the pasture plants put up fresh shoots to catch the increasing daylight. By late spring, grass was switching to the reproductive phase and putting up more stems and fibre, with a corresponding drop in feed quality. As spring progressed into summer the amount of dead matter from grass increased and energy available dropped. However, with a good legume content in the pasture, clovers can help take up the slack for quality during the summer months.

Estimating covers

The "eyeometer" could be all right for calculating covers as long as it was calibrated correctly, but it took experience and a good eye to account for seasonal changes, Thompson said. He noted that the DairyNZ equations for calculating covers using a rising plate meter were okay during spring, but probably not so accurate during summer on hill country pastures for deer.

Plate meters were no good for measuring lucerne covers, which were best measured based on height.

The Beef+Lamb NZ sward stick was another option, but it measured height and not pasture density, Thompson cautioned.

Adapting to change

Looking at changing feed sources, Thompson said deer didn't need an acclimatisation period for pure swards of chicory or plantain, but they did need time to adapt to pure legumes such as lucerne or red clover. "It takes them a couple of weeks to adapt but give them six weeks to compensate for the weight loss when they change over. The legume runs through them fast, so they need time for the rumen to adapt. It's not such an issue if they have come off pasture with a good clover content."

Thompson warned that with paddocks of legumes it could look as though there was more feed available than there actually was.

With plantain and chicory it was important to make sure deer were getting only good leaf and not relying on stem. "Avoid grazing the chicory crown, or you'll kill the plants. Chicory is usually good for about three years – plantain is a bit hardier."

Protein lack

Looking at winter feeding, Thompson said the "60-day wall" struck by deer on fodder beet is down to the lack of protein once the leaf has been eaten or has died. (Daily break feeding helped conserve the leaf, at least before it died later in winter.) The same could also apply to swedes.

Thompson said the ideal supplement would be lucerne hay or silage. Good quality pasture silage is okay, but while the crude protein content might be 20 percent, the rumen-degradable protein content is only about half of that. A growing weaner needs about 16–18 percent crude protein in its diet, something easily supplied by spring pasture. A protein overload would be just "pissed out".

Tony Pearse pointed out that the six weeks from late August were crucial for feeding growing weaners. "Their appetite is increasing by 10 percent a week over that period. Use a high-energy supplement if you haven't got enough grass. With the high schedule you can afford to do that." ■

Bryan Thompson shows that area that a growing R1 hind needs to graze each day on good pasture.

Farmers and vets have role

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Your deer veterinarian is probably familiar with a few other properties in your area, so they get a great overview of what's happening with the health of animals in their patch. But there's also plenty more that you can do at farm level to figure out what's happening within your own herd.

THAT WAS ONE of the insights shared with Next Generation participants by DINZ Deer Health Project Manager, Lorna Humm and AgResearch Research Associate, Jamie Ward. Humm encouraged farmers to take the initiative and investigate any deaths in the herd with a basic post mortem before they go "down the hole". Signs of some of the most common diseases can be reasonably easy to spot, she said.

If you find a freshly dead animal the first preference is to get veterinary advice and lab testing if appropriate, but if this isn't possible or practicable, Humm said it's worth taking a look inside yourself. If you are doing this, it's advisable to know what the inside of a healthy animal looks like, she added, so a post mortem on all dead animals is valuable, not just potentially diseased animals. "For example if you end up euthanising an injured animal, you know why it died but it's still worth taking the opportunity to familiarise yourself with 'normal' insides."

Some of the more obvious disease signs included the following (skip to the next section, gentle reader, if you are feeling squeamish):

- enlarged, hardened lymph nodes and thickened mesentery around intestines (Johne's disease)
- adult lungworms in the windpipe and where it divides into the lungs – often found in strong well-conditioned deer that cough up a clump of worms from their lung and then choke on them
- foam in the windpipe – many possibilities and the sign of an agonal death
- treacly consistency dark blood throughout gut and organs and out of rectum, and a slightly "cooked" appearance from action

Fawns drive lactation

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Lactation is driven by the fawn, not the hind and it is energy the hind needs in her diet during this demanding period, not protein. That was the advice of Bryan Thompson, Research Associate with AgResearch for Next Generation visitors.

THOMPSON SAID GRAIN at 300–400g/day is used for lactating hinds at Invermay for 2–3 weeks during the crunch period later in lactation, partly to keep up the milk supply but also to stop them losing too much condition in the lead-up to mating.

He said lactation usually peaks 3–4 weeks after birth and then slowly declines – similar to the pattern for dairy cows. "By the end of February 85 percent of lactation is completed. Any suckling that continues after this is for social reasons to maintain the bond between fawn and hind." Hinds were capable of lactating right into winter if necessary, but in these later stages most of the fawn's energy comes from what it eats, not from the hind.

Thompson said fawns start nibbling grass almost from day one, which contributes to their rumen development. It becomes a major part of their diet about 3 weeks after the "oesophageal groove", or rumen bypass, has closed.

While there were several products available to help boost rumen development, he was sceptical that any of them made a difference.

Because lactation is driven by the fawn rather than the hind, the lactation of a straight red hind with an F1 fawn will be different than the profile for a red hind with a red fawn. Tony Pearse said early work at Invermay had shown that an F1 fawn could "really suck of it out of even the top Eastern hinds". He said it was better to wean earlier in these cases to give the hinds time to recover in time for mating.

Thompson said that once lactation had declined it was almost impossible to bring it back up again. About the best that could be done was to arrest the decline for a period, levelling it off. "Once the cells in the mammary glands have started to break down, that's it." ■

It's the fawn calling the shots on milk supply. Photo: Dot Mullay.

of a herpesvirus (malignant catarrhal fever, MCF)
- spotted kidneys (possibly leptospirosis, but could be other bacteria responsible)
- lesions on feet, abscesses in spine or liver/lung in the chest cavity (fusobacteriosis).

Lungworms in the trachea.

Humm said the information you gather will be invaluable for your vet on a later visit if they weren't able to check the dead animal themselves. Photos taken at the time would also be useful. Good hygiene during and after any cutting open dead animals was advisable, especially avoiding contact between animal bodily fluids and any cuts or sores.

If you are new to a property, it's also useful to talk to someone who is familiar with its history, to see if there have been any underlying or ongoing health issues.

Humm also took the opportunity to remind people about the Deer Health Review document that's now available both in hard copy and online and is a Passion2Profit initiative. She said it's an evidence-based, three-stage process that gets you to think more deeply about health planning by considering:
- how is my herd performing?
- what are the animal health risks?
- what's the most effective action plan for managing the risks?

Humm said the review is a systematic process that you go through with your veterinarian to develop an action plan. It's as much about what you *don't need* to be doing as what you *should* be doing, she added. "Sometimes treatments that were previously justified may no longer be needed, just as previously unnecessary treatments may now be justified following a system change.

"It's more than just a calendar of activities – it's a policy document for the farm that both you and your vet are accountable for."

Good animal health management was linked to good environmental practices such as planting to provide shelter and minimising contact with mud and standing water to reduce foot problems and zoonotic diseases, Humm added. Health and safety for staff was also connected with deer health.

Next Generation participant Tom Macfarlane commented that different deer vets have different approaches to the same problems. Humm acknowledged this could be an issue and said she is working to identify regional "key deer vets" who can help make sure their colleagues are consistent with their messages, ensure their information is up to date, and align their advice. "The next generation of deer farmers are pushing for better answers and solutions to health issues, and new vets are coming through with the same aims."

Get good at body condition scoring

Lorna Humm: Both you and your vet are accountable for following up on a deer health review. Jamie Ward (partly obscured) shows the Deer Fact compendium.

AgResearch Research Associate, Jamie Ward took visitors through the basics of body condition scoring (BCS), noting that condition scores and liveweights were separate issues. "A deer can lose body condition without losing much weight." That said, one body condition score could represent about 10kg liveweight.

"Once a hind has lost condition, it's expensive to get it back on. Lost condition will cost you in feed and in the animal's longevity."

Ward said a thick coat can hide deteriorating body condition, especially on wapiti crosses. "You have to learn to assess condition by feel."

A hind that has a BCS as low as 1.5 or less is probably "unrecoverable", Ward said. The usual range of condition scores within a herd was about 2.0 scores, but a narrower range of 1.5 or even 1.0 was preferable, he said.

The Invermay hinds were a very satisfactory average of 3.9 BCS going into winter this year.

"You don't need to have the weigh scales set up to check BCS – you just need to be able to get your hands on them to get a sense of what good or poor condition feels like."

Jamie Ward (left) shows how condition scoring is done.

- For Deer Health Review: **http://deernz.org/annual-health-review**
- For DINZ Body Condition Score chart: **http://deernz.org/bcschart**

Environmental work at Invermay

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Environmental enhancement work at the Invermay deer unit was on display for Next Generation participants as part of the practical day of their conference on 23 August.

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE TOM Orchiston, (AgResearch), said environmental issues identified at Invermay had been addressed through a Focus Farm. They had identified "no-go" areas for deer paddocks including some wetlands. A few paddocks have many watercourses that were impractical to fence off, and these have been retired from deer.

The 2017/18 research programme at Invermay includes two pieces of environmental work: A paired catchment study is establishing baseline measurements of deer environmental impacts and then looking at the impacts of various mitigation strategies. A separate hill and high country catchment study is quantifying the environmental impact of deer on individual catchments to assess the need for mitigations to protect waterways.

Orchiston said the deer unit had gone through all three stages of a Land and Environment Plan, which had identified environmental hot spots. It was part of a wider exercise for the entire 563-hectare Invermay farm, of which 170 hectares is deer fenced.

Critical source areas of nutrients and sediments are being fenced, while winter crop grazing is being investigated to find ways of minimising nutrient losses. The wetlands being fenced off will be planted with natives over the next three or four years, building on earlier plantings done up to 10 years ago and which are now starting to look good.

Orchiston said silage pits are a high risk for nitrogen-rich leachate getting into waterways. A small sump had been tried at the Invermay silage pit but that idea, and the silage pit itself, have been abandoned in favour of less risky winter cropping. Fencelines are also being changed over the next five or 10 years to better protect sensitive gullies and other areas.

Tom Orchiston explained the environmental monitoring and mitigation work being done at Invermay.

While reduction of the number of deer wallows is to be encouraged, "safe wallows" like this one on the Invermay deer farm that don't directly connect with waterways are okay.

Janet Gregory of the NZ Landcare Trust, said farm environment plans took different forms in different regional council areas. The Sustainable Farming Fund deer farm environmental project she ran used the Beef+Lamb NZ Land and Environment Plan as a template.

Adding to Orchiston's comments on silage, she said the siting of pits was crucial. It was important to look carefully at the wording of local regulations when planning to install one. For example, some excluded the "possibility" of leachate getting into waterways, or specify a minimum distance between a pit and a waterway. "It's also important to consider what gets washed out of deer sheds," she added.

Where creeks were required to be fenced, you need to be aware of what margins are needed, she said. "If you are planting the margins [of an east-west stream] make sure you plant on the northern bank to enhance shading."

Paddock selection is vital when it comes to winter crops, Gregory said. "Where does the runoff go? If you can't graze a crop on a slope from the top down as recommended, you should still leave a generous buffer along the margins of any waterway and graze that last."

When it comes to fertiliser, factors like timing and intensity need to be considered, she said. Although OVERSEER® had been criticised by some as not being very relevant to deer, Gregory said "it's the only tool [for nutrient management] that we have!" She added that some deer-related data from Canterbury, where she is now located, is being fed into the OVERSEER model.

She advised the Next Generation visitors to be organised and proactive about doing a farm environment plan. "It shouldn't be a box-ticking exercise. It should culminate in a good farm management plan and your budget." ■

Inside genetics and disease testing labs

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The technology behind parentage and other testing was on display for Next Generation visitors to the Invermay campus, with tours put on by staff from AgResearch's Genomnz™ lab, and also the Disease Research Laboratory.

NICKY CASSIE OF Genomnz talked over the logistics of the parentage testing service. Their preferred sampling method is ear-punches using the Allflex tissue sampling units (TSU) and applicator. The Allflex sets combine EID, visual tag and barcoded tube to hold the ear-punch sample for DNA, which are all kept together. This minimises recording requirements, with only the gender of the animal to be noted as a check against mixing up of samples.

She said the tubes, which cost $3 each, can contain preservative, but urged people to keep the samples cold. "DNA is great food for enzymes and bacteria, so get the samples to us fresh!" The small red collar and tabs on each TSU are there for easy gripping – something of a revelation to many.

Nicky Cassie of AgResearch's Animals Team explains the best techniques for sampling for parentage testing.

continued on page 12

Genetics: continued

Cassie explained how the samples are processed in batches in racks with robotics used to handle the volumes with precision. The bar codes for each sample are scanned and recorded on a database before the DNA extraction gets underway. She said the DNA samples are now stored long term, so can be referred back to if needed.

Scientist Rayna Anderson explained that there is increasing automation, which is allowing greater speed and efficiency.

"We home in on certain pieces of DNA, which together give us our parentage profile. We are looking at single base-pair changes, so we need to look at a lot more than we did using the old microsatellite markers. But these also give us the ability to look for individual [gene] mutations that are associated with traits like meat yield. At this level we can look at the animal's whole genome. We'd do this for key sires and other important animals."

Anderson said the analysis at whole-genome level wasn't feasible for the deer industry at present but is being developed now that the deer industry has shifted to genotyping by sequencing technology (GBS).

The $2 million HiSeq sequencer uses the new GBS technology. Scientist Tracey Van Stijn explained that along with samples from deer, sequencing is done for everything from tuatara to Atlantic salmon to goats, sometimes put through at the same time to make up the numbers. The sequencer can process up to 6,000 samples in one 30-hour run, so this helps keep costs down.

Van Stijn said the sequencing spits out vast quantities of data, which have the potential to tell exponentially more about animals than simply their parentage.

Senior scientist Suzanne Rowe explained what the AgResearch team was doing with the data produced by the genotyping. She said deer farmers were only looking at parentage so far, but with 75,000 genetic markers available using the GBS technology there was potential to do far more.

By comparing phenotype (the actual expression of an animal's genetic code, interacting with its environment) against genotype, it might be possible to identify markers for specific traits. Rowe said the level of predictability for a trait could also be gauged.

"At the moment we're foraging for these links – we're still in the discovery phase. The beauty of using the sequencer is that we don't need to repeat that work. The more information we have about an animal's close relatives, the more accurate we can be.

"Anyone who has really well-recorded parentage and also a useful trait in their herd is welcome to contact us.

"We need to know that the animals we are looking at are representative of the New Zealand deer herd. We are looking for the hard-to-measure and unusual traits like disease or parasite resistance – the ones that genomic prediction is really useful for. The more heritable a trait is, the fewer samples are needed."

Rowe said the researchers would not get "too carried away" with identifying a breeding value for a particular trait unless the heritability was above 0.4 or 0.5 (1.0 is 100 percent heritable and 0 is not heritable at all).

Disease Research Laboratory

Manager Simon Liggett and Rory O'Brien showed the Next Generation group around the Disease Research Laboratory, which is owned by Otago Innovation Ltd and also located on the Invermay campus. All routine deer Tb (blood) and Johne's (faecal) disease testing is carried out there.

Lungworms anyone? Rory O'Brien from Disease Research Laboratory shows a sample.

Liggett said the laboratory started in 1985 when bovine Tb was peaking. With both diseases in decline, the volume of testing was also reducing. He noted that testing at the laboratory following discovery of a Tb reactor was now paid for by TbFree New Zealand.

He explained that the Tb ELISA assay is for antibodies to the various strains of Tb (avian, bovine etc).

As well as identifying the presence of Johne's disease, the testing can also identify the levels of infection by counting bacteria. O'Brien said that if an animal showing disease signs is clear of Johne's, they are also tested for *Ostertagia*-type and other internal parasites.

Liggett said since the laboratory has moved to the Invermay campus they are able to collaborate more closely with AgResearch's scientists. ■

Canterbury farmers buy Deer Improvement

South Canterbury sheep, beef and deer farmers Tom and Samantha Macfarlane and a business partner have bought Deer Improvement from LIC.

The LIC subsidiary was established in 2003 and now comprises a 390-hectare farm at Balfour, Southland, artificial breeding collection and laboratory facilities and a herd of more than 2000 high-genetic-merit animals.

LIC geneticist Dr Richard Spelman said the sale was being made because the co-operative's chief focus was the dairy industry.

The Deer Improvement subsidiary had contributed an average 15kg liveweight gain per animal over the ten years to 2014, based on yearling weight. LIC's reproduction technologies have also increased the number of high-genetic-merit stags available for deer farmers to purchase. Deer Improvement stags dominate the Deer Select database.

The business employs six staff in Balfour and Queenstown.

Tom Macfarlane said he and Samantha would own 50 percent of the shares in the business, with another investor holding the remainder. The Macfarlanes will manage daily operations.

"We are excited to carry on the good work of LIC. If we weren't positive about the future of the deer industry we wouldn't have bought this business," he said.

The sale was expected to be completed on 5 October. Neither seller nor buyer would reveal the value of the transaction. ■

- **Article supplied**

Looking ahead

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Participants gathered in the Cullen Centre at the AgResearch Invermay campus on day two of the NZDFA Next Generation Programme. Here they had plenty of scope to talk over the risks and opportunities that lie ahead for the industry and for them as individuals.

Velvet 101

Rhys Griffiths, DINZ Market Manager, Asia, gave a quick update on the velvet industry. Highlights of his presentation included:

- New Zealand velvet producers are still the new kids on the block in the history of the industry, but they are gaining respect in our markets.
- Rising use of New Zealand velvet in sophisticated healthy food products in South Korea and the New Zealand–China free trade agreement (FTA) have been big factors in the growth our velvet industry, with export values nearly doubling between 2014 and 2017.
- The benefits of the New Zealand–Korea FTA are starting to be felt and the percentage of our velvet that is dried will continue to grow as the agreement rolls out.
- Our focus is moving away from traders who can manipulate the market to high-end producers in the healthy food segment such as KGC and LG Household and Health Care. Companies like these are openly promoting the New Zealand origins of the velvet ingredients in their products.
- The reclassification of velvet going into China as a traditional Chinese medicine ingredient should be a positive for our industry by clearing the way for it to be used in healthy food products.
- In addition to Korea, there is plenty of potential for market growth in China, but there are also opportunities in other markets such as Taiwan and Japan.

There was hard work but plenty of lighter moments during the Next Generation programme.

Keeping up standards

John Taçon, DINZ Quality Assurance Manager, told participants that the Regulated Control Scheme (RCS) being implemented for the 2017/18 velvet season was a positive for the industry. He said that in the past there had been resistance from producers when the National Velvetting Standards Body had tried to lift hygiene standards, for example by requiring concrete flooring in sheds. However pressure from velvet buyers to improve standards was starting to be applied, so the RCS had come at a good time.

"Once people get more familiar with it they will realise it's actually not that onerous," Taçon said. More than 700 people had attended shed meetings throughout New Zealand to learn more about the new scheme, so the industry was getting on board with the changes.

Other industries such as dairying had been subjected to increasing hygiene standards in recent years, so the changes required on deer farms were not unexpected.

Taçon said the long list of approved sanitisers on the MPI website was hard to negotiate, so he and Pam MacLeman of DINZ had put a streamlined list of products and suppliers on the DINZ website, which is viewable at **http://bit.ly/2xt4BQ2**

One person noted that deer can react badly to the smell of disinfectants, so odourless sanitisers might be a better bet.

Animal welfare was always a top priority and Taçon took the Next Generation group through the most important areas, including velvetting, moving stock and transport of pregnant or recently weaned hinds.

He also extended a plea for a bit of common sense with use of velvet ID tags. "Please don't waste them on things like tying up your roses – they cost quite a bit!"

Farm Succession Planning

As one young farmer astutely observed, succession planning involves more than simply saying, "hey, mum and dad, who gets the farm when you pop your clogs?"

Contributors to the succession planning session included Peer Review's Tony Hammington, Simon Glennie and Bruce McCorkindale of AbacusBio and Ashley Hart, an Applied Management graduate now with chartered accountants Harvie Green Wyatt, who works with Simon and Bruce on succession plans.

For young deer farmers keen to get into

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Looking ahead: continued

increased responsibilities or outright ownership, succession planning is a big priority. Plenty of time and expertise were made available to discuss the issues, using a workshop format and some familiar themes emerged.

- Maintaining a viable, profitable farming business is not always easy to reconcile with giving all siblings a fair share as parents prepare to retire with a good lifestyle and pass on their enterprise.
- Non-farming siblings need to appreciate the risks and rewards involved for the one/s who take over the business and there also needs to be agreement on what is fair compensation or commitment for those who choose not to be directly involved in the farm.
- Non-farming siblings also have a strong emotional attachment to the place they grew up and this needs to be acknowledged.
- Good communication is essential to resolve any conflicts or misunderstandings about succession. This includes distinguishing between family and business roles. Avoiding conflict might also mean avoiding necessary conversations, with the risk that different people will have different understandings and expectations – a recipe for problems further down the track.
- Ownership involves wearing a lot of hats (governance, business management, operations, etc.) and it is unwise for all of these responsibilities to be handed over at once.
- Decisions about business ownership structures should not be driven solely by a desire to minimise tax liabilities. Company or trust structures have a lot of other implications and these need to be well understood by all parties involved.
- You may have a range of professionals involved in your succession planning (banker, lawyer, accountant, etc.). They don't always think outside their narrow field of expertise, so it can be good to have them all in the same room when mapping out succession plans. In some cases it can be useful for the younger generation to engage a different accountant than the one their parents use – this can be done within the same firm.
- Conflicts can stem from a clash of goals or a clash of behaviours. Sorting out one or the other is fairly straightforward, but when both goals and behaviours are in conflict, it can be problematic. Family dynamics can affect the process and these can change over time.
- Even when communication is good, it can be useful to have an independent person to facilitate the conversation between generations about personal and business goals and how succession planning is implemented. An external mentor for the young generation helps broaden thinking about options.
- For the next generation, succession can be more viable if they have accumulated some of their own capital to contribute. This could start at a young age, for example, running a few animals of your own, developing some forestry and so on. Non-farming siblings could contribute capital by diversifying into off-farm businesses.
- There are many different business options for succession. For example, the next generation may simply become a manager rather than seeking ownership, investing their own capital elsewhere. Partnerships, equity sharing and leasing are also options.

Agricultural leadership programme

DINZ's association with the Rabobank Waikato Agri-Leadership Programme continued this year. Waikato University student Jack Keeys, who initiated the four-day programme with Alanah Vinson, said 30 senior secondary school students were involved, and were exposed to a wide range of primary industry sectors (including deer) throughout the value chain. The programme is designed to attract more top-quality students into agribusiness careers – and with 85 percent of participants seriously considering such a path after the four days, it seems to be working.

William Robertson, a Year 13 student at Hamilton Boys' High, was one of the participants and was sponsored by DINZ to come to the NZDFA Next Generation programme.

Producer Manager, Tony Pearse, (right) presents William Robertson with a memento of his DINZ scholarship to attend the Next Generation Programme.

He looked into the deer industry and spoke to the Next Generation participants about what he sees as its strengths. These included:

- New Zealand's clean green image.
- Deer farming is a dynamic industry, not restricted by hidebound traditions, and is thus better able to innovate and find more efficient ways to produce venison and velvet.

On the weaknesses side of the ledger, William highlighted the following risks:

- Vulnerability on the animal welfare front. He said it is important to acknowledge problems and risks and be proactive in addressing them.
- Agriculture's stigma as a career choice. "A lot of people don't understand that it's much more than just staring at the wrong end of a cow or standing in the rain. Rural professions don't get acknowledged as options when you are in school. When you tell a teacher you want a career in agribusiness, the light goes out in their eyes."

Jack said he likes the deer industry's newness, dynamism and self-awareness. "I commend the way you are running your industry!"

The second day of a highly successful programme concluded with some thoughtful discussions on the NZDFA and the Next Generation Programme and the future of deer farming. ■

US #1 volume export destination for NZ venison

Export volume to the United States lifted by more than 30 percent in the past year, making it not only the largest market currently, but also a valuable alternative market for a wide range of New Zealand venison cuts. Building awareness of the benefits of New Zealand venison with existing and new customers strengthens that position.

STRONG PRICES FOR manufacturing venison, steady growth in demand from the restaurant trade and new customers in casual dining mean the United States now counterbalances the continental European market for New Zealand, says DINZ P2P Manager, Innes Moffat.

Exporters agreed to focus more energy on the United States to achieve better year-round demand for venison and to reduce reliance on the European game season, he explains.

"With a dramatic increase in manufacturing exports to the United States in the past 18 months and continued growth in the food service sector, the country is now New Zealand's largest export market and close behind Germany in value."

Latest figures from DINZ show exports to the United States increased by 31 percent to 3,437 tonnes in the year to August 2017. They also show the United States accounted for 28 percent of total volume and 23 percent of value, with value lifting 29 percent to $38.4 million during the same period. The volume of chilled venison exports to the market rose by 24 percent. In contrast, Germany received 2,570 tonnes, worth around $40.8 million.

In September 2015, the Cervena Trust and Cervena licensees agreed to allow all cuts from qualifying animals to be marketed as Cervena®.

"This has paved the way for a broader range of Cervena cuts to be marketed into premium and casual dining and also into specialist manufacturing customers. Exporters are benefitting from an increased demand for grass-fed meat as another fuel for growth," Moffat comments.

The biggest volume growth has been from manufacturing items as they have been diverted from traditional manufacturers in Europe due to increased demand for "exotic" and "grass-fed" meat. Specialist manufacturers are taking venison for items like burgers, sausages and added-value snack foods.

"We have also seen a big increase in sales of the lower-value trim for the luxury petfood market," says Moffat. "The traditional items for fine dining restaurants like racks and loins are also in demand and have experienced growth."

Commenting ahead of the new meat export season, which started on 1 October, Silver Fern Farms chief executive Dean Hamilton noted that venison markets, including the United States, remain strong given the lower supply out of New Zealand.

"Market prices out of the United States remain up on last year and new premium trim markets there are adding to the overall value," he says, adding the situation will likely continue over the new season.

Graham Brown talking to a chef group in Austin, Texas, in September.

Keeping premium fresh

Keeping the premium product fresh in the minds of customers and end-users is essential to maintaining the market's overall momentum. To that end, venison exporters have been making good use of the services of DINZ Executive Chef, Graham Brown.

At the time of writing, he was part way through a tour of duty in the United States and Europe, having just finished the first half of a US programme. This involved two weeks of activity on the US East Coast involving five events with New Zealand venison exporters and their in-market partners.

Four events were working with Mountain River Venison and its New Jersey-based partner D'Artagnan, a speciality game and foie grâs house, which distributes high-end proteins nationwide.

According to Mountain River's John Sadler, the aim of the interesting kitchen demos for invited chefs in Texas and Chicago was two-fold: to educate the D'Artagnan sales team and to introduce chefs who didn't use venison to its culinary and menu possibilities.

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Venison update

Production

- The national kill for the 12 months ending August 2017 was 297,856 deer, down 8% year on year.
- Production for the 12 months ending August was 17,035 tonnes (CWE), down 6% year on year.
- The total number of hinds killed in the 12 months to August 2017 was 145,109 equating to 48.7% of the total kill and down 13% year on year.
- The kill in the month of August was up due to a larger number of stags being processed, including some heavy weight animals, resulting in an average stag carcass weight of nearly 63kg, up from 57kg in 2016.
- Heavier weights have been recorded for the year to date. Average stag carcass weight is up 2kg and average hind weight up 1kg year on year.

Exports

- Germany remains New Zealand's most valuable venison market, with sales worth over $40 million in the past 12 months. With big increases in exports of trim, the United States is now the largest market by volume, and close to Germany in value with exports worth $38 million in the past 12 months.
- Companies have done a good job in balancing their markets, with exports to euro countries now accounting for 45% of volume.
- Average export values show a good increase, up 7% year on year.

Schedule and market observations

- The national average published schedule reached $9.73/kg gross in the week beginning 3 October. Interest.co.nz reported that some farmers were receiving $10.20/kg on contract. Firm prices in Europe, strong demand for manufacturing products in the United States and an easing NZD contributed to the prices.
- Exporters observe that the market seems in balance, with the reduction in supply from New Zealand meaning the higher-paying customers are being rewarded with venison from their New Zealand suppliers. While it is too early to be making predictions about consumption through the European autumn, importers report that offers are being accepted by their customers, although there is concern that leg prices will deter some chefs from placing venison on their menus. ■

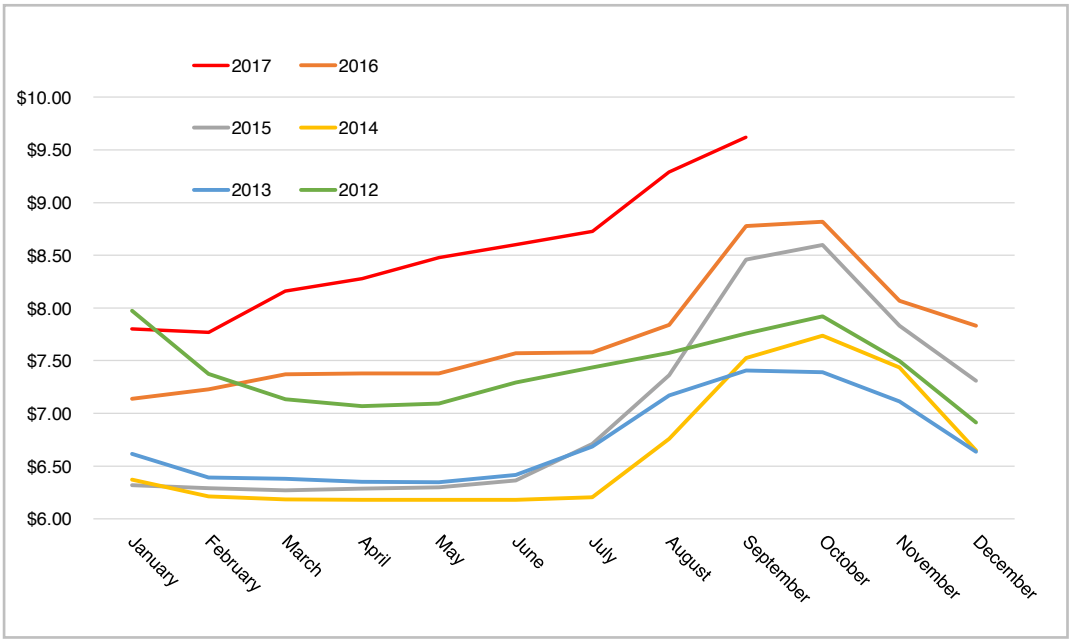

Figure 1: National published schedule: 2012–2017 AP Stag ($/kg gross).

US Markets: continued

"Graham was able to really explore the ideas in a conducive environment," he says.

"We pushed the non-seasonality of Cervena and tried to convince chefs to use the name on the menu to break the mental barrier on venison," Brown explains, adding working with small groups of chefs allows personalised introductions to Cervena venison. "It was a high-quality audience."

The three dishes he showed used newer cuts from the leg and shoulder and were well received, according to Innes Moffat, who understands good orders have followed.

"It indicates how chefs' cut choices are widening and that restaurant-ready cuts are increasingly popular."

Graham Brown's skills and other new items were also to the fore in a presentation for Los Angeles-based distributor Broadleaf at its sales and marketing conference and also for Reno-based Sierra Meat & Seafood.

"These went down a treat, so hopefully that will push their distributors to stock them and get them moving," says Brown.

Two trends he picked up during his US travel were stylised street food, coming from the food truck craze, and the use of cheaper cuts.

"Most of our importers are working the whole animal thing, getting the most out of all the odd bits and pieces and using secondary cuts to return a better carcass value," he explains. New

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Velvet update

Positive start to season

The 2017/18 velvet season has started with the same enthusiasm experienced just two seasons ago. There are reports that early season velvet contracts are gaining momentum as importers and companies are keen to ensure they have enough New Zealand velvet for the coming peak consumption period. Last season, some Korean importers reported they were a bit late securing supplies of New Zealand velvet.

Prices reported at this early stage are firm on last year, as initial market enquiry has started strongly. Velvet enquiry also remained strong throughout the quieter months, while importers waited for the new season to kick off. Until the first major export volumes come on stream, it is uncertain where prices will settle. Regardless, things appear to be an improvement on the disappointment experienced this time last year, when prices fell below expected levels.

Minhe's new GMP factory in XiFeng. The owner, Mr Xue, is second from left.

According to leading Chinese importers, velvet import licences shouldn't be an issue this year. Late in 2016, Chinese regulators ruled that velvet can only be imported as a TCM ingredient, a change from how velvet had been imported. While authorities gave the New Zealand industry time to get compliant with the change in velvet classification, Chinese velvet importers were not so lucky. Importers had to immediately comply with the change in classification, which none were prepared for.

Velvet import licences were issued by Chinese authorities in February 2017 – with most lasting a year. Chinese regulators provided a solution to enable time for factories to comply with the new category that velvet must be imported under. The current licences will get importers through this season, with some importers expecting no problems getting new permits next year.

Longer-term plans are underway in China to comply with the TCM regulations for importing velvet. Many processing factories are upgrading their facilities to become compliant with the regulations.

Two new factories built

In XiFeng (where a decent portion of New Zealand velvet ends up), two brand new factories have been built to good manufacturing practice specification. These new velvet factories have been built to ensure compliance with the Chinese TCM regulations. Other velvet factories are reported to be undergoing improvements to their facilities to ensure compliance. ■

Velvet promotion

New-season velvet promotions are well underway in South Korea. Korean food companies are reporting success and growth of their velvet products over the Chuseok period. Chuseok (Korean Thanksgiving) is Korea's largest gift-giving period, particularly for health type products.

A busy KGC store in Seoul proudly promotes Cheong Nok Sam (its hero New Zealand velvet product).

US Markets: continued

Zealand venison marketing companies doing these cuts to meet market demand are doing their farmer partners a great service, he says.

"As we have fewer animals to meet the market, we need to extract maximum value from what we have got. Chefs worldwide are naturally inquisitive and always looking for new items to make a point of difference in the ultra-competitive restaurant scene. Offals that used to end up in the bulk pet food market are now promoted and could attract a premium.

"You don't know until you have had a go. You can't say there is no market for them when they don't even feature on the inventory. We have to be more adaptable and specialised in our products and approach," he comments.

After two weeks working with importers and distributors in Europe, Graham was returning to the United States for another two-week programme of chef education and sales support events.

However, while things are looking great in the US market, John Sadler cautions against over-excitement.

"Product is tight and prices have lifted. The feedback loop means that customers are buying more product to secure supply and there may come a point where it drops back.

"We need to be close to our market and to look after them," he says. ■

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Michael Wilkins 027 249 9317
Email. mike@wilkinsfarming.co.nz

Pauline Pattullo 027 249 9309
Email. livestockgenetics@wilkinsfarming.co.nz

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INFORMATION

George Williams 027 447 6880 (Nth Is Sale)
or contact your local specialist Deer Livestock Agent

WWW.WILKINSFARMING.CO.NZ

New welfare regulations

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The deer industry is welcoming the introduction of a wide range of new animal welfare regulations following changes to the Animal Welfare Act in 2015.

TRANSPORT OF DEER will feature among the first set of 46 new regulations being developed for introduction in October 2018.

Welfare regulations specific to the removal of velvet antler will come later. The velvetting regulations will be among a second group of activities to be regulated – mainly surgical procedures affecting production and companion animals. Primary Industries Minister Nathan Guy announced that this second group of regulations will be developed next year, for introduction in 2019.

Among the first set of 46 regulations being developed for introduction next year, those that affect deer are largely covered already by the DeerQA Transport Programme[1], the Deer Code of Welfare and the Transport within New Zealand Code of Welfare 2016, so the impact is expected to be minimal for those who comply with these programmes. The new regulations reference the DeerQA programme.

The regulations affecting transport of deer cover the following:

- transport of animals with bleeding horns or antlers
- transport of animals with horns or antler (in velvet or HA)
- injuries caused during transport
- transport of lame animals
- transport of animals in late pregnancy.

A wide range of other animals and practices are covered in this first set of regulations – everything from use of fireworks at rodeos (prohibited), to mulesing sheep (also banned), removal of horns from cattle and the humane killing of crabs and lobsters.

Infringement fees in the section affecting deer are relatively modest at $500 and offences won't result in a criminal conviction. However, fines of up to $5,000 for individuals and $25,000 for corporates – and possible criminal convictions – will apply in other sections of the regulations, such as dehorning cattle and castration.

Although the deer industry will need to wait another year to start seeing the shape of the regulations that cover velvetting, it's not expected that these will vary significantly from the requirements under the current National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSB) programme.

They will be part of several groups of regulations, covering tail docking/castration, other surgical procedures in production animals (includes velvetting), surgical procedures in companion animals and dental work (all animals).

DINZ Policy Manager Catharine Sayer says the move to put velvetting within a stronger regulatory framework is welcome news, and will strengthen the market proposition that New Zealand venison and velvet production systems protect welfare.

The announcement follows years of negotiations between the deer industry and Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) leading to more formalised regulatory support for the NVSB-led programme. Sayer said DINZ is looking forward to engaging with MPI in the development of the welfare regulations to ensure they take deer industry needs into account.

- For further information: www.mpi.govt.nz/law-and-policy/legal-overviews/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-regulations/

[1] http://deernz.org/dinz-activity/quality-assurance/transport-qa

Wellingtons' hospice fundraiser a big success

DEER FARMERS HAVE generously pitched in with donations of prizes for a Hospice Waikato fundraiser organised by Susan Wellington, daughter of Brian and Jacqui Wellington.

Brian passed away in April this year and his family were keen to show their gratitude to the hospice team for the care they gave Brian by providing some fundraising to give practical support for the work they do.

Susan says she started out with a target of $5,000 to be raised at a quiz night. "That is enough to pay for the petrol of a hospice nurse covering the wider Waikato region for a year, so we thought that was a pretty good target."

In the event they were overwhelmed with support from businesses and individuals, including those in the deer industry. Oysters, wine and deer velvet products were among the prizes donated by deer farmers. Susan roped in the rest of her family and also got support from SBI Productions Limited, who lent all of the A/V equipment and sound system for the evening.

Just over 200 people packed into the Te Awamutu rugby recreation centre on 25 August for a quiz night where people had plenty of opportunities to open their wallets with raffles, auctions, silent auctions, quiz answers for sale and much more.

"Our final tally was $18,112 raised, which exceeded our expectations by miles," Susan says. "I'd like to thank mum and dad's friends in the deer industry for the support they gave. It really helped make this a success."

From left: Hospice medical staff Vicki Jones and Adam Fowler, Susan Wellington and Jacqui Wellington with the fundraising cheque.

DeerPRO after four months

by Solis Norton, Project Manager, DeerPRO

It is four months now since the name of the deer industry's national programme for the monitoring and control of Johne's disease was officially changed to DeerPRO. This represents a broadening of service to provide venison production information to deer farmers in addition to our established role with Johne's disease.

THE NAME CHANGE was made after consultation with the Deer Farmers' Association, venison processing companies and related groups. We've been busy since then and with September the end of our financial year it is a good opportunity to look back to assess interest in our new service from individual farmers.

Two main communications initiatives during winter spearheaded our efforts to assess farmer interest.

The first was a P2P-supported project phoning and emailing farmers to advise them about DeerPRO and offer a venison production report for their deer. We emailed just over 500 deer farmers and phoned a further 75, all of whom were not currently on our support list. Their response rate to our phone calls (more than 90%) was far higher than to our emails (5–10%). This was a little disappointing but apparently to be expected in email-based communications work. Of the farmers who responded, 95% were interested in receiving their report.

The second initiative was our routine Johne's disease (JD) work, where each season we contact 30 farmers with high rates of JD-suspect lesions in their deer. We sent them a report too and followed up with a phone call.

Several interesting points emerged from this canvassing of some 600 deer farmers.

1 **Interesting point number one:** Farmers processing larger numbers of deer (more than 200 per season) were three or four times more likely to request a report. This might be expected as deer are probably a more important part of the overall farming system for these people.

2 **Interesting point number two:** We compared last season's venison production statistics between those who responded with interest and those who declined our offer. The growth rate for young deer from interested farmers was 5–6% ahead of the industry average, while for the other group it was 2% behind the industry average. Statistically speaking, that difference might not be "significant" and our growth rate estimates aren't perfect, but it's interesting nonetheless.

3 **Interesting point number three:** For the 30 farmers we contacted for JD monitoring, the venison production reports were very useful for seeing possible causes and impacts of the high lesion rate. The reports helped illustrate the wider production picture for those farms together with the levels of JD lesions. The benchmarks were a great way of showing where those farms had seen a drop in production. The farmers commonly thought stock stress levels were higher last season than usual, which supports the idea of JD levels increasing with stress.

4 **Interesting point number four:** We will finish up this financial year with about a third more farmers than we started with on our service list. Their farms produced 59% of the industry's deer last season and 80% of JD-suspect lesions recorded at processing. While this is positive progress, there are plenty more fish in the sea yet, as they say, and we'll continue our efforts to increase coverage next season. Similar levels of growth are likely for several seasons and could continue further if the deer industry expands significantly, which it may well do.

Our progress will be achieved well under budget. The DeerPRO board of directors have strongly encouraged financial prudence throughout the year and, at the time of writing, expenses are 5% below a tight budget with one month to run.

Overall, the outcomes from our shift to DeerPRO at this early stage have proven encouraging. Both the Chairman, Ken Blair, and I feel this positive trend should continue, just as our aspirational goal should continue to be the best animal health and production reporting service in the New Zealand dry stock sector. ■

National Rising Stars Hard Antler and Velvet Competition

Mt Maunganui, Saturday 24 February 2018

"THE MOUNT" IS at its best in February so come along and experience sunshine, surf and great shopping when you attend this national competition. A fishing charter is available on a first come basis; booking essential. Or take a flight around Mt Maunganui and Tauranga.

Competition categories:

- National Red 1, 2 and 3 year hard antler
- National 2 year Elk/Wapiti hard antler, 2 year Elk/Wapiti velvet
- National 2 year Fallow hard antler
- National Red sire of 3
- National 2 year Red velvet
- National Red super heavyweight 10+ kg velvet
- Plus supreme trophy and people's choice

Participate ... or just enjoy viewing the outstanding heads and the company of like-minded deer farmers. Viewing late afternoon with BBQ hors d'oeuvres, followed by dinner.

Entry forms included in December issue of *Deer Industry News*

Contact: **Bex Cowley 022 468 1030, Sandra Garrett 027 293 1287**

Top of the South velvet and hard antler competition 2017

What you need to know

- Competition boundaries are **extended** to include all of Canterbury, with Nelson and Marlborough, East and West coasts north of the Waitaki.
- New 5 year red class, following success of 4 year red class last year
- Other categories: 3 & 4 year red, 3 & 4 year elk/wapiti, mature red velvet, open elk/wapiti, mature red hard antler, mature elk/wapiti hard antler
- Sponsors will buy winning entries from each commercial class at 20% premium above market
- Pre-event seminars on velvet research and VARNZ
- FMG is providing additional prizes
- Entry deadline: At PGG Wrightson Prebbleton by **noon, 4 December**
- Awards dinner 5 December from 4pm at Darfield Community Centre
- Entry forms available from **http://deernz.org.nz/201718-velvet-competitions**, from your velvet agent or from Grant Hasse
- Contact: **Grant Hasse, 027-224-5542, gandshasse@xtra.co.nz**
- Sponsors: **Zee Tags, PGG Wrightson, Provelco, Hawker Velvet, FMG, Xcell Breeding Services, Elk & Wapiti Society NZ, Ballance Agrinutrients, Tasman Velvet, Central Deer Freighters, Mountain River Processors, Plasback/Agpac, Central Canterbury Elk Breeders**

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CALLING ALL NORTH ISLAND VELVET AND HARD ANTLER GROWERS!

NORTH ISLAND VELVET AND HARD ANTLER COMPETITION

30 NOVEMBER 2017 – NAPIER SAILING CLUB

As you begin to cut this season's velvet, please consider keeping back your best heads to enter in the 2017 North Island Velvet & Hard Antler Competition (NIVC).

The 2017 NIVC is being hosted by the Hawke's Bay Branch, NZDFA. The viewing and dinner will be held at the beautiful Napier Sailing Club on Thursday 30 November. Viewing is from 5.00pm – 6.00pm and the Awards Dinner commences at 6.45pm. Accommodation options are onsite at the Blue Water Hotel.

Velvet and hard antler needs to be in your local collector's hands for delivery to the competition by Monday 26 November 2017. See local collection contacts below.

This year the National Velvet Competition is being held in Invercargill on 12 December.

PGG Wrightson has offered once again to transport velvet from Napier to Invercargill for the National competition. We thank PGG Wrightson for their ongoing logistical support of this competition.

Contacts

Entry forms will be posted out to all previous entrants. If you haven't entered before and would like an entry form or other details, please contact Cenwynn Philip, Deer Industry New Zealand, Phone 04 471 6110; or look on **http://deernz.org.nz/201718-velvet-competitions** and download a pdf for printing or a word document for emailing to enter. Or contact Grant Charteris: 06 856 5747 or 027 230 8531, grantcharteris@gmail.com

The following are your local coordinators for velvet and hard antler collection:

Central Regions (Wellington, Manawatu, Wanganui, Taihape and Taranaki)

Craig Hocken: 06 328 7702, 0274 576 388, **c.hocken@farmside.co.nz**

Hawke's Bay, Gisborne, Wairarapa

Grant Charteris: 06 856 5747, 027 230 8531, **grantcharteris@gmail.com**

Te Awamutu/Waikato–King Country

Steve Borland: 07 872 4679, 027 666 4269, **Southerndeer@xtra.co.nz**

Thank you to **CK Imports and Colin Stevenson** for being our principal sponsor this year. Good luck to all entrants and we hope you can make the awards dinner for a great entertaining night out. Dinner tickets only can be purchased for $60.00 per person booked via an entry form or direct with Grant Charteris (contact details above).

1 STANDARD
THAT PROMOTES US ALL

All five venison marketing companies have agreed to base their on-farm quality assurance (QA) programmes on one industry standard

Ask your venison company about their on-farm QA programme

HELP KEEP OUR CUSTOMERS CONFIDENT

On-farm QA proves that we as farmers are as good as we say we are. That our venison and velvet is good to eat and that our deer have been raised humanely.

Having one on-farm QA standard supported by all venison companies will make it easier to communicate these messages to our customers and the wider NZ public. It will also make it easier on the farm.

Each venison company has its own time-frame for introducing its new or revised QA programme based on the Deer QA on-farm standard.

ASK YOUR VENISON COMPANY

about on-farm Quality Assurance and how you can be involved.

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Deer Industry New Zealand

P2P

Bob's twin passions

Trees and deer are two of Bob Atkinson's life-long passions. Now on his fourth Waikato property, the attention to detail that has been lavished on the previous properties is evident here as well.

Bob Atkinson.

ALMOST EVERY PADDOCK on his "boutique" 25 hectares is surrounded by a shelter belt of native and park trees and what was a small "puddle-like" pond is now a sight to behold. At tree spacings of 75cm, the pond and 1.3ha are crammed with native plants, flaxes and grasses.

With the wet environment, everything has flourished and some of the lacebarks are now well over 3m tall. Considering that the trees were planted as 50cm saplings only 2–3 years ago, the wetland is well beyond the establishment phase. For a tree lover such as Bob, who planted every single specimen on the farm himself (well over 18,000 of them), this is incredibly satisfying. This area, completely unsuited to pastoral activities, is now a real asset.

Bob has been living in New Zealand for more than 30 years, having started his deer farming career in Kaipara in the 1980s, working for Alastair Porter. When he moved down to the Waikato, his 400-hectare Whitehall property near Cambridge ran 1,200 hinds and 1,000 velvetting stags, an operation he ran with just one staff member.

If it is a job he can do himself, Bob will do it. He has always let his deer do the talking and many will recognise his top stags, Achilles, Banks and Endsleigh, to name a few, in the background of many of today's top animals. He has been quietly involved in the deer industry, sitting on the first Deer Farmers' Landcare Manual committee and always willing to share his extensive knowledge.

In this age of environmental compliance, Bob is a leader, not a follower, managing all of his properties to what he believes are the highest sustainable standards. At Whitehall in the early 1990s he fenced off a patch of native bush to protect it from the deer. Coincidentally this aided with the recovery of a local population of indigenous bats and the rediscovery of a rare fern, thought extinct in the Waikato.

At Hickey Road, he retired gullies feeding into the Karapiro Stream and undertook extensive restoration. Every spare minute was spent spraying weeds and once these were under control he moved to revegetate the gullies, planting to stabilise the steep sides. On the flood-prone river flats, where the neighbours told him he wouldn't be able to keep deer fencing intact, sensible fence location and native plantings have protected not only the deer fences, but also the banks.

The focus of his deer has now moved to Pure Woburn, a breed that Bob has always had an affinity with. He jokes that in the early years, you would need to extend the mortgage to purchase a single Woburn hind. The current trend in antler genetics is for cross-bred trophy type deer, which are currently producing massive antlers in both weight and points.

Crossing hybrids of any species (in this case English and Eastern) works well – until it doesn't! Stud breeders around the country recognise this and strongly supported Bob's pure Woburn hinds at his recent sale. To his knowledge, this was the first time a sale of entirely pure Woburns has been offered in New Zealand.

Bob firmly believes that the Woburn has an important role to play in the continued improvement of the velvet and trophy antler genetic base in New Zealand.

When he needs a break away from planting trees and farming deer, Bob heads off "on assignment" to wild, almost uninhabited places, for example the Amazon basin in a dugout canoe protected with vast quantities of mozzie repellent and every vaccination under the sun! ■

- **Article supplied**

Bob Atkinson has planted more than 18,000 natives and other plants on his current "boutique" property.

First-hand look at Woburn deer

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

I indulged in a quick busman's holiday while on a holiday in the United Kingdom with my wife Rose last month where, at the invitation of Henrietta Russell, the Dowager Duchess of Bedford, we visited the Woburn Deer Park and Woburn Abbey Deer Farm.

BEDFORD ESTATES HEAD Deer Keeper, Dan De Baerdemaecker, kindly took time out of his busy schedule to show us around. The 1250-hectare deer park, established more than 250 years ago, is today host to nine deer species. It's an intriguing range – everything from the tiny Chinese water deer that have up to five fawns a year (so small that they are preyed on by red kites and crows) to the renowned red deer herd that has contributed antler genetics to the New Zealand deer industry since the early 1980s.

The stud, Woburn Abbey Deer Farm, was established in the early 1990s to maximise the potential of the Woburn genetics and is next to the deer park. Currently it has five mixed age sires plus 2-year-old stags, and 60 hinds. Dan said selection is based on antler correctness with several styles pursued, and now in-depth recording of hind performance. Customers include other deer parks and commercial deer farms, with animals also going to hunting blocks in Europe; semen is also available for the New Zealand deer industry.

Dan De Baerdemaecker (left) and Phil Stewart talking deer at Woburn Deer Park.

Being flanked by large arable farming areas and little livestock farming, there is not much pressure from bovine TB or other animal health challenges. The deer are managed as naturally as possible within the park, with low stocking density and innate resistance meaning that anthelmintics are rarely needed.

The red herd in the deer park has about 250 mixed age hinds and 100 males of two years and older. The total tally for all species in the park is 1300–1500, with about 400 culled each year. As they are classified as wild rather than farmed deer, the processing for meat is relatively straightforward. Dan said local butchers especially liked the Père David's large, meaty carcass (this breed was saved from extinction by the 11th Duke of Bedford and there is now a healthy sized herd in the park – there is also a small herd in New Zealand). Currently venison is supplied to a large supermarket chain through processor, Dovecote Park.

While the United Kingdom deer industry is still small compared with New Zealand's, Dan said there are signs of optimism and growth in the sector. After more than a decade at Woburn and the last five years as head deer keeper – a diverse job that includes wildlife management as well as conventional farming – he is moving on shortly to help establish a commercial deer farm in Kent. ■

Red Woburn Deer Park stags.

Trophy breeding to chart a separate course?

Four years ago, **Bryce Heard**, Pampas Heights Warnham Deer, asked: "what kind of stags should studs be breeding?"[1] In the following supplied article he reviews what he said then and how it measures up against what actually happened. Excerpts from his original article appear here in tables and tinted boxes.

How things were

In 2013, this is how the industry was made up (Table 1).

Table 1: Estimated composition of national herd and product share of export income.

Dedicated breeding stags	12,000	1.20%
Dedicated velvet stags	85,000	8.50%
Dedicated trophy stags	1,200	0.12%
Commercial venison stags	401,800	40.18%
Breeding hinds	500,000	50.00%
Total national herd size	1,000,000	100.00%
Venison	$180,000,000/year	65.69%
Velvet (estimated)	$40,000,000/year	14.60%
By-products **	$47,000,000/year	17.15%
Trophy stags (estimated)	$7,000,000/year	2.55%

** includes tails, sinews, pizzles, hides and leather

Note: These figures are based on material from Statistics New Zealand, DINZ and discussion with industry leaders. There will be minor variations and interpretations, especially in the velvet and trophy figures, because much of the trade is not visible to the official record keepers. These variations did not materially affect the conclusions in the article, however.

The figures in Table 1 have changed little in four years, except that velvet has increased its market share a little and venison prices have risen to near record levels. The overall size of the national herd is also probably smaller now. In 2013, we deduced the following from the above figures:

Lesson 1	The deer industry is based on venison.
Lesson 2	The second most important product and the one with the most growth potential is velvet.
Lesson 3	Byproducts are much bigger than most of us realise and rapidly growing. We need to accommodate them in our breeding programmes. Research is needed to find out how this can be done.
Lesson 4	Trophy is an important end-use for sires and velvetting stags and should be seen as the icing on the cake for a small number of the very best stags.
Lesson 5	We need to go back to basics. Most deer farmers are reformed hunters and the thought of massive stylish trophy heads excites our instincts. This excitement makes the job fun, but it must not distract us from our core businesses.

What has changed?

Today, the only significant change to these 2013 conclusions is that the trophy market – as an outlet for commercial stags –has shrunk significantly and could disappear altogether. This is because the market for trophy stags is tiny (0.12% of the total herd in the above figures) and most safari parks are increasingly breeding their own trophy stags. Some agents report that numbers of stags sold to safari parks are now one-third of what they were 3–4 years ago. They expect to sell close to zero trophy stags by 2020. I believe that safari parks will soon be buying only the odd >750 SCI type of stags, because they can now breed all of the others at a fraction the cost of buying them.

This change is rendering 2013's Lesson 4 redundant! However it adds considerable strength to Lessons 1, 2, 3 and 5.

In line with the convictions I expressed in 2013, we at Pampas Heights have been moving down the track of breeding big-bodied venison animals with heavy velvet producing capability.

We have invested heavily and converted almost our entire herd to Warnham bloodlines. This captures venison and velvet breeding traits in a pure strain that has long formed the cornerstone of the New Zealand national breeding herd. Since virtually no one else was doing it, we took on the role to provide farmers with an ongoing source of long-proven, base bloodlines that can be trusted to fall back on and to use as master sires to cross with whatever farmers choose.

It has tested our resolve at times, to see our big-bodied, big-velvet animals being overlooked in favour of the all-exciting, masses-of-points, trophy-style stags at the annual stag sales – especially when the 3-year-old trophy stags were often struggling to match our 2-year-old body weights.

Notwithstanding, to stay ahead of changing times we continue pushing hard along the track we have chosen, because we believe it is the right track for the New Zealand deer industry and, ultimately, for us as stud breeders.

What should we be breeding?

The conclusions about what we should be breeding, reached in 2013, follow. With one exception, they appear even more relevant today than they were four years ago.

[1] See *Deer Industry News* December 2013 page 30, downloadable from www.deernz.org/publications?page=10

1. Venison breeding stock

There are several EBV systems in place to measure this already. But why do many venison breeders use wapiti bulls for terminal sires? Perhaps stud breeders have failed to produce red stags capable of breeding animals that make the >90kg cut off body weight by chilled season time at 9–10 months of age. We must be able to offer a reasonable red stag "cross back" option for these farmers, as a minimum first step. Perhaps the most relevant bodyweight for buyers is the 10-month weight of the sire stags.

2. High-yield velvet breeding stock

After big bodyweights, the next most important and readily measurable trait is velvet yield. Stags capable of yielding more than 8kg of velvet per annum, including regrowth, should be targeted. Two-year-old stags need to be yielding almost half that weight if they are to make the target.

We have diverted on-farm thinking away from the real commercial purpose of velvet breeding for maximum profit. Much of the conventional wisdom that comes through velvet competitions favours velvet form and style over total weight. We have introduced no less than 66 (at last count) velvet grades to help guide us with growing ideal velvet. (This count was taken before the release of yet another set of grades in September 2013.) Ideal for whom? The market tells us a slightly different story.

Conventional thinking ascribes value to the "higher" grades. The highest to lowest grade values are seen as SA, A, B, C, D, E, spiker, regrowth and remanufacturing, in that order. The market sees it differently. Offshore buyers put correctly cut regrowth, manufacturing and spiker velvet at the upper end of the spectrum at around $135-145/kg and the rest in a cluster at around $90-100/kg [2013 figures].

To the market, form does not matter. The market wants and pays for simple mass of correctly cut antler – irrespective of shape and form. So why do we create all the hype and complexity about velvet form in the farmer's mind?

Absolute weight of correctly cut antler yield per animal seems to be the *only* measure that makes a commercial difference to the economics of velvet farming.

3. High yield by-product breeding stock

It will be much more difficult to breed for this multiplicity of products and I suspect it will have a lot to do with farm and processor management issues as well.

4. Adding in trophy potential at the end of the stag's productive life

Trophy stags provide only 2.5 percent of total industry income, although it is worthwhile to add a terminal trophy value to our breeding and velvet stags at the end of their productive lives. It is much more attractive to sell these animals for $7,000 than $700 after they have fulfilled their prime purpose. This is a bonus and should not be the prime driver of our breeding programmes. Every year a handful will get a 600 IOA stag to the trophy market but the odds are stacked heavily against winning this prize for commercial farmers.

What are we breeding for?

This?


or this?


or this?

continued on page 34

Self-feed silage making life easier

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Finding a better way feed their hinds in winter has led King Country deer farmers Alan and Kerry Blackburn to build a new self-feed silage pit, a change that is working well for them and their hinds.

Alan (right) and Kerry Blackburn run the farm in partnership. Alan looks after the day-to-day management while Kerry is book-keeper for both the farm and jet boat businesses – and "everything else that needs doing". Alan puts the fact that their deer are "pretty quiet in the yards" down to her gentler hand.

THE BLACKBURNS FARM in partnership at Ongarue, 24km north of Taumarunui on 378 hectares (330 effective) of predominantly medium-to-steep hill country. It's their second time on the same land; they first bought the then run-down sheep property in 1984, developing it into a deer enterprise, with a small beef herd and a few goats for blackberry/weed control, before selling it in 2007. The main reason for the sale was to embark on a new tourism venture, Forgotten World Jet Boating.

"However, we diversified back into farming in 2011 by buying back the same farm," laughs Alan. They have retained the jet boating business since the move back to the farm.

They bought in 400 yearling red hinds, mainly from Southland's Fairlight Station, for their venison breeding herd, which they have since built up to 630 hinds, including 75 15-month-old first fawners. The first fawners and about 100 mixed age (MA) hinds are put to red stags and the rest to a terminal hybrid sire. There is also a 200-stag velvetting herd, with stags bought in. They also run 120 dairy cross steers and 80 Friesian bulls, along with 350 Boer-cross goats, but there are no longer any sheep.

In 2015, the Blackburns heard of the deer industry's then-new Passion2Profit (P2P) programme which aims in part to help deer farmers lift profitability[1] As part of this, a network of 25 Advance Parties (APs) operate around the country; the Blackburns are part of the Waipa AP of 11 farms.

"We were isolated in the King Country with very few deer farmers in the area," explains Alan.

As members of the Waipa AP they have found a group of like-minded, passionate people they can relate to. The Blackburns' aim was to gain ideas from the group to lift their profitability above "average" and closer to the top 20 percent.

"We've learned lots, picking up little things as well as the big ones. We're probably one of the biggest beneficiaries from our group," he says.

Issues are mulled over in "pretty open discussion" in the monthly meetings, which include information provided by members from their bank manager or vet. The AP is facilitated by vet Ginny Dodunski.

Robust discussion and advice from the group members gave the Blackburns the confidence to sell their breeding cows to concentrate further on their deer and trading beef cattle.

The AP has also explored things like silage feeding and yersiniosis, which is a risk to weaners on many farms and has been a problem this year.

In a first visit to the property in December 2015, the AP members identified significant potential benefits for the Blackburns in moving to a different way of wintering their hinds.

The original wintering system, where hinds were set-stocked on a hill block, was too vulnerable to the vagaries of the often long and tough Taumarunui winters, which the group identified as a constraint on hind performance.

In their first year as AP members, Alan explains they moved to winter-feeding baleage to hinds in a "sacrifice" paddock.

"It was a lot of work and made a mess as the animals moved from the top of the paddock to the bottom to feed and back up again. This churned up the paddock and wasted probably two-thirds of the feed in the process."

The hinds have now gone from being wintered on 150 ha to

The silage pit showing the steel gates.

[1] P2P is supported with funding from DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

The hinds get some supplementary feed two to three times a week.

Licensed jet boat driver Alan spent 70 days off-farm last year at the couple's other business helming the Forgotten World Jet boat down the Whanganui River.

5 ha. By the group's second visit at the end of June, a brand new self-feed silage pit was in place for winter-feeding the hinds from May through to early September. The hinds are then set-stocked in fawning paddocks. Surplus feed in spring is traditionally controlled by cattle.

Following the advice of the AP members, the Blackburns learned the best position for the pit was towards the top of the paddock and that making pit silage cost 30 percent less than baleage. In addition, they found the quality is frequently better due to better compaction and exclusion of air.

A suitable site – one of their best flat 5 ha paddocks, with a knoll at one end and away from waterways – was selected and a design drawn up.

Last October they dug two 30-metre trenches, 15m apart and 1.2–1.5m deep. Reinforcing steel and concrete were installed in the trenches before the pit floor was dug out for a good dry, firm concrete base. Three steel gates, 5m x 1.9m high were fitted for the animals to feed through. The pit slopes to one side so any water drains away into a paddock, away from waterways.

The AP calculated 30 hectares of silage, at a yield of 2t/ha, would be needed to feed all MA hinds from May to September. Ryegrass/clover cut off the paddocks was put straight into the pit in mid-December, with layers of coarse salt for palatability, and 530 hinds started feeding off it on 23 May.

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Keeping it in the cloud

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Using a cloud-based app on his smart phone to feed his farm information system is surprisingly straightforward, says Te Anau farmer, Ross Carran. Speaking to *Deer Industry News* about capturing the information needed to support the industry's Deer QA on-farm standard, Ross explained the data he gathers and stores helps him improve the business's bottom line – it's not just something to satisfy the needs of customers and meat companies.

CARRAN, WHO FARMS wapiti, elk and red deer on four blocks in the Te Anau basin with his father Chris, uses the Agri Map 360 system. Much of what he records goes straight in through his phone when he is out on the farm. Details of drenches, expiry dates and batch numbers of products used, paddock-by-paddock spraying and fertiliser applications and much more are captured through the app. "If I spray a paddock I can record that on the spot – much better than remembering to do it on the computer later on," he says.

While recording these details is extra work, Ross Carran is philosophical. "We have to provide this information for the meat company's QA scheme, so we might as well get good use out of it for our own purposes as well. The main venison exporters have incorporated the DeerQA on-farm standard into their own on-farm QA programmes. This means the approach of each company is similar, although some have additional requirements to meet the needs of their own customers.

"We can instantly recall what [treatment] has been given to what stock and that helps us get a better fix on what is working and what isn't – especially for drenches," Carran says.

"It all helps us keep better tabs on what the farm is producing."

He says the farm's health and safety system is also being incorporated, making the task for on-farm audits easier. "We've got first aid kits and fire extinguishers in all the vehicles, all our chemical and fuel containers are properly labelled and we have up-to-date records on what chemicals are stored."

Chris says the "gutholes" have been covered and fenced off and waterways on the four farms are now almost all fenced.

Wapiti hinds at Lochinvar.

The Carrans supply both Silver Fern Farms and Alliance, and so are audited by each company, year and year about. MPI also makes audit visits. "They are usually interested in the same things – use of chemicals and animal health treatments, ASDs, fertilisers records and so on. Often the same people visit for successive audits which is good, because they get to know us and our systems. My only plea is that they come in winter when we aren't so busy, rather than November when we are flat out."

Velvet standards

The Carrans velvet about 300 stags a year on their four properties. The Regulated Control Scheme (RCS) for velvet storage and handling has meant that they, like most velvet producers, are having to make changes. Because they have four sets of deer yards over four separate blocks, there are logistical issues.

Chris Carran accepts the changes are needed but was concerned at how quickly the scheme was being implemented. He would have preferred to see it phased in over three seasons rather than less than 15 weeks. "We have just spent $30,000 fencing off waterways, so it hasn't come at a good time. Some people who have only a few [sire] stags to velvet each year might leave the industry because of it, or just let them grow out their antlers each year."

Son Ross is more relaxed about the changes, however. "Some people have been shocked at the speed of the changes, but they had to come. [Velvet is] consumed as a food, so we need to respect that."

Ross said their older walk-in freezer didn't need replacing to bring it up to standard. "We found that all we needed to do was reline it."

Although it's not part of the RCS, they are also looking to improve the flooring in their deer sheds with rubber matting for better and safer handling of deer. With a likely cost of $60,000 to do all the sheds it will be a phase-in approach rather than doing them all in one hit.

"It's good that these changes are happening while velvet is worth a dollar or two," Ross says. "Imagine if you were a woolgrower and you suddenly had to upgrade your woolshed with prices the way they are – that would be pretty awful."

Carran Farms profile

Chris Carran and his wife Helen farm four properties near Te Anau in partnership with their son Ross and his wife Keren. Overall they run 2,800–3,000 hinds in 20 breeding mobs, eight of these mobs

Elk hinds on swedes.

being first fawners. There is also a separate mob of 403 red hinds kept on a hill block.

The main product is venison, with about 3,000 animals being killed each year, mainly through Silver Fern Farms. The venison numbers are partly made up by bought-in weaners – 300 this year. They have been able to source more in the past, but like most finishers they are finding weaners harder to get recently.

Velvet accounts for 10–15 percent of total income and is harvested mainly from their sires and sale stags (sold as three-year-olds). In-calf hinds are also sold – Chris Carran is reluctant to send hinds to the works, noting they are worth about $100 more in-calf than they are on the hook. "We only cull them if they are late fawners, they don't look right or if there is a temperament problem," he says.

Chris lives on the 156-hectare Lochinvar stud, which sells 40–50 stags annually along with in-calf hinds. The herd here is Fiordland wapiti, a strain that originated in the Southern California Rockies (since shot out there) and well suited to the Fiordland environment. "Most elk in New Zealand are from Canada. They are used to a dry cold, but don't do so well in the damp cold of Fiordland," Chris says. He is determined to keep the Fiordland herd as a separate line. While they can't be distinguished from Canadian elk by genetic testing, "I can tell the difference very easily," he says. "They are smaller than the elk, but they're hardier."

He says environment – especially minerals – has a lot to do with how well deer do.

A second 142-hectare block is farmed by Ross and is based on the original farm bought by Chris in 1983, shortly after he started farming deer. Ross runs elk hinds, weaners and sires there.

The third block of 71 hectares is Ross and Keren's home and the base for an elk breeding mob and sire stags.

The fourth and largest block (526 hectares) is west over the Whitestone River and includes the mob of 403 red hinds which are run on 88 hectares of hill where they achieve a useful 92–93 percent fawning rate. Fiordland wapiti are run on the easier country on this farm. Across the whole operation, the wapiti and elk hinds usually achieve fawning rates of about 89–90 percent. (Overall scanning results this year were pretty good, with a dry rate of 8.5–9.0 percent.)

Overall, the operation is low intensity. No palm kernel or grain is fed and the main winter crop is swedes. Fodder beet is also used, but not as much as in the past. Some lucerne is grown and proves its worth during the dry spells that can hit the Te Anau basin. There is a regular programme of regrassing on the cultivable land following crops and Chris says they have been right around the Lochinvar block twice in the 18 years they've been there, doing two paddocks a year.

The low intensity philosophy extends to animal handling. Ross believes that in their system, constantly getting weaners in for weighing would stress them and set them back. "We only get one chance to grow these animals, so we reduce stress as much as possible. If you're getting them in every four weeks to weigh them, that's two days a month they won't be growing."

He's also careful to avoid causing stress by overstocking, especially during the winter months.

"I take a good look at the weaners when we get them in every eight weeks for drenching. I can see if something's not right. ■

Lochinvar sire stags.

QA part of management routine at East Dome

When northern Southland farmers David and Pam Nind first featured in *Deer Industry News* seven years ago, they had recently set up a 13,000 stock unit mixed livestock operation at Five Rivers and were part of the Deer Industry Focus Farm programme. Editor **Phil Stewart** visited the Ninds earlier this year to talk about their adoption of DeerQA On-Farm Industry Agreed Standards and found the couple have not wasted any time further building up their venison-focused deer enterprise.

David Nind: Regular QA audits part of the annual routine.

THE NINDS CAME into deer farming by way of shearing and the dairy industry, setting up a mixed livestock farm including deer at Dipton in 2000. In 2008 they took the opportunity to move on from Dipton to properties that gave them more flat land and more flexibility. They bought two farms, 730 hectares of hill and flats at East Dome and then 270 hectares of flats nearby at Bixter Road. Since then they have leased a further 2,000 hectares of extensive hill at Garston (no deer are kept there) and the 1,500 hectare Remarkables Station.

Seven years ago, the Ninds were wintering 1,100 mixed age hinds and buying in about 1,640 weaners for finishing on the Bixter Road farm. Wapiti terminal sires from Lochinvar are now used over about 60 percent of the hinds, with the balance being mated to red stags from either Fairlight or Wilkins Farming.

Today they have 2,250 mature hinds plus 580 replacements over two farms (East Dome and Remarkables Station) and no longer buy in weaners – everything they finish at Bixter Road is bred on the other two farms. David Nind says even if they wanted to buy in deer weaners now, it would be hard to find any.

Having joined the deer industry in 2000, the Ninds are still newer to the game than many, and came in with a very clear-eyed vision for improving productivity and profitability. Running three drystock classes plus the dairy grazers, they have a few levers at their disposal to tweak the balance between the different enterprises. The beef cattle have an important role on all four properties for pasture management and integrated grazing.

Getting involved in the Focus Farm programme only a year or two after moving to East Dome meant they could put their plans under scrutiny. For example an early challenge was to get weaners grown out quickly enough to make way for the lamb crop – an issue faced on many mixed operations. A programme of pasture improvement and extensive use of crops such as swedes, kale and fodder beet has helped in this regard.

Carcass weights have been a focus and an early objective was to lift averages from 51–52kg up to 56kg, while getting venison animals processed as early as possible. Today the average has lifted to 55.5kg, so they are now close to that target. Killing usually starts by late September or early October and the last of the crop are gone by February. The lambs start getting loaded onto the finishing property before Christmas as the deer make way.

Being a new conversion – fences, lanes and sheds – all of the deer infrastructure is still in good shape. There is no velvetting side to the operation other than the sire stags and spikers, and the incoming Regulated Control Scheme for velvet removal and handling is not expected to create problems when it comes to adapting the existing facilities.

Using FarmIQ

Setting and achieving goals for such a large and complex operation requires a good system for recording and monitoring progress and for the past five years the Ninds have been using FarmIQ for the purpose.

"We didn't do a lot with it at first, but we have really cranked it up over the past 18 months," David Nind says. He was an early adopter of EID for deer and cattle and is now starting to use it for his sheep as well. "Three of the four farms are close together and count as one property for the purposes of NAIT, which makes stock movement recording simpler."

Nind is now using FarmIQ to record purchases and applications of animal remedies (right down to the batch number), fertilisers, chemicals and so on. He says that as suppliers such as vet practices modernise their systems, it's becoming possible to feed purchase

records straight into FarmIQ without too much double handling of information.

As they start to use the system more fully, Nind is seeing the value of having paddock-by-paddock information, not only showing how well the farm performs at that level, but being able to see exactly what inputs (e.g. herbicides) have gone where. "The fertiliser spreader should be able to send us GPS records showing exactly where they have been – and from the health, safety and environment point of view the system can also help pinpoint risks such as steep corners, waterways or soft spots to be avoided."

Nind also uses FarmIQ to record animal health treatments and to monitor growth rates for each mob. "If you are getting in different lines of stock, it's very useful to be able to see how each performs. For example if there was a problem with Johne's disease with a mob, this would probably show up in the weights."

Nind also sees a role for the system in areas like environmental management and health and safety. He says there are some sensitive areas on the properties with light soils or wetlands and they have already done drainage work and fenced off some areas. They are working through a land and water plan with Environment Southland and while they do not have any issues with slope on the areas that are cropped, he says one more-sensitive block may well be reserved for sheep alone.

On-Farm QA

The DeerQA On-Farm Industry Agreed Standards (http://deernz.org/onfarmQA) hold no fears for the Ninds, who are regularly audited by their venison processor, Silver Fern Farms. They have an annual audit from a Silver Fern Farms agent, who usually focuses on a particular aspect each year. In addition, representatives from the meat company's clients also make audit visits to their supplier farms and Nind has hosted these visits as well.

"They looked at a range of things including welfare, water supply, dog kennels and so on. We do little velvetting here, but they did take a while to get their heads around how that works."

Having taken up NAIT straight away, they didn't have to change their habits when it came to the animal identification and traceability aspects of the audits.

Nind says Silver Fern Farms also brings its overseas clients to visit about twice a year for more marketing-related purposes. "I enjoy meeting the buyers from Germany, Belgium and so on. They like to meet the face behind the product and see where it's grown, so I'm conscious that what they see here can be a big selling point.

"QA is just a routine part of farming for us now. Setting up the FarmIQ system has taken a bit of work, but it's starting to get easier and we are really beginning to get something out of it now. It's turning into our information hub.

"We are getting to the point where an auditor could turn up any time and we could give them exactly what they are looking for."

- The development of the DeerQA On-Farm Industry Agreed Standard was funded by the Passion2Profit Primary Growth Partnership.
- A Deer Fact about the quality assurance on your deer farm was circulated with the August/September *Deer Industry News*. In case you missed it you can see it online at: http://deernz.org/deer-facts
- See David Nind talking about on-Farm QA and its place in his deer business on YouTube at bit.ly/NindQA ■

Young stock on a winter crop at East Dome Farm.

Self-feed silage: continued from page 29

The pit is covered with polythene silage cover and old tyres and two to three times a week the Blackburns were uncovering another length of cover. However, they found the deer are enthusiastic silage eaters, so they had to slow them down a little to ration the feed.

"They were pushing so hard on the gates to get more, we had to fix brakes on them to stop them eating too much!"

During the last visit in June, the AP members used the DairyNZ factsheet, "How much silage is in my stack", to calculate the amount of silage (kg dry matter) in the stack. This showed that, at 80 percent utilisation, the stack had 72 days' feeding. There was also the option to extend days on feed by adding supplement to the hinds' rations. Thanks to the very wet winter – by the end of September they had already had their average annual rainfall – this option was needed. The hinds spent 95 days on the silage over winter with the addition of one tonne of supplement fed two to three times a week.

At the start of feeding on 23 May, the hinds averaged 119kg liveweight. The average had dropped 2–3kg over the mob after several weeks, but the Blackburns have been keeping an eye on individual condition and Alan was not too concerned. Running the herd through the shed at the start, they had picked out and marked two or three of the lighter ones so they could watch them, he says.

"They're not lighter now."

He says that following the wintering using the silage pit, "the hinds are in the best condition I've ever seen them at this time of year". He's expecting the benefits to flow through to the next breeding season. "They should fawn earlier which means they will put on condition again faster and conceive earlier next year."

He's also pleased with the total $30,000 cost of the build, comprising:

- $23,000 for the reinforcing steel and concrete
- $2,000 to dig and cart the fill away
- $5,000 for the steel gates.

"It's less than the new feed-out wagon we were looking at. We're absolutely rapt with it," says Alan. "Our wintering system is so easy now."

HB velvet demand up

Demand for Hawke's Bay deer velvet is taking a giant leap with the success of a local company promoting the product expanding into new and uncharted export markets.

Havelock North-based Gevir is celebrating exporting its established velvet supplements into China and the United States, with sights also set on Canada, Japan and South Korea by the end of the year.

Hawke's Bay businessman and farmer Josh Buckman saw untapped potential for the business soon after he took over the reins two years ago from Shelley and Clint Thomson, who owned and founded Gevir in 1991.

The company has also launched a new velvet pet product, being sold through rural retailers. Buckman, who is Gevir Deer Velvet Managing Director, says he has been overwhelmed by the number of farmers who have purchased the pet product to improve dog performance and longevity, not only for older pet dogs but also working dogs.

Hawke's Bay Farmer, Mike Ritsson-Thomas, has a 13-year-old heading dog, "Thai", who recently tore her Achilles. After the vet unsuccessfully tried several different treatments, he opted to start feeding her his Gevir deer velvet tablets.

Josh Buckman (left) with Hawke's Bay farmers Caroline and Mike Ritsson-Thomas and dogs Fergie and Thai.

"It was a like a miracle because suddenly Thai came right and she no longer had a busted Achilles. She was back out on the farm with me mustering and easily jumping on and off the bike. It was just unbelievable how the deer velvet gave her a new lease of life."

Alongside its new pet product, Gevir plans to grow its product base with a new skincare range later this year.

- **Article supplied**

Trophy breeding: continued from p27

Trophy potential losing relevance

In 2017 I think the fourth priority in the 2013 list above – breeding in trophy potential – will be irrelevant in 3–5 years, and that safari park deer will be seen as a totally different industry from commercial venison and velvet farming. Only the occasional "freak" animal will be sold by commercial farmers to safari parks.

So, while our thoughts four years ago are playing out almost exactly as predicted, the futile practice of trying to breed or own a world record trophy stag lingers on.

The New Zealand deer industry was (and still is) premised on the production of venison and velvet. In our excitement about masses of points we lost our way for a few years and forgot what we were here for – and yes I was as guilty as anyone. However, our instinct not to desert our core purpose – venison and velvet – is playing out in practice. Trophies are fun and can make a few people a lot of money. But it is not mainstream business for the New Zealand deer industry and should be regarded as a totally separate activity.

Velvet weight and growth EBVs provided

This realisation has lead us to offer many of our future auction stags with correctly cut velvet removed and weighed with growth EBVs provided. This removes any speculation about what they are carrying or how fast they are growing.

- Further information: **www.pampasheights.co.nz**
- **Article supplied**

Farm hosts Korean vets

Mandy and Tony Robinson, who farm at Dalefield west of Carterton, impressed a delegation of about 25 veterinarians and veterinary epidemiologists from Korea with their deer farming operation during a visit last month.

THE VISITORS WERE based in Wellington for an intense New Zealand–Korean governmental veterinary epidemiology workshop done pursuant to the Free Trade Agreement between the two countries. The theme of the workshop was cooperation in animal health and veterinary epidemiology and was the second in a series of four workshops following on from the inaugural workshop hosted by the Korean Animal and Plant Quarantine Agency in Seoul in 2016.

The objective of the workshops is for each country to learn from the experiences and expertise of the other. Of interest to New Zealand, Korea has extensive experience in managing several foot and mouth disease and avian influenza outbreaks. Complex data management systems have been developed by the Koreans to be used to respond to such outbreaks. Amongst other things, New Zealand demonstrated the newly developed surveillance information management systems, response planning and capability and the development of the new National Biocontainment Laboratory at Wallaceville, Upper Hutt.

A field trip to the Carterton district in the Wairarapa gave the Koreans the opportunity to set foot on free-range pig, sheep and beef, deer and dairy operations and discuss with the farmers their animal health and biosecurity management practices. The Robinsons have a mixed venison and velvetting operation with 100 mixed age hinds, 75 velvetting stags, 150 R1 stags and 70 R1 hinds. About 20 of the R1 stags are retained for the velvetting mob each year.

Tony and Mandy were great ambassadors for the deer industry, assisting veterinarians from our key velvet market with their ready knowledge and endorsement of the deer industry's role in schemes for velvetting, transport, velvet traceability, individual animal identification and TB control. The deer shed might also be a contender for Best-Spruced Up Velvetting Shed 2017!

Tony – who works as a TB tester for AsureQuality – says the Korean visitors were interested in how the procedure was done in New Zealand and fascinated that it could be done without sedating the deer. He says they also wanted to learn about our TB testing requirements, biosecurity measures, use of vaccines and practices like quarantine drenching. And to be sure we practise what we preach in biosecurity terms, the visitors were asked to put plastic covers on over their footwear and dunk them in some Virkon disinfectant.

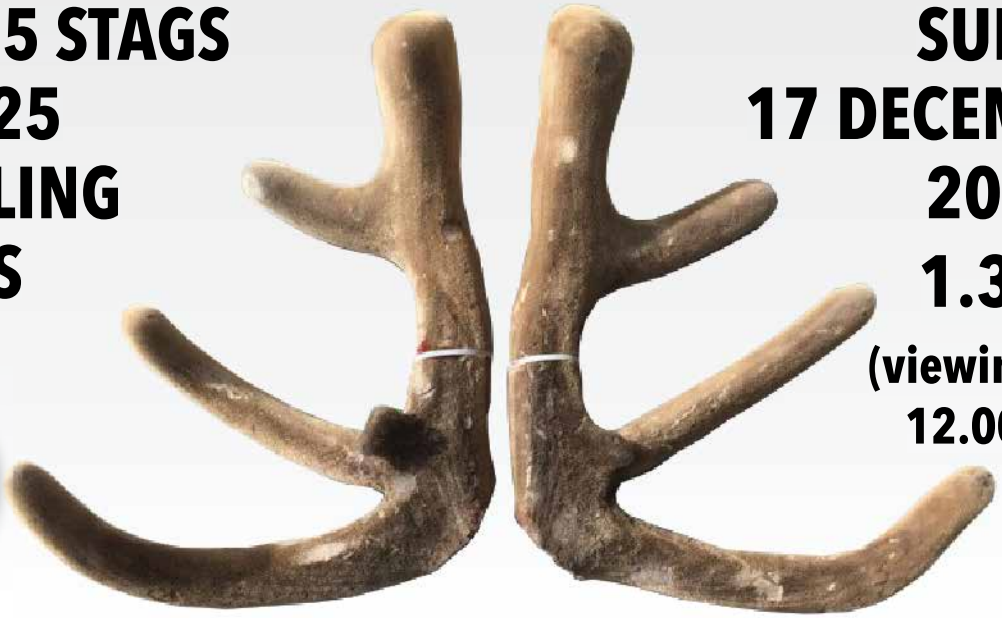
Many thanks to Mandy and Tony for taking time out of their very busy schedules to present an exemplary operation to the visitors, whose first-hand insight into and comfort with a New Zealand deer operation should stand the industry in great stead. ■

The visiting delegation with MPI and deer industry hosts. Tony Robinson is second from left, back row. Photo courtesy Ministry for Primary Industries.

Pampas Heights
Warnham Deer

STAG & YEARLING HIND SALE

TOP 25 STAGS
BEST 25 YEARLING HINDS



SUNDAY 17 DECEMBER 2017 at 1.30pm
(viewing from 12.00 noon)

For more information or a private viewing, call Bryce on **021 926 812**.
Visitors are always welcome at Pampas Heights.

www.pampasheights.co.nz